



“Born in the Likeness of Men” (Ph 2:7)

An Ignatian Meditation

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Introduction

"Present your bodies as a living sacrifice..." (Rm 12:1)¹ Christianity, which is the following of Christ, consists of an entire life which is converted into a true sacrifice. This is not reduced to acts which are properly "religious", like prayer or the sacraments, but rather the entire existence of the Christian should be converted into a form of living for God, a God who is Emmanuel, "with us". Secularity, understood as the human and mundane condition of our life, is the substance of living as a Christian. The Samaritan woman asked Jesus about the place where she should adore God. Jesus invited her to look beyond spaces and buildings and to consider her whole life, lived "in spirit and truth" (Jn 4:23) as authentic adoration and sacrifice. "Religiosity does not refer to any area of human existence but rather the whole of it in its relationship to God which includes all of it and maintains it."²

All of this was made manifest in Jesus, who made Himself one like many others and whose way of realizing the Kingdom of the Father consisted not only in the spilling of blood, but also in an entire life faithful to the will of the Father, making it alive and

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1. *Translator's note:* All of the direct quotations from the Bible are from *The Revised Standard Version*, Collins (New York, Glasgow, 1973). I have done this for the sake of consistency and clarity, knowing that some of the quotations are not an exact translation of the Spanish. The direct quotations from the *Spiritual Exercises of St. Ignatius* are taken from the translation and commentary by George E. Ganss, SJ, The Institute of Jesuit Studies (St Louis, 1992), abbreviated throughout as SE; those from the *Constitutions of the Society of Jesus* are taken from the translation of George E. Ganss, SJ, The Institute of Jesuit Sources (St. Louis, 1970). Both of these are standard sources in the United States.
 2. RAHNER, Karl. *Curso fundamental sobre la fe. Introduccion al concepto de cristianismo (A Basic Course on Faith. Introduction to the Concept of Christianity)*, Herder (Barcelona, 1979), p. 376.

present in the world. And the greater part of his life was spent in doing, enjoying and suffering what the majority of us human beings do, enjoy and suffer. He never called attention to himself, and when he showed himself to the public in the last part of his life, people knew him as the carpenter. (Cf. Mk 6:3)

Therefore, our Christian life, that of the vast number of us Christians who compose the Church, ought to be more inspired by the way of living and of doing things of this carpenter, one like many others, similar to us in all things but sin (Cf. Heb 4:15). This is what makes easier for us the contemplation that Ignatius proposes for us in the Spiritual Exercises on the hidden life of Jesus (SE 271-272). As Ignatius himself believes, this is a way of life that brings together all of the depth of living the transcendence of God within the finite condition of human life, within immanence (Cf. SE 135).

Nevertheless, just as this life was a long preparation, we have a need for an intense personal preparation. Ignatius proposes in the whole of the Exercises a time of spiritual training in the contemplation and assimilation of the life, passion and resurrection of Jesus. Once having gone through the process of personal transformation in which Christ has been forming the retreatant (Cf. Ga 4:19), at the end of the Exercises is proposed the “Contemplation for Obtaining Love” (hereafter COL) in order to “love and serve God in everything”, in all things and everywhere. Thus, by means of this contemplation, the life of Jesus, which now inspires and moves the retreatant, can be translated into daily life.

Hence, if in the contemplation of the years of the ordinary life of Jesus we contemplate a way of living that is simply human, open to the Father, in the midst of all other people, and in the most varied circumstances in which we find humankind, in the COL we have at our disposal a mystagogy in order to live the opaqueness of the human and the mundane with all of the mystical richness of the humanity of Christ. So, in these pages there will be presented in the first part the contemplation of the model of human life of Jesus, and, in the second, a detailed analysis of the mystagogy of the Exercises for living the whole of life “in everything” as a “living sacrifice” (Rm 12:1). That is, to “love and serve the Divine Majesty” in all the things that make up human life. On the one hand, the hidden life is like a scale model of the work that should be realized over the course of the Exercises. On the other hand, the COL is a help for the journey which the retreatant should undertake in order to convert the work of the Exercises into a part of daily life.

This double objective explains the distinct nature of the two parts of the present study. Since Ignatius only proposes a few notes or points as material for the contemplation of the mystery of the hidden life of Jesus and allows the retreatant to contemplate personally the said mystery (see, listen, understand, make oneself present), I try to open with my own reflections something of a path through this contemplative task. On the other hand, in the COL Ignatius develops to a great extent the method

and the content of this spiritual exercise. Therefore, my job is that of analyzing with the greatest precision possible and of developing the wise orientations of Ignatius.³

Finally, since there is not offered here a proposal for points of meditation or contemplation of two independent exercises, but rather a study about the relationship between them, these pages offer a unique approach to the Exercises and they should be read as “an Ignatian meditation”.

3. The two parts that comprise this Booklet are, with some adaptations and complementary material, two presentations that were read at two workshops concerning the Spiritual Exercises. The first was in Monte Alma (Pozuelo de Alarcon, Madrid) in 2004, and the second in Alacuas (Valencia) in 2009. The first was part of a series of presentations about Christianity as counterculture; the second, also part of a group of studies related to the “Contemplation to Obtain Love.” If the first is more conditioned by the general theme of the workshops, the second is an exposition and declaration that is more tied to the Ignatian texts. Nevertheless, the two presentations, with different styles, are a reflection about one and the same objective which is to live Christianity in the human existence of the world, in the great diversity of vocations, as a profound relationship with God, inspired by Jesus.

The “Hidden Life” of Jesus: Human Life As a Sacrifice to God

“It seems that he practiced the trade of carpenter, as St. Mark seems to indicate (6:3). ‘Is not this, surely, the carpenter?’” (SE 271). These words of the Exercises reflect well the image of Jesus that was held by the ordinary people of his village. The image of a person from the village, “one like many others” (Cf. Ph 2:7). And Jesus, precisely because of his human condition, common to everyone else, was capable of living and acting as a man of God. In this Jesus, who “[h]ad to me made like his brethren in every respect” (Heb 2:17), we find inspiration and a path for making our lives into a “living sacrifice” (Rm 12:1)

As a proposition that can carry us to this inspiration and this pathway, I will make two approaches to the hidden life of the Lord making use of the Ignatian standard of “as if I were there” (Cf SE 114), doing this first in the literal Ignatian sense and then reversing it, i.e., part 1, “As if I were there”; part 2, “As if one were to be there” Going to the Jesus of the hidden life and bringing this Jesus into our life today.

1. As If I Were There

The problem which is presented by approaching the hidden life of the Lord is well known; it consists of those thirty years about which we hardly know anything: conception, birth, a few episodes surrounding the birth, and then Egypt, the temple and long years of growth before men and God. Nevertheless, Ignatius proposes dedicating at least three whole days to the contemplation of these mysteries. Where is one to find

nutrition for the “true basis of the story” (SE 2)? And above all else, what support will the retreatant have to feed his personal dialog in order to come to feel and relish interiorly the mystery in a sufficiently solid and non-arbitrary way? In order to respond to this question, I will use as my basis three considerations which, to my way of thinking, shed light and include safe and useful paths.

a) *The concept of permission.* According to the anthropological concept of *permission*, developed by M. de Certeau,⁴ a certain text not only leaves open meanings that do not contradict its more literal sense, but also permits interpretations stemming from a certain coherency or analogy with the source text. For example, you can speak about the multiplication of the loaves as a miracle or sign of a true multiplication, or, in a permissive sense, about the dynamic of solidarity which produces the wonderful result that the bread extends to everyone who is hungry. Perhaps this phenomenon is not justified in the primary sense of the text, but the text *permits* this interpretation of the miracle of solidarity.

b) *Creative exegesis.* Starting from the nature itself of the Bible and of exegesis, you can arrive at an imaginative and creative form of reading the Gospel, so that, without betraying the original text, you can invent expansions, stories, new parables that illuminate what in the text itself is implied in some way or that can be extrapolated from it without betraying it. In other words, this way of approaching the Gospel text is not tied to formal exegesis, although, without ignoring the scientific interpretation, it takes off from this base toward the grasping of new meanings. This path is propounded and justified by the exegete Gerd Theisen, giving wings to a reading and commentary of the Bible which is not arbitrary, but rather imaginative and creative. “The texts are open-ended. They allow for a multiplicity of explanations, but not all. ... Therefore, one cannot expect from the exegesis stereotyped explanations, but only propositions. This gives the preacher freedom. ... Biblical preaching should follow the internal grammar of the texts, without just repeating the letter of the text.”⁵ Ignatius invites us to a certain creativity when he says, for example, that we may discover through our reflection (SE 2) or that we can contemplate what the persons “are saying or might be saying” (SE 123).

c) *Read the hidden life from the point of view of the public life of the Lord.* Supposing the two ways of approaching the Biblical text that I have just expounded, another way of getting inside of the hidden life is to do so starting from what in the public

4. DE CERTEAU, Michel, *La rupture instauratoire ou le christianisme dans la culture contemporaine.* Esprit (1971), p. 1201.

5. *Selecciones de teología*, n. 163 (2002), pp. 172, 188, 193. Along this same line, “Its condition as a living document is essential to Scripture. The Bible includes a change of tradition, a vital renovation. A faithfulness to the Bible that is not open to this dynamic of change is not being faithful to the Bible.” LUZ, Ulrich, *El Evangelio según San Mateo. Mt 18-25.* Siguense (Salamanca, 2003), vol III, 330.

life, in one way or another (more or less explicit), is said about this long time in the life of Jesus. Not only that he was a carpenter and who his family was, but also what is manifested in his way of behaving and speaking, in his parables, in his personal relationships, in his freedom, in his sense of belonging to a people, etc.

1.1. Incarnation and birth: mystery of the solidarity of God with the poor

The contemplation of the mystery of the Incarnation as it is proposed in the Exercises (SE 101-109) reveals:

- the insertion of God as *interpersonal relationship* or solidarity;
- the manifestation of God *as solidarity with the world* on which he has not turned his back, but rather makes it the object of his self-giving;
- *the way of creating solidarity* with the involvement of each of the Persons of the Trinity;
- the experience of the retreatant of this God who reveals himself in human history making history, as an *experience of solidarity* with this divine plan.

In a definitive way, we discover how solidarity is, at its root, a profoundly religious experience.⁶

The contemplation of the Birth (SE 110-117) guides us towards the contemplation of the mystery of the solidarity of God in our asymmetrical human history in which, along with untold riches there abounds misery and poverty. The divine solidarity leads to the fact that “the Lord is born into the greatest poverty”, the poverty of the poor: work, hunger, thirst, heat, cold, affronts and insults, the cross. With this contemplation we open ourselves to the mystery of a God whom we find in history, with whom we can form a relationship only through his involvement in this history. Given, of course, that history is a reality that is what it is, not as it should be, the Evangelical experience induces us to form a relationship with God based on the reality of the poor, the impoverished, based on real solidarity with them.

1.2. Being human in the manner of Jesus

The years of what we call the hidden life, properly speaking, show us how the being of Jesus was formed, because they are not so much the years of doing especially notable things as they are of growing and maturing. “Jesus increased in wisdom and in stature, and in favor with God and man.” (Lk 2:52; cf. 2:40). But since this progress in

6. Cf. JOHN PAUL II, *Sollicitudo rei socialis*, 40.

being is a process in being human, of becoming a man, of humanization, these years show us how a human person ought to be, according to Jesus, someone who is truly human. Therefore, the hidden life is a time of being, not of doing, a time of humanization and for making real a particular human being. As a consequence, Jesus becomes someone who inspires others in this way of being a human person. Let us look at him through a schematic approach to the narratives of Matthew and Luke, bearing in mind that, according to David Stanley, “I should learn to play my personal role in the contemporary history of salvation by means of *an insertion into the mysteries that I contemplate*, ...respecting on the one hand, its historical importance, but with great creative force and without fear of the modern specter of ‘historical precision’.”⁷

1.2.1. *The humanizing of Jesus*

In this context of insertion into the life of the people as such, in its strong but not populist sense, Jesus is making himself, he grows and matures, in every sense of the word. It is only possible to get little out of a literal reading of the Gospel text, but it is possible from an examination of its deeper sense, given that “he had to be made like his brethren in every respect”. (Heb 2:17), from what the text itself suggests by what it says concerning Mary and Joseph, and from what it is possible to deduce from the public life of the Lord. That man who was known as “the carpenter”, who, on the other hand, spoke like no one else, who had great authority without having had special studies or belonging to any qualifying class of the society of the time, who had a very healthy way of being with people (weddings, dinners, discussions), who mixed with all kinds of people without avoiding either people of bad notoriety or women, who was extremely free with respect to the laws and authority, etc. Even in his religious life, he lived as one like many others. “In and of himself, Jesus lived his religious life in the normal way it was lived in his village ... which he accepted and lived as a whole (religious life, synagogue, feasts, usages, the law, priests, teachers, Holy Scripture, temple) and as legitimate and desired by God.”⁸ All of this leads us to describe some fundamental aspects of his life, hidden from our eyes, but which would not have been so hidden in the sense that is often given to this expression, as if we were dealing with a totally private way of life without any consequences in his exterior and social life. Let’s take a look at it in what follows.

7. STANLEY, David M. , *Moderno enfoque bíblico de los Ejercicios Espirituales* (Modern Biblical Focus of the Spiritual Exercises). Apostolado de la Prensa, (Madrid, 1969), pp. 82-83. Emphasis is by P. Rambla.

8. RAHNER, Karl. *Op. cit.*, 292.

a) A place: the school of the village, like the poor

It doesn't seem as if the place of Jesus's apprenticeship, for his human and cultural formation, was anything other than the village itself with the possibilities it offered for approaching the Bible (source of culture) and the conditions of some very simple childhood and adolescent relationships, of work in the wood shop, surely some excursions into the fields at certain times, of participation in the common happenings among the people of the village such as weddings, funerals, family joys and sorrows, etc. The basis of Jesus's life would be that of everyone else, the same as that of a very large part of humanity, even of today, of the people in the street. The fact that he was not a priest, nor a teacher of the law, nor a Pharisee, nor an Essene is very significant in order to understand the type of "religion" that he professed and which he would propose. The interesting thing about the life of Jesus is not the exceptional, but rather the normal, the life of every day, of the people. To this type of people and these conditions of life there is oriented what is more structural, like politics, social organization, religion, etc. It is not the reverse. Within this common human state and from its point of view Jesus meets the challenges of life with the greatest realism.

And if it is true, as it seems to be, that Jesus was neither on the margins nor marginalized, it is also true that he belonged to a social group of people of modest means and that he suffered the conditions of privation that are common to the poor. Therefore, "the true basis of the story" (SE 2) that Ignatius offers us in the contemplation of the Birth, in continuity with the Franciscan and medieval tradition, and in agreement with the contemporary spiritual mystical exegesis of Charles de Foucauld and Antoine Chevrier (among others) is that of a Jesus who is born into the "greatest poverty" (SE 116), and who experiences cold, heat, hunger, etc. In other words, the school of Jesus was the condition of life of the common poor people, who did not belong to any social group that was comfortable or, even less, privileged. "He became flesh (*sarx*)" (Jn 1:14). He assumed "the condition of a slave and became as men are" (Ph 2:7). "He humbled himself (*kenosis*)" (Ph 2:8). "Though he was rich, yet for your sake he became poor, so that by his poverty you might become rich" (2Cor 8:9). It is here that the divine pedagogy of Jesus begins which introduces us to the knowledge of a hidden God in the "humility of God" (Francois Varillon). It is no wonder, then, that this same Jesus, schooled over years in the hardness of life, although bathed in silence, in joy and in the everyday, would be capable of feeling the passion for the poor, for those whom he wanted to become the Good News (Cf Lk 4:18; 7:22).

b) A way of being in life

The place where we are born and grow up influences us, but it doesn't condition us or educate us automatically. Our formation depends in large part on the pedagogy that is applied, on personal attitudes. Some features that are written concerning Mary, and

to some extent about Joseph, would have figured into the way of being in the life of Jesus, that would let him be formed by it.

- *Receptivity.* That being able to keep things in her heart which is so much a part of Mary (Lk 2:19. 51) would also be characteristic of the disposition of Jesus. The parables and his knowledge of the human heart reveal to us a person who is accustomed to being in contact with the reality of his environment, without walling himself into an isolated situation, and with an attitude of seeing, of being aware, of knowing and grasping ideas. He was a man who was open to very different realities (children's games, people and their jobs, great events and small happenings, people and loneliness, prayer and psalms, temple and synagogue, conversation, silence and work, etc.) that distinguish a person who is an observer of reality from inside the reality itself.
- *Transformation or active maturation.* Nevertheless, a personal disposition to allow yourself to work at things is also required. Perhaps that "pondering things in her heart" (Lk 2:19) of Mary uncovers an active and permeable way of reacting to things and people, listening and learning, sympathizing and feeling pain, adapting and resisting, etc. From where would have come to Jesus that so decisive and firm taking of a position towards people and events? That manner of speaking with such certainty and authority that it carried all before it? That liveliness and harmony with life that was manifested in the parables? His capacity for dialog, his understanding, his autonomy, his sensitivity to the pain of others, his deep knowledge of people, his non-negotiable preference for the poor, etc.? That "growing up" which Luke repeats can be understood in the sense of this multidimensional human maturity.
- *Obedience to life.* From even before his birth, the life of Jesus was docility toward God in the rhythm of events. Mary accepts a plan that she had not foreseen and Joseph, the same thing. The birth is produced against what would be a normal plan for any family. Mary and Joseph have to take on the inconveniences of a journey. Moreover, Jesus and his parents are met with emigration and returning already while in his infancy. The episodes are marked by angelic orders (from God Himself) which are related to very concrete social situations (Cf. Lk 2¹-5; Mt 2:13-23). Thus, Jesus, "born of woman, born under the law" (Ga 4:4), would learn this human lesson which is so important: that of obedience to events which are the "superiors"⁹ of a large part of humankind who cannot extract themselves from the inconveniences of obligations, from the exigencies of a structured society, from a predetermined way of acting that does not always coincide with one's

9. "Small circumstances are faithful 'superiors'. They do not abandon us for an instant, and the 'yesses' that we have to give them follow one another." DELBREL, Madeleine, *Nosotros, gente de la calle (We, the People of the Street)*, Estela (Barcelona, 1971), p. 63.

personal desires or plans. The social sense that is well incorporated into one's own conduct, the ethic of obligation, the reading of faith into common occurrences, etc.

- *Acceptance of questioning.* Human existence is not the interpretation of a music score which is already written and known. The course of life is intersected with times of darkness and perplexity, of fears and insecurities, etc. This is what Mary lived when faced with the angel (Lk 1:29-34), with the shepherds (Lk 2:19), with Simeon (Lk 2:35), when Jesus is lost in the temple (Lk 2:48-50). Also later, when that child seems to have gone mad (Mk 3:21). Joseph also lived with his doubts (the anxieties of Joseph), his moments of confusion (Mt 1:19-20; Lk 2:48-50). Neither would Jesus be spared the questioning in the future when his life was turned into a continuous temptation: those who were near to him did not understand him (Mk 3:21; Jn 6:42, 60-61), they misinterpret him and some abandon him (Jn 6:64, 66), others attack him (Mk 3:6; Lk 4:28-29), some confront him to the point of condemning him (Mk 14:1-2; Jn 11:53-54). The will of the Father becomes for him a source of anxiety (Mk 14: 34-36) and his sense of mission becomes clouded (Mk 15:34). During the long and monotonous years of the hidden life, I am sure that Jesus had to face fear and insecurity. If it were not so, his behavior in the situations just described would not be comprehensible. Speaking about fear and insecurity does not mean doubt or paralysis, but rather a sincere search in reflection and prayer, in contact with the Word and the community. It also means patience, a time of painful waiting for things to become clearer and to settle themselves in one's own heart and personal life. Above all, it means a great confidence, now that one knows that his own life is in the hands of Abba (Cf. Mk 14:36).

1.2.2. Jesus within history; the inculturation of Jesus

Perhaps the anachronistic term *inculturation* might be used to sum up what Matthew presents to us through the genealogy of Jesus and the episode in Egypt. The Jesus of the Gospels, the new Moses, makes the history of his people his own story. He becomes integrated into it. He incorporates into his life the aspirations and the sufferings of a long history which will later be changed into his own task of liberation (Cf. Lk 4:18-20). Already through his circumcision and presentation in the temple he has been officially incorporated into the people of Israel and he has also been introduced to respect for the law (Lk 2:21-38). He was "born under the law" (Ga 4:4), who's deepest meaning he will venerate and reveal. For Jesus, the law consists in the true love for God and the neighbor. He is a man with a great sense of belonging to the people, and so he will carry forward this history, revealing the most hidden part of it.

Luke underscores how Jesus is part of the tree of the Davidic line, fulfills the hopes of Israel and makes real “the consolation of Israel” (Lk 2:25) announced by Isaiah and contemplated by the old man Simeon. So, it is enough to project into the hidden life what was perceived by the devout believers who were Elizabeth with her exultant greeting to Mary (Lk 1:39-45), Zacharias, with his *Benedictus* (Lk 1:67-79), Mary, with the *Magnificat* (Lk 1: 46-55), Simeon, with his hymn of praise (Lk 2:29-32), and Anna, with her unquenchable hope (Lk 2:36-38).

The solidarity with the people and their history that is manifested later in the public life (although in a contradictory way against many ways of understanding the history on the part of the establishment) is fundamental in order not to reduce the interpretation of the hidden life to a time of a placid spiritual life that could even be a bit folkloric. It is better to overcome the notion of understanding the hidden life as a private time, perhaps enchanting and bucolic, but one without being situated in the hard and changeable reality of the life of a village. Because already in the days of the childhood and adolescence of Jesus, a dramatic future began to be perceived, a “sign to be contradicted” for him and a “sword” for the heart of his mother (Lk 2:35-35; cf. Lk 12:51-53). This is something that had caught the mystical intuition of Ignatius when he proposes contemplating by starting from the Birth itself: “born in great poverty ... to die on a cross.” (SE116).

1.2.3. *The heart of Jesus: Abba*

The presence of the Father and the communion with him are the *leit motiv* or *cantus firmus* of the life of Jesus. This is very clear, like a kind of overture, in the episode of his going up to the temple when Jesus stays there because he had to be with the Father (Cf. Lk 2:49). Later, to do his will and to carry out his work of love for all humans will be his food (Cf. Jn 4:34). The relationship with the Father illuminates and unifies the whole life of Jesus (Cf. Heb 10:5-10) which he lives dependent on the Father to the point of placing his spirit into His hands (Cf. Lk 23:46). At the same time, it is a life given over to all of humankind (Cf. Mk 10:45; 14:24). So, the years of the hidden life will be the years of a profound and constant experiencing of this unity in communion with the Father and with his brothers and sisters.

1.3. By way of synthesis: Where did this man get all this? ... Is not this the carpenter? (Mk 6:2-3)

Once we have made this journey through the hidden life of the Lord, as if we were there, we can distill out a few pathways as a kind of synthesis that might help us with the next step.

- *The importance of being inserted into history.* We cannot be salt and light with any amount of efficacy – perhaps countercultural to a false dominant culture – by standing outside of the world, but rather by being assumed into a history against which it is necessary to place ourselves, but yet participating in it. Jesus was not someone who was on the margins of his society. There grew in him “more and more a lived belief that his mission would take him into a mortal conflict with religious and political society. ... As a consequence, the whole theology of Jesus can be read as a *political* theology.”¹⁰ A new form of asceticism, then, is necessary in the Christian life, that of the politicization of life. That is, the task of concretizing Christian life in all its dimensions within the temporal and spatial conditions of the *polis*, the society in which this life evolves.¹¹
- *Experience of normal life.* One can take part in society in very different ways, living and seeing things from many various angles. One has to be in the world like Jesus who lived in the life of normal people, like one of many others. Only in this situation can one take responsibility for what one is in life, although doubtless one can occupy the seat of a politician, or the chair of a professor, or be a monk or a Discalced Carmelite. To live life and to be with the people, not only giving, but also receiving. To allow oneself to be transformed by people and events (teaching, but learning; evangelizing, but allowing oneself to be evangelized; loving, but allowing oneself to be loved). Danger to the “theoreticians” who do not have any credibility because what they think or write about, they do not live, they do not suffer. It doesn’t change them.

Obedience to life is first of all an obedience that is placed on us humans if we have to live humanly. Therefore, one should avoid the easy ways out that submerge us in the artificial and which distance us from the condition of the people. We should also assume the perplexities, not save ourselves from the hard things in life, learn, change, subject ourselves to the facts and look for new courses to take, not anchor ourselves, etc. We have here another aspect of Christian asceticism: do not isolate yourself from the condition of the people, because we know that one doesn’t think the same way in a hovel as in a palace.

- *A life from God.* The reality of the history and the life of people presents many possibilities for interpretation. Jesus followed the reading of reality of a believer, according to the vision and the will of the Father. God was the ultimate and definitive key for reading life and history. So, the poor, of whom God is the defender, have a prime preference in the attention and commitment of Jesus. We

10. RAHNER, Karl. *Op. cit.*, p. 293.

11. Pope Francis, in *Fratelli tutti*, says: “It is important that catechesis and preaching include in a more direct and clear way, the social sense of existence, the fraternal dimension of spirituality.” (n. 86).

can assume the paradox that in order to think humanly, we should not think as men, but as God does (Cf. Mk 8:33).

2. As If One Were to Be There

Given all that has preceded this, let us move on to contemplate our life today by projecting into it the style of Jesus of Nazareth, since Christ is our contemporary and we know that He is “life” (Jn 14:6). He is “true life” according to St. Ignatius (SE 139). How does life illuminate us?

It behooves us to pay special attention to the preamble that Ignatius places before entering into the election and the contemplation of the public life (SE 135). Although obviously, we have to reread it from the point of view of current post-Vatican II theology, it permits us a look at very rich evangelical content. In this text, Ignatius presents an interpretation of the hidden life as a synthesis of the two states of life that are found in the Church: consecrated life (“Evangelical perfection”) and secular life (“keeping the commandments”). These are ways of life that Jesus symbolizes, on the one hand, by his participation in normal life (“in obedience to his parents”), and on the other hand, by creating a prophetic distance from it (“when he remained in the temple”). This schematization of two poles of life, around which is constructed a constellation of varied ways of life, serves to underscore the two facets which with more or less intensity and more or less visibility should be found in all Christian life. These are the making of a worldly or historical life and the existential recognition of the primacy of God, Father of mercy. No Christian can be exempted from actualizing in their life these two dimensions of Jesus, although certainly each in a different way.

2.1. The experience of the “only true God” (Jn 17:3)

Perhaps it is more important than ever when today the name of God is invoked to justify exploitative policies and economics that are not in solidarity, it is necessary to incorporate in our hearts “feeling and savoring internally” (SE 2) the experience of the only true God in order to exorcise the demons that lay siege to us and the idols that seduce us. The Christian experience of God starts from the moment of baptism when we are “submerged” in the mystery of solidarity of the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit. This is an initiating experience which is embodied in the mystery of solidarity and communion of the Church. It should be extended naturally, if it is true, by radiat-

ing outwards in communion and solidarity. Because the authentic experience of God, to whom a world which appears to have little attraction matters, has to generate an interior movement of great efficacy in order to go against the current of the easy and instinctive “Let those who can, save themselves!” and “If the other person can’t get ahead, then so what?”. In the same way, we ought to ask ourselves if before beginning some well-made Exercises, the person beginning them should already have had an experience of solidarity, founded on a well-reasoned personal conviction. On the contrary, the danger exists that the contemplation on the Incarnation might bounce off, leaving the person with some intimate feelings, but without getting to the “firm and persevering determination to work for the common good, that is, for the good of all and each other person, so that all of us might be truly responsible for everyone else.”¹²

Moreover, this true God who is revealed to be on one side of history, that of the poor, provokes a spiritual experience which is neither symmetrical nor calming. It is enough to assimilate the Gospel well in order to realize that Jesus, who loves all people, speaks and acts from the viewpoint of the poor and that his action and his words are destabilizing. That is, the poor and the reality of poverty, at least in the revelation of God found in Jesus of Nazareth, are something intrinsic to the experience of faith, not simply a consequence of it. Nevertheless, the destabilization that the Lord provokes is always healing, like that of the experience of the Beatitudes. For that reason, it helps to become aware that spiritual consolation is not always happy or agreeable, but is always a healing and constructive experience for the person who experiences it (CF. SE 316). We can now see the importance of the first two mysteries that Ignatius proposes for the 2nd week, Incarnation and Birth, which are like the overture to the “hidden life”.

2.2. Humanizing our life

2.2.1. *The truth about life*

To value the simple state of life, that of the people at the bottom, to be with them, listen to them, share the conditions of their lives of desires and disillusionments, etc. Grand visions and great stories are necessary, but – and this perhaps has been one of the failures of modern times – what has been lost is the sense of the everyday, of what is nearby, of each day, of what really motivates humans, of what makes them work and suffer. We have to know the true reality of the world because we see everything with unfocused perspectives. In the world, the majority of the people are poor and very poor (due in large part to the wellbeing of the most comfortable minorities).

12. JOHN PAUL II, *Sollicitudo rei socialis*. 38.

Even in the countries of the northern hemisphere there are insulting amounts of poverty and exclusion. It is an unavoidable necessity, in order to start to follow the Lord, to allow yourself to be wounded by this reality and to fit it into our particular existence and context which is supposedly Christian. To go from knowing “about” to knowledge “of” poverty and the poor. And if, as has been said, the Church is an expert in being human, it should become an expert in the poverty of the poor. That is, through a life that is nearer to and shared with simple people and the poor, allow our sensitivity to reconfigure itself and thus it will push us toward new options and behaviors. Less discussion and more reality and more effort to tear down the Cyclopean wall that favors today’s globalization, “the wall of insensitivity”. Is it true that we have lost solidarity with the poor? Well then, in Jesus of Nazareth a way is revealed to us of living humanly and poor at the same time, something like that “civilization of poverty” (I. Ellacuria) or of “austerity” (J. Sobrino). The words and gestures of Pope Francis invite us to rekindle the fire that had been spread among us a few decades ago.

2.2.2. *The “each day”*

Let us not move on immediately to the extreme, to what grabs our attention, to the extraordinary. The first truth of life is the everyday, the simple, the vulgar, what does not appear but yet is always there: relationships and work, encounters and separations, projects and failures, monotony and fiesta, etc. All of this educates and transforms the person who allows it to happen. They are decisive classes in humanity that counteract false and deceptive values that are imposed on us without our being aware of it: everything is easy, everything is possible, use and throw away, things are more important than persons, diminution of human capabilities to the degree that the possibilities of technology and progress grow. Allowing yourself to be educated by the everyday can be the pathway to growing as persons who are subjects and not objects, who live a unified life and not one broken in pieces, who live reconciled with reality without allowing themselves to be alienated by a world of fiction to which it wants to send us. In this respect, the old reflections of Karl Rahner about the spiritual transcendence of the “each day” continue to be of startling modernity as well as those of Marcel Legaut about the necessary participation in the school of simple people in order to have a true spiritual life.¹³ And many other more recent writers. “Take on our

13. RAHNER, Karl, “La oracion del ‘cada dia’” (The “Every day” prayer), in *De la necesidad y don de la oracion*. Mensajero (Bilbao, 2004), pp. 57-69. RAHNER, Karl, “Dios de mi vida cotidiana” (God of my Daily Life) in *Oraciones de vida*. Publicaciones Claretianas (Madrid, 1986), pp. 109-114. LEGAUT, Marcel, “La obra espiritual” (The Spiritual Works) in *Pasado y... ¿Porvenir? del cristianismo*. Verbo Divino (Estella, 1972), pp. 465-498.

own existence, take charge of it, in fact does not mean to go to a place different than daily life.”¹⁴

2.2.3. *The joy of living*

It seems that Jesus had a healthy enough life: childhood games, participation in the life of the village (work, relationships, fiestas, etc.). He even liked to invite guests, to eat and to drink. We can confront the corruptions of a certain globalization that dehumanizes through its excesses that insult the poor and impoverishes the rich exploiters (individuals, companies, towns or states) only by the development of authentic ways of life that respond to the deep desire for life, a full life, that God has planted in our hearts. A modern and Christian ideal, in the face of a rationalism that closes windows and dreams, is to develop that Biblical *shalom* that integrates the fact of being at peace with oneself, with others, with creation and with God. And to pass the current course about the pleasure of life. “I came that they may have life, and have it abundantly” (Jn 10:10). On various occasions Pope Francis has underscored the importance of the joy of living and of pleasure. “Christian spirituality proposes growth with seriousness and a capacity to find joy in living with little. ... It is not less life nor a lesser intimacy, but just the opposite.”¹⁵

This school of reality, of the “each day”, and of human joy, brings us closer to the authentic life of humankind against the great risk of the people of the Church to live in a separate world which, in general, is predominantly bourgeois or petit bourgeois. It makes us more objective and realistic. It makes us into the live subjects of social life.

2.2.4. *Fertile gratuitousness*

What has gone before leads us naturally to ponder the importance of gratuitousness in these years of life of Jesus of Nazareth and to take on a challenge that they propose for us. Gratuitousness does not mean anything other than living the true reality of things and not to value them or appreciate them because of something added on, a Value Added Tax that does not flow out of the thing itself. It means to be into life, to let yourself be formed by it, to allow yourself to be discombobulated, to look for answers without taking refuge in false or prefabricated solutions. The hidden years of Jesus made him into a man capable of feeling the joys and hopes, the sadness and the pains of the people, to experience true solidarity which is a deep feeling, motivating to action. These years were like a laboratory for his words because later his teaching took on a specific weight not because of the diplomas which he had, but rather for

14. ESQUIROL, Josep Maria, *La Resistencia intima. Ensayo de una filosofia de la proximidad* (Intimate Resistance. Essay on a Philosophy of Proximity). Acanalado (Barcelona, 2015).

15. *Laudato si'*, nn. 222 and 223.

their deep, warm and prolonged gestation in his humanity. Who spoke as he did? Finally, Jesus showed himself to be an autonomous man, independent and free. He did not allow himself to be dragged along by an easy and deceptive success. He was not intimidated when facing the power of authority. He spoke with clarity and risked himself. The school of the “hidden life” prepares us for not succumbing to the human deformations that are at the root of the globalization that exists today; to the rationalism that only knows how to access reality exclusively through what is rational and atrophies other ways of human access to life; to the capitalism that only is motivated by individual or tribal economic gain and reduces the person almost to a purely material level; to technocracy which pigeonholes, programs and directs persons and freedoms.

“The mute beating of time was also God” (J. M. Valverde), because silence, an expression of gratuitousness, is preparation for drawing closer to others, since only in silence do we make room to receive God. Only in silence can we become capable to accept a friend. “In the origins of any human gesture which is profoundly human is silence. Without silence there is no thought, nor love nor communication.” (J. M. Bailarin). We have silence and we need to cultivate it because the thousand noises which surround us make as much confusion as we do ourselves. Silence defends us from assault and the globalizing invasion into our thought, our values, what we consume. In silence we become practiced in a “spirituality of resistance” which is absolutely necessary to live a true, humanly healthy existence. Moreover, it makes us more capable of creativity, of initiative. Thus, silence is also the channel for recreating a new word, a true, authentic word, in a world of devaluation of the word in ads and in politics. It can be a word that shows us what we can hold on to, a valiant word, a word which carries a message, a motivating word. Silence is also a field for cultivating freedom in the face of the ordering about of globalization, the manipulation of freedoms, the homogenization of persons and peoples, the one-dimensionality of people. Silence is the food of great mystics who were fighters.¹⁶ A concrete suggestion: the repeated contemplation of the “hidden life” in which being predominates over doing.

From this gratuitousness and silence there is born a very unusual way of being in society. It is a solidarity that is not a defense only of one’s own interests, but rather an option for the poor, although it might be without verifiable results (at least, in the short term). Solidarity born not of an ideology or from voluntarism, but rather

16. Let us recall the example of Abbe Pierre: “When in the times of the Resistance or when in Emmaus we suffered a great crisis, I went up on to the great mountain to do a week of fasting before making any determined decisions which clearly called for reflecting. It was a time for not reflecting. Once everything was well swept and the windows all clean, what I had to do was very clear. Often, I say that Emmaus was made in this way. It was never the fruit of a reflection, of a project.” PIERRE, Abbe, *Dieu Merci*. Bayard Editions Centurion (Paris, 1995), p. 42.

from closeness and the personal or immediate experience of the situation of other people, makes one feel it as one's own affair. A great number of collective and initially unifying efforts succumb to weariness of long processes, to the disenchantment of insufficient results, to the discouragement of defections of one's companions in commitment or struggle. Solidarity which is matured in the gratuitousness of love pushes one to take great risks, to constancy for long journeys and fortitude to overcome disenchantments. The option for the poor, which feeds on the kind of closeness described above, finds also in gratuitous incomparable strength, because what is free cannot be always what is useful. On the other hand, it is full of feeling and encloses a value that transcends the utilitarianism that is imposed by society which wants to cut up the human being according to patterns of money and myopic efficacy.

Starting from this disposition and not from preconceived ideas, it is easier to understand the poor and put oneself by their side. For that reason, the hidden life, the fertile life of the Lord provokes in us a greater decision to share the life of the neediest, the impoverished. Perhaps not all of us can live like the poor, but some can, and many people can share life with them. If we don't move in this direction, we will become lost in subtleties and disquisitions about poverty and the poor which will cover up our fears and areas of resistance and which will never do more than wake up our indifference and disbelief toward what it is they are suffering. And if we opt for the poor, it is because we opt for being human, but we do it historically. That is, we do it in a world made of poverty, suffering and injustice, and we take on the challenge of the cruel asymmetry between rich and poor, the impoverished and the exploiters.

2.3. The human and the social as Christian mediation

2.3.1. *Living the human out of faith*

As Christians it falls to us twice, as persons and as believers, to recognize that "the only responsibility toward history is to rewrite it" (O. Wilde). Because the first thing that we have to consider in today's situation of globalization is that this, as a reality very much of the world of today, with frequently inhumane consequences, is not only not foreign to us, but rather it belongs to the heart of the Christian experience because it deals with something that is part of the human, the historical, the social. "For us Christians, spirituality is basically the ability to give a response to the signs of the times, as Jesus did for his own time and place ... the capacity to respond to the situations in life in the style of Jesus."¹⁷ Like Jesus, who takes on the history of his people and makes it his, the Christian incorporates into his experience of faith (reflection,

17. ARUN, Joe, *A Spirituality for Globalization*. Vidyajyoti (2002), vol. 6, p. 421.

prayer, discernment, commitment, etc.) this reality which invades everything because of its very globalizing nature. Because, by their baptism, Christians, all with no exception, are called to share the same way of life as Jesus, “called into the fellowship of his Son, Jesus Christ, our Lord” (1Co 1:9; cf. Rm 1:6).

Thus, the Christian should respond to a double call: living a spirituality that integrates history, but also a history read from the viewpoint of faith, since Jesus has revealed to us the radical secularity of Christian spirituality. This is something that is not yet integrated, not even by a long shot, into the conscience of the majority, despite the fact that many discussions flow in that direction. So, one facet of a spirituality in the midst of a wild globalization is a “spirituality of resistance”, not only in the sense of not succumbing to the unrelenting attack of world capitalism, but also in the active sense of speaking, of denouncing, of conscience in the face of this devastating threat.

Nevertheless, spirituality cannot be only negative, one of resistance, but rather it should be implicated in the constructive task of searching and offering alternatives, not only lamentations. Given the complexity of the globalized world, the majority of us will not be able to follow Jesus in this undertaking if it is not through affiliation with or support of institutions or movements which strive for resistance and seek alternative goals. What is certain is that Jesus who, in the synagogue of Nazareth, presented himself as the liberator from all types of slavery, herald of Good News to the poor, and promotor of a new solidarity (cf. Lk 4:17-19), would have let this option mature in the years of “hidden life” that had just preceded.

So then, to live as a Christian, which in its deepest sense is the same as living spiritually (this is important facing the smorgasbord of spiritualities in which the pure gold is mixed with costume jewelry and scrap metal), is something strong, vigorous, risky, and in it is found in one’s own satisfaction and joy. For this reason, in the midst of our labors and struggles, we have to be very convinced that consolation, joy and happiness, although not always comfortable, always completely fill us.

2.3.2. The wisdom and the strength of God

As Ignazio Silone said, it is difficult, but important today, to know who is crazy and who is not. As St. Paul did, we Christians proclaim someone who was crazy and weak, but our faith tells us that there lies true wisdom and true strength (cf. 1Co 1:25). It is very important to note that in the Exercises, Ignatius proposes “genuine life” (SE 139), the wisdom of God, in the exercise of the Two Standards, immediately as a continuation of the hidden life. It seems to say to us that in these hidden years he has been working out a way that God valued and did things which is what to take upon ourselves if we want to choose and decide as a Christian. That is what the retreatant has been perceiving and assimilating in the contemplations. In fact, Jesus is not a model but a principle of life. Jesus is not the most perfect example of a kind of life

that has been previously known or thought up by us, but rather the same standard for living humanly as for those of us who believe in him. To believe in Jesus is to believe in true life. Therefore, the specific thing that we bring to the world is the attempt to configure our personal existence, our social and apostolic choices, the orientation of our labor and commitment according to the design drawn by the life and word of the Lord. In the Exercises, this is the task that is accomplished in the meditation on the Two Standards and during all of the 4th day of the 2nd week. But it is important to underscore that the option for Christ means to allow ourselves to be dislocated by him in order truly to encounter ourselves and others, because it is true life and we are completely convinced of it. This true life opens us to the complete spectrum of what it means to be human, since during the contemplations we are centered on the “Lord” (Kyrios) who in turn introduces us, through our identification with him, into a new brotherhood, given that he is “the first-born among many brethren” (Rm 8:29).

The ideal of a human life like “one of many” inspired by Jesus is a very high goal. But we do not lack witnesses who confirm for us the good sense and the truth of crazy Christian principles when it comes to the apparently sensible craziness of the globalization of injustice of today. There are crazies like Abbe Pierre who reminds us of the efficacy of the contemplative life of a believer, both provocative and militant in favor of truly human causes. Or the paradigmatic case of Mr. H. who, while exercising the profession of politics on a high level as the secretary-general of the UN, left behind a trace of his competence to the non-negotiable service of the common good in the obscurity of some sociopolitical meditations, where he lived with a very appealing experience of God. Or the testimony of the recently deceased bishop Pedro Casaldaliga, who reveals to us the wide fields of Christian life and evangelization. These and many others tell us that in hiddenness is found fertility.¹⁸

18. Dag Hammarskjöld (Mister H.), who carried out a risky political mission as the secretary-general of the UN (1953-1961) recognized that “there is not in life a better thing than to serve with disinterest one’s own country or humanity.” He confessed, “I find in the writings of the great medieval mystics that ‘denial of oneself’ has been the way to full self-realization and that by ‘spiritual unburdening’ and ‘inner life’ they found the strength to say Yes to every call made by the needs of their neighbor.” See RAMBLA, Josep Maria, “Testigos de una nueva justicia” in VV.AA, *Aldea global, justicia parcial*, Cristianisme i Justícia (Barcelona, 2003), pp. 201-222.

3. Conclusion

To live one's daily life in the manner of Jesus, in the religious opacity of the world, in the midst of a great variety of persons, places and situations, in a society of inequalities and injustices, of conflicts and loneliness, is not something that is gained with good will and intentions, but rather it requires a long work of personal transformation, realized with the grace of God and a humanly free response. This is the proper task of the Spiritual Exercises, by means of different 'exercises' which are the cooperation with the action of God on the part of the person who makes them.

Right after finishing the contemplations of the hidden life, in which the retreatant will have grasped a synthesis of the fundamental lines of living as a Christian, as much concerning a consecrated life as of life as a layperson, one enters into the contemplations of the stages of the public life, of the passion and the resurrection of Jesus. In the exercises of the Two Standards, the Three Classes of Persons and the Three Ways of Being Humbled, with insistent recourse to Divine grace, the retreatant disposes himself so that the exercises of contemplation and other spiritual practices will help him to have the same feelings as Christ (cf. Ph 2:5) and lead him to where Christ is being formed in him (cf. Ga 4:19). In the middle of this process, the election or the reform of life will have been made in order to go out into daily life and live in the manner of Christ, "as one like many others" (Ph 2:7), to live in "perfection in whatsoever state or way of life" (SE 135). In the end, then, of this long haul of some thirty days, the person who has made the Spiritual Exercises finds himself in the situation of integration into the normal life, very diverse according to the various retreatants, which the person has been contemplating from the viewpoint of God mediated by the life of Christ.

In order to make this passage to ordinary life, common to all human beings in different states of life and in extremely varied situations, there is proposed the Contemplation to Obtain Love. It is an exercise, a contemplation, which ties the experience of the retreat into the concrete life in which the retreatant will be submerged. It is a specific help to make life human, as Jesus did in his years in Nazareth, and later, in the rest of his unhidden life (cf. Rm12:1), a way in which "to love and serve the Divine Majesty in all things" (SE 233).

The “Half-Divine” Life; The Contemplation to Obtain Love (Col)

After the Exercises, the retreatant is going to encounter people, circumstances and environments in which he will neither contemplate Jesus nor hear his word. In spite of this, God will continue to be present, accompanying him and speaking to him as he had experienced all during the Exercises. How does one feel the presence of God? How do you perceive God's actions and hear his calls? Moreover, how do you live a relationship with God when He is not seen, thought about nor heard? In order to help make the passage to normal life after the Exercises, there is proposed inside of the retreat the special exercise of the COL. It is not about trying to obtain a love that perhaps has not been reached during the month of Exercises, but rather through the help of this contemplation, to come to the point of living this love in one's ordinary and normal life, a mystical experience of life in whatever situation a person may find him or herself.

Therefore, as a complement to the reflection on the contemplations of the hidden life of Jesus which we have done, now we will analyze in detail the COL which St. Ignatius proposes at the end of the Exercises in order to facilitate the retreatant in being able to “love and serve the Divine Majesty in everything” (SE213). But here the treatment of the material will be different than that used in the first part. There, starting with the few, albeit inspiring, Ignatian points for the contemplation, I tried to develop some personal considerations as possible points of meditation and contemplation. Now, on the other hand, given that the Ignatian orientations for this exercise shed a lot of light, I will restrict myself to commenting on them in a way that the reading or the reader can do any considerations for the contemplation that might arise.

1. As An Overture, A Hidden Life With Christ In God

Before beginning to analyze in a detailed way the COL itself, it is worth pausing on the Christological character of this contemplation, not only to shine some light on the question that is usually asked about this, but also to better situate the COL within the dynamic of the whole of the Exercises.

The Spiritual Exercises aspire to having the retreatant participate in the intimate immediacy of God who communicates Himself gratuitously (Cf SE 15). But all of the Exercises are crisscrossed by the personal relationship with Jesus, the Lord (Cf SE 4). Because He who descends from above (Jn 3:12-13) is the one who affirms that “He who has seen me, has seen the Father” (Jn 14:9), and He is the one who introduces the retreatant into the inaccessible Light so that he can allow himself to be embraced by the Creator (Cf SE 13).

Nevertheless, a paradox surprises the one who carefully analyzes the character of the experience of the Exercises. Each of these has a different goal, but there is one which encircles all of them, that of the COL, at the end of the spiritual experience. This goal is expressed in the petition itself of the exercise: “to love and serve the Divine Majesty in all things” (SE 233).¹⁹ So, it is noteworthy that while during the entire Exercises, from the very first week, the image of Christ dominates the meditations and the contemplations, upon arriving at the end, as if in continuity with the mystery of the Ascension (where the Lord is snatched from the sight of the disciples),²⁰ Christ also disappears from the sight of the retreatant.

A bit of clarity can be brought to this paradox by the life of Ignatius. For example, the image of the rays of light which, according to some personal experiences of the saint, can be interpreted Christologically, “just as the rays come down from the sun” (SE 237). Ignatius himself, at the end of his life declared “Even now I had many visions, above all those of seeing Christ as the sun.”²¹ Already since the time at Manresa, the sun (or a white body and later made of gold) is the form as he perceives faith in Christ, a reality that illuminates and warms everything, from whom the rays come, because “all good things and gifts descend from above” (SE 237). So, in the same way that the light and heat of the sun accompany us without imposing their images on us, Christ is a real and efficacious presence a companion who is constantly following us

19. I take for granted that the goal of the Exercises is that of the COL. In authoritative words: “To be able to love and serve the Divine Majesty in all things (SE 233) is a complete synthesis of the concrete, typical and distinctive spiritual effect to which the Exercises of St. Ignatius lead.” CALVERAS, Jose, *Que fruto se ha de sacar de los Ejercicios Espirituales de San Ignacio*. Libreria Religiosa (Barcelona, 1950), p. 139.

20. “A cloud took Him from their sight” (SE 317).

21. *Autobiography*, n. 99. Cf also nn. 29, 41, 44, 48. And *Spiritual Diary*, n. 87.

without our being able to confine Him to a space or to any predetermined form, but rather hidden.

Therefore, based on the mystical experience of Ignatius, we can affirm that our Christian life, in our world, will consist of an existential relationship with Christ, in faith and in love, but without seeing Him (Cf. 1P 1:8). And the COL is oriented toward living this way of life, “in Christ”, in the midst of a society often opaque to the presence and action of God, in a way similar to how Jesus would have lived out his long years of life in Nazareth, in the midst of people and chores proper to the common life of every human being.

So then, the Exercises help a person who practices them to live a hidden life with Christ in God. Because:

- The Christian life is a life hidden in the social opacity of the world where the work for the Kingdom of God is being realized;
- In spite of the hiddenness of the Christian life, it offers a permanent relationship with the Lord, so that the Christian life finds itself hidden, but with Christ;
- This Christ is the Lord of history, “taken up to heaven” (SE 312); the life of the Christian of the Exercises, united to Him, is a life in God.

2. The Col Inside Of The Exercises: Some Previous Considerations

2.1. The COL and the Exercises in general

It seems clear that the contemplation to obtain love is the end point to which the Spiritual Exercises are oriented and on which they converge. Nevertheless, following the premise that the end determines the means, the COL is in some way present in all of the Exercises. It has always been underscored that the “Principle and Foundation” contains the seeds of the COL (Cf. SE 23). Nevertheless, given the importance that the experience of God has in the life of the believer to which the Contemplation to Obtain Love is oriented, in whatever type of Spiritual Exercises, even in the very simple ones that are presented in Annotation 18a, the COL should be implicit and seminal. On the contrary, we would be introducing the retreatant to an atrophied Christianity, because the Spirit is already working in the heart and life of the person making the retreat. So, one should begin at a point that precedes the action of accompaniment and the task of the retreatant. Here I have a certain personal reservation about referring to the simpler Exercises which are proposed as an initiation by Ignatius in Annotation

18a as “light” and avoiding their banalization.²² The person who does the accompaniment lives a certain connection between the God who inhabits and works in his own heart, and the God who lives and works in the heart of the retreatant.²³

2.2. The COL in relation to the preceding stages

The COL should be considered an opening to the reality of life outside of the Exercises. So, much has been said and discussed about what the COL brings to the experience of the Exercises. Of course, it does not bring “love”, since from the “Principle and Foundation” that has been the object of the retreatant’s task as a response to God’s love poured out in his heart. It is to liberate love in order to allow that one’s own life be moved by the love that “should descend from above, from the love of God” (SE 184; cf. 338).

Moreover, it seems ingenuous to think that an exercise that is usually proposed for the end of the thirty days will cause love to be born in the retreatant. On the other hand, it IS possible to say that the function of this exercise is to connect the retreatant, who has been growing in love, leaving behind his “self-love” (SE 189), with the outside reality, which in an implicit or explicit way has been present throughout the month. If during that month the retreatant has contemplated the world in God, now he is invited to contemplate God in the world. It will be an initiation into living the

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22. It is enough to recall the quality with which, in a simple but rich form, are clothed the Exercises that Ignatius gave in Alcalá de Henares, according to testimony in the process of his canonization. One of the witnesses says, “The said Ignatius was teaching the first two Commandments. Love God, etc., and he spoke a long time about this.” CALVERAS, Jose, *Ejercicios Espirituales, Directorio y Documentos de S. Ignacio de Loyola*. Balmes (Barcelona, 1958), p. 654. Another: “He talked about how one ought to love God” (*Ibid.* p. 660). And in introducing the Examination of Conscience, he would suggest this prayer: “My God, my Father, my Creator. thanks and praise I give you for so many mercies that you have done for us and which I hope that you will do for us.” (*Ibid.* p.661) (Cf. *Monumenta Scripta de Sancto Ignazio*). Referring to the elementary Exercises that he later began to give at Manresa, Polanco says that he set on fire the love of God. In truth, after the deep mystical experience of the Cardoner, the pilgrim could no longer “help souls” except out of that experience of loving union with God, that illumination that brought him to see life as a place of mediation of his encounter with God.
23. See the now classic article of DIEZ-ALEGRIA, Jose M., “La ‘contemplacion para alcanzar amor’ en la dinamica espiritual de los Ejercicios de San Ignacio”. *Manresa* (1951), pp. 171-193. See also VANHOYE, Albert, “Ejercicios Espirituales para la ‘civilizacion del amor’”, in *Ejercicios Espirituales y mundo de hoy, Congreso Internacional de Ejercicios*, (Loyola, September 20-26, 1991). Mensajero Sal Terrae (Bilbao-Santander, 1992), pp. 299-309. The quotation is on p. 303, n. 2.

Ignatian “loving Him in all creatures and all creatures in Him” (Constitutions 288), the expression of a way of Christian life or of a fully integrated spirituality.²⁴

In analyzing more in detail the connection of the COL with the totality of the experience of the Exercises, it is appropriate to highlight these points:

a) Descent or kenosis of God

In the contemplation on the Incarnation, the retreatant places himself before the mystery of the gaze of God on the world, a gaze which is sensitive to the contradictory and sorrowful reality of the world and of history that becomes an efficacious solidarity in the “Let us work the redemption of the human race” (SE 107). This descent, which becomes visible and is converted into concrete history in the life of Jesus, ends up in the astounding event of the Cross.

But the descent from gazing and solidarity begins to be an assumption of the world through the resurrection which is God’s Yes to the world and to history, the way in which Jesus is constituted Lord (Ph 2:9-11). In him everything has existence, so that history will be “groaning with the act of giving birth” (Rm 8:22) to a new creation, already conceived and in the process of gestation. Thus, with the resurrection, the descent of God has been converted into world-izing of God, to the point that the world is now “half-divine” and there is no need to look for God outside of the world, but rather in immersion in the concrete world. If heaven is the resurrected condition (Cf. Col 3:1-5) the earth, sealed now with the new life of the Lord, should be growing nearer to the “celestial” condition of Christ. God has to be sanctified, the Kingdom should arrive at its fullness and the will of God should be done “on earth, as it is in heaven.”

b) Motivated by Love

All of the Exercises are a school of affectivity, the “University of the love of God” (W. Sierp). They try to give order to the affections, that is, to center them on the true treasure where the heart should be. It should grow in love, a love fed by the personal relationship with the Lord. So, all that the retreatant deliberates and decides in the course of the spiritual experience is motivated by the love which “descends from above, from the love of God” (Cf. SE 184, 338).

c) A hidden life

The retreatant, upon leaving the retreat, is now the person who does not look for the living among the dead (Cf. Lk 24:5), but rather in the midst of life, in all of the polychromed reality of persons and circumstances. Jesus Christ does not appear in an

24. Concerning the idea of the COL in other places and not after the contemplation on the Ascension, please see note 2, p. 303, in VANHOYE, *ibid.*

explicit way because there is found in the retreatant, who has now transformed his life, “Christ formed in you” (Ga 4:19; Cf. also 2:19-20). The life of the retreatant, as far as being a believing person, is a hidden life in Christ, without this life having a necessarily special “religious” distinctiveness. Christ configures the life and the actions of the person who has reached the culmination of the Exercises. He opens up to him the reality of the world for which Christ has lived and handed himself over. He unites him with the Father as the Father is united with Christ. He accompanies him as the one who will be with us until the end of time. Truly, the retreatant can affirm that his life is hidden, but with Christ and in God. The Spirit, who in an anonymous way has been animating the experience of the Exercises, will be the one who in daily life will remind him of the word of Christ and will lead him creatively toward complete truth, constantly making Jesus up to date (Cf. Jn 16:13; 14:26). The life of the retreatant as a Christian will be a spiritual life, Christocentric and theological, but worldly, since now by the resurrection God has said “Yes” to the world.

3. The Text of the Exercises

3.1. The title (SE 230)

“Contemplation to obtain love.” Given that the word “love” is already clarified in the two preliminary notes, it behooves us to clarify the meaning of “contemplation” and of “obtain”.

Contemplation. This word, which Ignatius reserved for the Gospel mysteries, here has a strong meaning. It does not deal with a simple meditation or a discursive consideration of the story, but rather contemplating “the real lived in the resurrected Christ, present in the retreatant and in the world which is summed up in Him: all in all.”²⁵ This contemplation is oriented toward perceiving what is interior, including the exterior of life, which is of a greater richness than the penetration of what is interior in the interior.²⁶ That is one aspires to seek out and find God “in all things”, not only

25. See DEMOUSTIER, Adrien, *Les Exercices Spirituels de S. Ignace de Loyola. Lecture et pratique d'un texte*. Editions facultes jesuites (Paris, 2006), p. 426

26. See Suso's text provided by Demoustier on p. 476, n. 3: “Celui qui demeure interieur dans les choses exterieurs deviant plus interieur dans les choses interieures que celui qui ne demeure interieur que dans les choses interieures.” (ANCELET-HUSTACHE (ed.), *Vie XLIX, Œuvres complètes*, Paris: Éditions du Seuil, 1977, p. 285).

in what is interior, but also in the exterior world where the life of the retreatant will develop in large part.

Obtain. With respect to this verb, it is also a good thing to shed some light, given that its precise meaning is not obvious. It does not deal with “getting” love at the end of the long process of the Exercises, naturally not in any way as the fruit of human effort, nor from a grace that is requested, since for the whole time of the Exercises one has worked with spiritual affectivity and the retreatant has tried to make a decision motivated by love (SE 15, 104, 184, 338). Nor does it seem that one should try in this final exercise “to arouse” more love than what has already been developed in the Spiritual Exercises, although the translation of the Vulgate, *ad amorem spiritualem in nobis excitandum*, seems to suggest that. However, within the permitted linguistic possibilities for the verb “to obtain”, and with the perspective of an exercise for leaving the retreat, and, in some way, to focus the ordinary life of the retreatant, I believe that the following interpretation can be useful: “contemplation in order to live in love.”

3.2. Notes and preludes

a) “Love ought to manifest itself more by deeds” (SE 230)

This first note tells us that Christian life is one of fidelity. Upon moving on to daily life, works will be a key for understanding the reality of love, which is expressed in many ways, but deeds manifest it clearly. Love with deeds is the truth of love (Cf. 1Jn 3:18; Jm 1:22). Nevertheless, there always remain questions that only discernment can elucidate. What deeds are to be considered? Because interior deeds also are a truthful proof of love. Moreover, words can be true deeds. Nevertheless, it is not rare to find a case of a person, for example, who is married and who falls apart into tender and very affectionate words, and nevertheless maintains a relationship that puts into doubt the person’s fidelity which is declared only in words. So, the Ignatian note warns us about the risk of putting an excessive emphasis on feelings, although they have their importance. He warns also against the error of believing that one truly loves based on what they feel, or the reverse, believing that one does not love because they feel the Lord very little.

b) “Love consists in a mutual communication between the two persons” (SE 231)

The second note reminds us that a life of faith, the Christian life, is relationship. Here we are dealing with the love of a friendship, the most elevated kind of love, although it is not always the most generous. In this way, ordinary life is focused as a life of alliance, in the reciprocity of love which is sharing. The COL is a training ground for friendship. Remember the experience of Ignatius with Faber in the College of St.

Barbara and the life of the first companions in Paris, as described by Lainez, a life of “friends in the Lord” as Ignatius would say. Moreover, the relationship with God is changed into a synergy, because this relationship of friendship with God will be lived in a life of commitment, either in the midst of the world or in the retreat of a monastery, since the encounter with God always points the way to others (Cf. God and Moses, Jesus and his disciples). So, the Christification of the Exercises introduces us to the intimacy of the Trinity just as it appears in the great apostolic prayer of Jesus when he asks the Father that we might be welcomed into the same loving relationship as the Divine Persons (Cf. Jn 17).

In summary, these two preliminary notes help the retreatant to consider that the Christian life develops as an encounter, and it is built more on the depths of the heart, on affectivity, than on ideas or simple moral behavior. What Teresa of Jesus formulated, for the purposes of the prayer that is “dealing with friendship”, is applied more generally to all of a Christian life as such. Only thus, through an encounter and not by intellectual knowledge, is it possible to find God in all things, given that many “things” require attention such that they don’t allow for thinking about God.

c) *“The usual preparatory prayer” (SE 231)*

This prayer is a necessary constant in the whole process of the Exercises until the end. To live in love and service and to love God in all things and all things in God supposes a simple focus: a correct intention. Ignatius very wisely indicates that this correct intention should not only orient one’s “state of life” in general, but also that it should extend to “all individual matters” (Const. 288). An encounter with God in life is not produced by some kind of automatic reaction to contact with some reality or the doing of some work without anything else. A correct intention comes to be the key of all the musical score that will be composed of a wide variety of notes. Things in themselves can have very different meanings and can be oriented toward one sense or another. It is because of this that “the intentions, actions and operations” of the retreatant should be ordered to the “service and praise” of God (SE 46) in a search for the Kingdom. Ignatius will write to a Jesuit that even the things that distract one from thinking about God can be very spiritual when they are guided by a correct intention.²⁷

d) *“First prelude. Seeing myself as standing before God” (SE 232)*

Christian life is a life that is accompanied. Throughout the Exercises there appear other indications similar to this prelude. For example, in the triple colloquy (SE 63, 147), in the offering of the exercise on the Kingdom of Christ (SE 98), in the compo-

27. Letter to Manuel Godinho of January 31, 1552, *Obras Completas de San Ignacio*. BAC (Madrid, 1982), pp. 823-824. [Translator’s note: I have used a later edition of this work than the one cited by Fr. Rambla as a reference here. Pages cited are to this later edition].

sition of place of the Three Classes of Persons (SE 151), there is cultivated a kind of accompanied spirituality, neither like a desert nor solitary, but one of communion in faith. We are never alone. This prelude, which expresses a certain visualization and explicit consciousness of finding oneself next to our Lord and the saints, can generate a spiritual way of living of feeling oneself always in a company, although it might be without thinking about anyone. And this experience can be lived in one's normal life. St. Pierre Favre is an extraordinary example of this way of living the faith, although he frequently experienced it even in his thinking or his conscious reflection.

e) *“Second prelude. To ask for interior knowledge of all the great good ...received”*
(SE 233)

As always, this prelude, in which is formulated the petition proper to the exercise, explicitly states the goal that is sought. It is the key to the exercise of the COL. Given the preliminary note about the reciprocal character of love, it is immensely important that one recognize the gifts that one receives from the other person in order to reciprocate. Nevertheless, here the knowledge is requested for the simple reason that the gifts of God are not always clear in our knowledge. The true good does not coincide exactly to whatever we might value as such. It is for all of that that one has to ask God.

f) *“Interior knowledge”*

The text does not refer only to the deepest knowledge of that which is given to us. Given that for Ignatius “interior knowledge” means a knowledge of a personal relationship, here one is asked to grasp all the love that is enclosed in the gift that is offered to us.²⁸ In this way, “knowing oneself totally”, one can respond with works of love to the love with which God anticipates us, because “God loved us” (1Jn 4:10).

28. See DIVARKAR, Parmananda, *La senda del conocimiento interior. Reflexiones sobre los Ejercicios Espirituales de San Ignacio de Loyola* (The Path of Interior Knowledge. Reflections on the Spiritual Exercises of St. Ignatius Loyola), Sal Terrae (Santander, 1984). Divarkar states: “Interior knowledge is what we would call today personal knowledge, the kind of knowledge to which we allude when we say that we know someone and which is different from saying that we know about someone. When the one who is known personally is God, then interior knowledge means ‘faith’ In the richest sense of the word” (p. 33). Further on he adds: “Of course a personal relationship can be formed only between persons, but it can also affect the relationship to things. So, for example, a date on the calendar gains special significance for me if is the birthday of someone I love. It doesn’t stop being the date it is, but now it has become operational in my life.” He concludes by saying that it is to this that the text “interior knowledge of all the great good received” refers. (p. 34). See also by the same author, “La transformacion del yo y la experiencia espiritual. El enfoque ignaciano a la luz de otros modelos antropologicos” in ALEMANY, Carlos and GARCIA MONGE, Jose A. (ed), *Psicologia y Ejercicios Ignacianos*. Sal Terrae (Santander), Vol 1, pp. 23-34, esp. p. 26.

g) *“To love and serve” (SE 233)*²⁹

This is an expression which, as happens often with Ignatius, has a somewhat deeper meaning than the simple words reveal. In response to the love that God shows to us, we are asked to offer a corresponding love, that is, that deep attitude which is the actualization of one’s own human existence. “Love is the fulfilling of the law” (Rm 13:10), it “binds everything together in perfect harmony” (Col 3:14) and “love never ends” (1Cor 13:8). But “service” is not simply a consequence of love, but rather its own manifestation. That is, service is not an action that is done out of love, but is itself love. With this is revealed the richness of service which does not consist of doing certain works, but rather itself is love, a spiritual experience.

All of this is indicated in a very terse way in annotation 15 (SE 15): it is better “that the Creator and Lord himself should communicate himself to the devout soul, embracing it in love and praise, and disposing it for the way which will enable the soul to serve him better in the future.” The love with which God communicates himself to the retreatant is an embrace which wraps up the person in this same loving movement and converts it into a response of service. A basic paragraph, known as “the pearl of the Constitutions” (Const. 88) is an especially privileged formulation of this inter-penetration of love and service. “All should make diligent efforts to keep their intention right, not only in regard to their state of life but also to all particular details. In this they should always aim at serving and pleasing the Divine Goodness for its own sake, and because of the incomparable love and benefits with which God has anticipated us.”

h) *“In all things” (SE 233)*

The double textual interpretation of the phrase allows for going more deeply into the richness of its spiritual content. In the first place, if it is interpreted as “in all things”, it places us in one of the most distinctive ideas of Ignatian spirituality: to find God in all things. The retreatant who discovers in the points of the COL the great variety of the gifts of God that extend throughout his life, he will understand easily that it is in the totality of his life and not just a part or an area of it that he will encounter God. Therefore, the person who finishes the Exercises is disposed to continue the spiritual experience which he had acquired over several weeks in his daily life, which is constituted by an immense gamut of “things”, places and tasks, situations, persons, personal moments, social occasions, life in the Church, etc. And this does not mean that the experience will lead necessarily to an active life (although the Exercises serve especially as a preparation for a Christian life immersed in the world), given that the

29. For this point and the one that follows, see the very well documented and exhaustive article of DECLoux, Simon, “En todo amar y server, para una compresion del lema ignaciano”, *Manresa*, 63 (1991), pp. 7-31.

expression “all things” doesn’t create any sort of a limit. This is what Ignatius teaches and recommends to Francis Borgia when he counsels him not to limit himself to prayer, but rather to reduce the time dedicated to it, and, on the other hand, he should try to give himself over to the study of theology and to carry out the business of his duchy, since “it is a greater grace to be able to enjoy the Lord in various places than in only one.”³⁰

Secondly, “in all things” also has an adverbial sense “totally” (as in the version of the Vulgate: *totum me impendam*), and the vocabulary of the edition of *Monumenta Historica* supposes this interpretation.³¹ In this case, we are faced with the expression of the global experience of God: “with all your heart, with all your mind ...” The prayer with which this first part culminates demonstrates this disposition toward a complete handing over with the unequivocal note of a relationship with God, in which there should remain nothing of our hearts and lives. This has been prepared by the exercise of the Three Classes of Persons which tries to overcome the reservation of the Second Class, the case of the person who wants to have a relationship with God with “reductions”, definitely manipulating God.

In a text of greatest importance in the Constitutions, Ignatius says that the Jesuit should “abhor in its totality and not in part whatever the world loves and embraces” (Const. 101).³² The experience of Egide, a Jesuit mystic of our time, confirms that “There are experiences of God only when one is ready to put everything aside, for this world that needs to be liberated here and now.”³³ It only remains to add that this total giving of oneself is not the least spectacular, but rather it is done in the most normal and simple moments of our lives, although we might believe that they are insignificant. For that reason, one of the Gospel passages that is of greatest impact is that of the poor widow who gave only a small coin, so little compared with what the rich people of the time were giving, but with the detail that she gave “everything” (Cf. Mk 12:41-44).

We can conclude with some words of S. Decloux: “To say ‘in all things’ is for Ignatius, on the one hand, to maintain that nothing escapes love and service, but, on the other hand, it is also to affirm, in accordance with the ‘magis’ which is a measure

30. September 20, 1548, letter 45. In *Obras Completas*, op cit., pp. 750-753. The quotation is on p. 751.

31. In the Glossary at the end of *Exercitia Spiritualia*. Volume 100 of *Monumenta Historica S. I.*, there can be read: *modus adv. En todo = enteramente* 165, 186, 233, 342, 350, 353, 363, 365.

32. In a letter to his sister Magdalena on May 25, 1541, Ignatius wrote: “To whomever it pleases [our Lord] in his infinite and great goodness, may he increase in you always the love for Him in all things, placing not a part, but totally all of your love and caring in our Lord, and because of Him also in all creatures.” *Obras, op. cit.* p. 676.

33. RAMBLA, Josep M., *Dios, la Amistad y los pobres. La mística de Egide van Broeckhoven, jesuita obrero. Sal Terrae* (Santander, 2007), p. 232.

of one's dynamism toward God, that one never stops applying oneself to loving and serving better, because the intensity of the dynamism of the Spirit that penetrates the love and service is itself infinite."³⁴

But there still remains a third interpretation that enriches the meaning of what has been said to this point. Jeronimo Nadal says that Ignatius saw life and things *ex integro*. Starting from this affirmation, we can think of another meaning that the expression "in all things" allows: "all together". That is, not only is it requested in the preliminary note that one love and serve in all things and entirely, but it is asked that one embrace that harmonized vision of reality all together, like the Ignatian experience at the Cardoner, that was defined as a synthetic or architectonic vision of reality.³⁵ There, Ignatius perceived in faith, a harmony among the things of faith, the things of learning and the things of the spirit, that is, of the whole gamut of reality in which the life of a human and believer unfolds (Autobiography, 30). This interpretation, then, integrates the double meaning of "all things", both the extensive and objective dimension and the intensive and subjective dimension.

From this perspective, one understands better the uncomfortableness of Teilhard de Chardin with a literal and closed interpretation of the text of the Exercises, and also the spiritual creativity with which he deals with it, given that Teilhard is convinced that fidelity to a text consists in overcoming it. From this Teilhardian perspective, for some the source of a much-desired Christological renewal, we can open the COL to the perspective of Colossians 1:15-20 or chapter 21 of Revelations and contemplate the cosmic Christ in a dynamic vision of a history that is evolving, in which the retreatant is involved and of which He is the recapitulation.

In light of all this, one understands better how Ignatian spirituality encompasses the "more" of the love dynamic and the "all things" of the self-giving that love requires. That is, by means of the term "more", Ignatius expresses the growing dynamic of love which either spreads like fire or is extinguished. But with the term "in all things" the intensity of love is expressed, a love that asks one to give everything, burn everything, because all love is, both literally and figuratively speaking, a *holocaust*.

i) "The Divine Majesty" (SE 233)

It is in this expression that the theological dimension of the contemplation is enclosed. Given that created reality, all of which has been marked by the event of the

34. DECLoux, *Op.cit*, p. 12

35. You can see the word "Todo" by MELLONI in the *Diccionario de Espiritualidad ignaciana*, colección Manresa, n. 38, G-Z, 1704-1707. Also, RAMBLA, Josep M., "Dios, todo en todo". "Todo", otra clave de los Ejercicios, in GARCIA DE CASTRO, Jose, and MADRIGAL, Santiago (eds.), *Mil gracias derramando. Experiencia del Espiritu ayer y hoy* (Pouring out 1000 graces. The Experience of the Spirit Yesterday and Today), Comillas (Madrid, 2011), pp. 325-341.

resurrection of Christ, is half divine, the encounter with it is a mediation of the relationship with God. Thus, love and service, taking on any concrete form of action in the world, is an experience of God. Without annulling it, to love and to serve transcends the commitment to the world.³⁶

3.3. The points of the COL

Before entering into the points themselves, it would be good for us to recall that their content is not seen as going in a straight line, but rather a spiral. That is, each point does not add different content to the one before it, but rather brings a new focus and deepening. Moreover, the contemplation of the first part of each point induces a response of love that “consists in a mutual communication between the two persons” (SE 231). The four points can be summed up in four words: grace, encounter, hope and transparency.

a) *“I will call back into my memory the gifts I have received”* (SE 234) Christian life is grace

Because all of life consists of “gifts I have received”. At the beginning of the Exercises, the retreatant has sensed that he “is created” (SE 25), that is, that his existence springs from the love and initiative of God, a love that “is” permanent. Now at the end of the spiritual experience, the person who is making the Exercises stops to pay greater attention to the immense series of gifts of all kinds of which he is the object. He realizes by “[pondering] with deep affection” (SE 134) that he “is created” by the Father and that means that in reality he “is gifted”. All of life is like a gift of God! Thus, he can make his own the words of joyous gratitude and praise of Ep 1:8-23; 4:7-16. The testimony of the Jew Etty Hillesum who, in the midst of the atrocious experience of a concentration camp can exclaim “life is beautiful”, is an extraordinary example of how one can recognize the gifts of God in any situation.

But as we well know, love does not leave things the way they were, and so the retreatant considers “in all reason and justice” how much he should give in return,

36. These thoughts of Thomas Merton seem to me to be very illuminating in this respect: “While we may not love God perfectly, everything that is in the world will be able to wound us”, because in the love of God we possess everything and we enjoy everything without its staining us, but rather ‘we can encounter in creation something that reflects the fullness of heaven’. For that reason, “the saint is capable of speaking about the world without making any explicit reference to God, and in such a way that what he says gives more glory to God and awakens a deeper love for God than the observations of a person who is less holy”, whose elocutions “make us think that religion is problematic”. *Nuevas semillas de contemplacion* (New Seeds of Contemplation), Sal Terrae (Santander, 2003), pp. 46-48.

“with deep affection”, with the whole heart to this God who loves him so much. He offers himself “entirely” to the One who has loved him so much and who loves him.

At this point, we find ourselves with one of the very scarce times that Ignatius puts into the lips of the retreatant a formula for prayer, which itself indicates the transcendence of what is said in it. In effect, the parts of this prayers sum up the journey of what has been proposed in the preliminary notes. Given that “love ought to manifest itself more by deeds than by words” (SE 230), the retreatant offers to the Lord all of his being, beginning with what most makes him a person, which is his freedom (and we remember that Karl Rahner discovered in this point an existentialism *avant la lettre*)³⁷, with the firm decision and strength of allowing God to take, receive and dispose of everything absolutely according to His will. Moreover, love, expressed in the three potencies of the will, is *imago trinitatis* (according to the theology which Ignatius knew well), that is, it is a participation in the very mystery of the Trinity, a love poured out in the heart by the Spirit. Grace creates in the retreatant a special relationship with the three Divine Persons.³⁸ In this prayer we can say that we find ourselves in the midst of a symphony of “all things”, since that word appears five times in the five lines of text.

Moreover, the reciprocity of the love is expressed in the “You gave it to me, Lord, and I return it to you.” The retreatant has learned the gratuitousness of love, but also that love is the highest gratification. It is love that is God himself, poured out in our hearts (Cf. Rm 5:5), but at the same time it is the love with which we love others, since if God loves us in a way such as this, we also should love one another (1Jn 5:6). This love is the highest gratification, “your love and your grace”, which we need, but “it is enough for me” in order to live a humanly full life, because God has not destined us to a void, but rather He has come to give us life and “life in abundance” (Jn 10:10).

37. Paul Claudel in *Le soulier de satin* puts into the mouth of the young Jesuit Rodrigo, holding tightly to a piece of wood during a shipwreck, these words that show all the human richness of freedom given over to Freedom: “My life is tied to Christ on the cross, but the cross of Christ is not tied to anything”.

38. “As St. Ignatius sees it, that love is an *imago Trinitatis*. The application of the aspects of the soul does not mean the application of an instrument or instruments about things submitted simply from the outside of those instruments for their transformation. Ignatius knows that the memory, understanding and the will are the image of the Trinity. If then in the *suscipe* that *Trinitas* is mentioned as present in the very being of man, and if that *imago* definitely presents God to us as an act of love, it is evident that here he is thinking about a love that becomes real in a way similar to the *imago Trinitatis* is sustained by the divine intra-Trinitarian mystery itself, at its greatest when divine grace creates an authentic personal relationship with the three divine Persons and it is not just an objectivization created by the efficient causality of God, that would be the work *ad extra*, toward the outside, of God himself.” RAHNER, Karl, *El sacerdocio Cristiano en la realizacion existencial*, Herder (Barcelona, 1974), pp. 273-274.

b) *“The Second Point: I will consider how God dwells in creatures”* (SE 235). Christian life is an encounter

From the beginning of the Exercises, Ignatius helps the retreatant to get into an attitude of relationship, “in order to praise, reverence and serve” (SE 23). Now this process culminates by exercising oneself in the relationship with God ‘in all things’, since now he “dwells in creatures”. Thus, Christian life is converted into an encounter with God in life. This encounter could be in the manner of the good Samaritan who knows how to recognize him in a ditch on the side of the road or like St. John of the Cross who recognizes him in all created things. In all cases, the COL suggests that we move forward in this dimension of living the Christian life with the warmth of a friendship with a God who is present everywhere and in all circumstances. It is the experience of a life that is accompanied as it was lived by the disciples of Emmaus who, although they were not conscious of the presence of the Lord at their side, *they really experienced him*, as they recognized later. “Did not our hearts burn within us?” (Lk 24:32). So then, our “finding God in all things” places us in the category of encounter that is a real perception of God although it does not consist of a consciousness of his presence at our side. This point initiates us on the road to an affectionate, deep living out of the relationship in our daily tasks. That is the thing that is most characteristic of Ignatian spirituality.³⁹ It has been said that Christianity is the closest religion to animism, but without succeeding in falling into it. If truth be told, if one takes seriously a text like Col 1:15-20, it doesn’t seem that we exaggerate if we feel that we go out to encounter God in the thousands of realities of our life that is then changed into a permanent relationship with our Lord.⁴⁰

39. This is the Ignatian doctrine that Nadal had in mind when he said that Ignatius was a contemplative in action and that he found God in all things and that this is what he desired for Jesuits. So, in the instructions that Ignatius gives for those who are in formation, he insists on this training of an encounter with God in all things in life. See letters 66, 67 and 72 in *Obras de San Ignacio*.

40. Pope Francis amply expounds on this presence of God in all creatures. “The creatures of this world are no longer presented to us as a merely natural reality because the Risen One mysteriously enfolds them and orients them toward a destiny of fullness. The very flowers of the field and the birds that he contemplated with admiration with his human eyes are now filled with his luminous presence” (*Laudato si’*, n. 100). Moreover, creation bears the seal of the presence of the Trinity. “Every creature carries in itself a Trinitarian structure, so real that it can be spontaneously contemplated if the vision of a human being were not limited, dim and fragile. In that way it indicates to us the challenge of trying to read reality in a Trinitarian key.” (*Ibid.* n. 239)

c) *The Third Point: I will consider how God labors and works for me*” (SE236). To live in hope

The Christian life is living in hope, given that we are already saved, but only in hope (Rm 8:24). The fact is that God “is working” (Jn 5:17) in the world that is already marked with the sign of the life of the Risen One. We live, then, in a world filled with meaning, in spite of the nonsense in which humankind and creation find themselves submerged (Cf. SE 50). God has not discharged himself from our world. God does not want to step out of it. On the contrary, he carries forward the task of liberation ordering everything toward the good (Cf. Rm 8:28-30). This vision which is so positive and so consoling is, at the same time, a call to respond to this God by means of the synergy of commitment to the world, placing one’s entire being on the line in the search for the Kingdom. It is an active hope, born out of faith in the active love of God in the world of today. And therefore an activity, all of which is impregnated with the love which “moves the heavens and the stars”. It is the synergy and the cooperation that Jeronimo Nadal spoke about.⁴¹ All of human activity, “word and action” (Cr. Col 3:17), is an experience of God.

d) *“The Fourth Point: I will consider how all good things and gifts descend from above”* (SE 237). Aware of the transparency of God

We know that Teilhard de Chardin loved the term transparency, more expressive even than epiphany, since God is in the heart of the earth, of our world, and does not have to add any further element of revelation, which would be epi-phany.⁴² The same reality of our world is now transparent, because through (dia) the same things God himself is now manifested (phania), such things as “justice, goodness, piety, mercy and so forth” (SE 237), that include the immense gamut of manifestations of God in our world. One tries to live with a positive disposition, born from the vision of faith. “Blessed are those who have not seen, yet believe” (Jn 20:29), that is, blessed are those that contemplate the true and deep reality of things, because life will become for them a blessing, things will sometimes radiate goodness and beauty, and there will always be the love of a God who tells us that in the Risen One, he is with us until the end of time (Mt 28:20), and that through the Spirit, he makes all things new (Cf. Re 21:5).

Inigo, in Manresa, reached that insight, that profound, divine vision, by means of which “all things seemed new to him” (Autobiography 30), because he grasped them in their true reality which is the footprint that the Risen One has left on them.

41. This is a recurring theme in Nadal. Cr., for example, *Orationeis observationes*, MHSI, 90s, 217.

42. See *El Medio Divino (The Divine Milieu)*, part 3, 3.a) *La aparicion del Medio Divino. El gusto de ser y la Diafania de Dios*. Recall the allocution of P. H. Kolvenbach on the day of the Epiphany in 1995 in *Congregacion General 34 de la Compania de Jesus* (Curia of the General, Rome, 1995), pp. 40-483.

It is true that God “is always greater”, that he overflows everything, but also that he gives himself in the smallest things. In the world of today the continuous creation of God is revealed. Therefore, the mystic Egied saw creation in the world of today and he preferred the concrete reality of this actual world more than that distant and sublime one of the burning bush on Sinai.⁴³ Because according to Thomas Merton, “the fullness that we find in creatures corresponds to the reality of having been created, a reality that proceeds from God, belongs to God and reflects God.”⁴⁴ The problem is found in our disordered inner self when we look for a greater fullness than any created thing can give. And in this way, instead of adoring God, we try in what is certainly an unconscious way to adore ourselves by means of the creatures.

Thus, the positive disposition, fruit of a Christian life of welcoming the Good News, can be developed with what this fourth point is proposing. Christians who are sensitive to this transparency can be a reflection of the God who has said “Yes” to the world and who loves it. In that way all those who have a relationship with them will perhaps come to praise God because of the works that reflect him. (Cf. Mt 5:16). In one way this point recapitulates the preceding ones as Karl Rahner says: “All of these points have in common the “finding God in all things”. They tend to allow that the redeemed world through me becomes transparent to God and also that God becomes transparent to the world and to me.”⁴⁵

4. The Experience Of The Resurrection

4.1. “You have been raised with Christ” (Col 3:1)

The experience of the resurrection in the last week of the Exercises has not distanced the retreatant from earthly commitments, but rather the contrary. It has submerged him in this our world to which God has said “Yes” (Cf. 2Co 1:19-20), so that “in all things” he does the work of the Father who acts in the manner of one who is laboring (SE 236). Therefore, the long spiritual experience of immediate encounter with God mediated by Christ will now continue being real, since the world, where from now

43. Cf. RAMBLA, Josep M., *Dios, la Amistad y los pobres*. Sal Terrae (Santander, 2007), p. 166.

44. MERTON, Thomas, *Nuevas semillas*. Sal Terrae (Santander, 2008), p. 48.

45. RAHNER, Karl, *Meditaciones sobre los ejercicios de San Ignacio*. Herder (Barcelona, 1986), p. 263. The Jesuit poet G. M. Hopkins notes about this point of the COL: “All things are filled up with love, filled up with God. It is enough to know how to touch them in order for them to give off sparks and they catch fire, they drip and they flee, they resound and they speak of Him.”

on the life of the retreatant will unfold, is half divine. So, we can make the following conclusions:

- Life in the world, animated by the Spirit and in a constant and hidden relationship with the risen Christ, lowered into the suffering humanity of today, *will be an experience of God*, a “life in God”. Because the “lord” (SE 104) who has been contemplated during long hours of prayer through “the mysteries of the life of Christ our Lord” and whose “glory and joy” (SE 221) at being raised has been identified by the retreatant. At the end of the Exercises, it is the “Divine Majesty” (SE 233) that continues giving itself to the world, working in it and allowing itself to be discovered in a thousand reflections (SE 234-237).
- At the same time, his existence will be a *life with Christ*, with whom he has come to have a relationship and to identify himself with during the long process of the month of Exercises. It is a life with Christ in the faith, joy and blessing of those who believe without having seen (Cf. Jn 20:29).
- And in this relationship of friendship with Him (SE 230-231), a life given over in the fullness of freedom (SE 234) will be hidden *in the midst of the opacity of the world* and in predominantly secular situations in which his daily life will be developed.

So then, the COL prepares one for a profound experience of Christ, a deep experience of the world, constant union with God. And all of it is the work of the Spirit, who is the Spirit of the Father and the Son (for St. Thomas, the “anonymous one”), who in the New Testament commonly is hidden beneath the adjective “spiritual” and the same way also in the Spiritual Exercises.

4.2. Some “true and most holy effects” of the Resurrection (SE 223)

We people who move within today’s society and want to live a life with a certain amount of human and Christian depth find ourselves confronted with three realities that shake us up. In the first place is a harsh society, dominated by a search for quick results which are verifiable and apparent, some relationships marked greatly by all kinds of interests (economic, sociopolitical, psychological, social, etc.), a coldness and anonymity in the middle of an inhumane demographic density. We humans find ourselves in need of warmth and affection.

In the second place, our society is a centrifugal and disjointed society. We are driven to come out of ourselves. We find ourselves launched into the dispersal, fragmentation and atomization of our lives which are divided into sectors that are very distant one from another (the family, professional life, religious life, sport, etc.), with

a notable multi-adherence to various groups or communities (those related to the family, to work, to church, etc.).

In the third place, we find ourselves immersed in a secularized society. God and religion have no political significance, although it is not denied, nor even less stated that God is absent. Although this may be a sociological reality, which in itself does not have a negative connotation, we certainly find ourselves inevitably forced to live our faith in a social context where religion does not count publicly and everything is opaque to transcendence.

These three noted things, a harsh society, a disjointed experience and a secularized world, appeal to three important human necessities: the need for affective fulfillment, the search for unity in life, and the longing to live a religious life in the world. It is to these three desires, fed by the actual circumstances I have described, that I believe the COL, which we have just analyzed, responds. In fact, the COL disposes us to live in the midst of our anonymous and cold society with a sense of profound friendship with God and, by extension, with persons, and with a cordial countenance for life. With respect to the fragmentation in which the life of today is sunk, the COL initiates us into the unity of sensitivity that includes everything in the relationship with a God who comes out to meet us in whatever situation or reality, converting existence into a dialog with the One in whom everything has its unity and existence. Finally, the world in which we move is a really profane world, but at the same time a sacred world where through love we open ourselves to the transcendence of a God who is “all in all things” (Cf. 1Co 13:8). Like the believers to whom Jesus referred, the COL helps us not to tie ourselves to any sacred space in order to live the faith, breaking the division between sacred and profane, and it calls us to be in every place and in all things true adorers in spirit and truth. That is, to live as witnesses of that Jesus who, in the greater part of his life was “made like his brethren in every respect” (Heb 2:17), like one of many others (Ph 2:7), but who, nevertheless, could say “He who has seen me has seen the Father” (Jn 14:9).

Conclusion

Jesus, who spent some thirty years of his life immersed in the most normal of human daily existence, "made like his brethren in every respect" (Heb 2:17; cf. 4:15), who "went about doing good" (Ac 10:38), always ready "to do the will of the one who sent me, and to accomplish his works" (Jn 4:34), taught us to make our daily life into a new life. A life of an immense human and spiritual density, that is, motivated by the Spirit of God.

Jesus came for the whole world and not for an elite of specialists in spirituality. So, the privileged place to follow Him and participate in his divine condition as a human is the life of normal people, with all the great variety of situations in which we humans move. But this life, so simple and perhaps not very distinctive, is covered with an intensity and greatness that only that Presence who has known how to reveal his great mystery to the little one can make happen (Cf. Mt 11:25-27)/ The mystery of the Incarnation is revealed precisely in a unique way in that the immensity of God not only is enclosed but also lives in this finiteness of the human, the daily happenings, the homely.

The life of Jesus which is forged in the years of the hidden life is the material which in the Spiritual Exercises of St. Ignatius is assimilated with a long journey of transformation in Christ during three weeks. And in the COL there is offered a mystagogy appropriate for transfer to the conditions of life after the Exercises, the deep spiritual experience of the retreat in order to live it all in Christ. To be in Him, one like many others, witnesses of Christ, "Salt of the earth and light of the world" (Cf. Mt 5:13-16).

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