



The Theological-Spiritual Sense of the Principle and Foundation at the Different Stages of the *Spiritual Exercises* of Saint Ignatius of Loyola

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Abstract: The *Spiritual Exercises* of Saint Ignatius of Loyola have been famous in the Church for almost five centuries for their extraordinary effectiveness in building and deepening one's relationship with God. This effectiveness is attributable not so much to their content, which is related to the fundamental truths of the faith of the Catholic Church and to the contemplation of the mysteries of the life of Jesus Christ, as to their precise method. The author of the *Spiritual Exercises*, by adapting their content to the exercitant, helps them to open themselves more and more to the action of the Lord God and to cooperate with him, so that he may ultimately love him in everything and serve his Divine Majesty. This final chord of man's spiritual union with God is already present, as it were, in embryo in the first exercise of the Ignatian retreat, in the so-called Principle and Foundation (*Principio y Fundamento*). This exercise, commonly known as the Foundation, is, as it were, the root of the whole tree of spiritual development contained in the *Spiritual Exercises*. This is because the content of the Principle and Foundation develops and deepens more and more during the different stages of the *Spiritual Exercises*. The purpose of this article is to analyze scientifically the content of the Principle and Foundation and to show the theological-spiritual sense of the Principle and Foundation in the different stages of the *Spiritual Exercises* of St. Ignatius of Loyola. The text uses the method of analysis of the source texts and the literature on the subject, as well as the hermeneutical method, and shows that the synthesis of the spiritual life contained in the Ignatian Principle and Foundation continually develops and reaches its culmination in the last spiritual exercise of the Ignatian retreat – in the so-called “Contemplation to attain the love of God” (*Ad amorem*). In conclusion, it is shown that the content of the Principle and Foundation constitutes the foundations of the spiritual life, which, on the path of development, leads the exercitant to be able to “in all things love and serve the Divine Majesty.” (SE 233)

Keywords: *Spiritual Exercises*, Principle and Foundation, meditation, contemplation, contemplation *Ad amorem*, spiritual development

Principle and Foundation (*Principio y Fundamento*) is the name of the first spiritual exercise with which Ignatian retreats begin according to the method of the *Spiritual Exercises* of St. Ignatius of Loyola (SE 1–161). In the so-called Autograph of the *Spiritual Exercises*, which was written in Spanish, the title of this exercise is *Principio y Fundamento* (cf. SE 23).¹ In the *Podręczny słownik hiszpańsko-polski*

¹ In the critical edition of the original texts (*arquetipos*) of the *Spiritual Exercises* one can find different translations of the title of the exercise. In the Versio Vulgata, the title reads: “Principium sive Fundamentum”;

(Handy Spanish-Polish Dictionary) we read that the word *principio* means: “beginning,” “source,” “basis,” “principle,” (Wawrzykowski and Hiszpański 1982, 593) while the word *fundamento* means, among other things: “base,” “foundation.” (Wawrzykowski and Hiszpański 1982, 396) The Latin *principium*, on the other hand, translated as “beginning,” “basis,” “principle,” (Kumaniecki 1999, 337) corresponds to the Ancient Greek word ἀρχή, meaning both “beginning” and “principle,” but also “foundation.” (Cf. Abramowiczówna 1958, 340) Mieczysław Bednarz translated the Spanish title of this first exercise *Principio y Fundamento* into Polish as: “Zasada pierwsza i podstawowa [Fundament Ćwiczeń]” (The First and Fundamental Principle [Foundation of Exercises]) (Św. Ignacy Loyola 2022a, 200). Jan Ożóg, on the other hand, translated it as: “Zasada i Fundament” (“Principle and Foundation”) (Św. Ignacy Loyola 2019, 20).² Following his suggestion, this paper shall use the title: “Principle and Foundation.”³

The purpose of this article is to scientifically analyze the content of the Principle and Foundation and to show the theological-spiritual sense of the Principle and Foundation in the different stages of the *Spiritual Exercises* of St. Ignatius of Loyola. What is therefore sought here is the answer to the question: is the content of the Principle and Foundation present, and to what extent, in the successive stages of the *Spiritual Exercises* of St. Ignatius of Loyola? To date, scholarly analyses of the content of the Principle and Foundation, undertaken by experts in Ignatian spirituality (e.g.: Arzubialde 2009; López Tejada 1998; Rendina 1989), do not provide an answer to the question posed in this paper. These authors analyze the content of the Principle and Foundation, but do not show its relationship with the other stages of the *Spiritual Exercises*. In order to answer the question posed, I will first analyze the context of the Principle and Foundation, that is, its place in the structure of the entirety of the *Spiritual Exercises*, and briefly explain its basic purpose. What will follow is an analysis of the content of the Principle and Foundation, pointing to the spiritual dynamics of receiving and responding as the fundamental forms present in the building of man’s relationship with God contained in this exercise. Finally, it will be shown how the seed of spiritual development, present in the Principle and Foundation, is increasingly developed and deepened in the various stages of the *Spiritual Exercises*, called weeks⁴ by St. Ignatius, to find its completion and culmination in the last exercise – “Contemplation to attain the love of God” (*Ad amorem*) (cf. SE 230–37). This

in the Versio Prima of 1541: “Principium et Fundamentum”; while in the 1547 Versio Prima text: “Principium et Fundamentum,” cf. Calveras 1969, 164–65.

² Jacek Paweł Laskowski, on the other hand, translated the title as “Początek i Fundament” (“Beginning and Foundation”). See Św. Ignacy Loyola 2018, 23.

³ This title is commonly used and understood in the practice of giving Ignatian retreats as the Foundation.

⁴ “Week” in the *Spiritual Exercises* is a conventional name for one of its stages. It does not necessarily correspond in length to a week. Depending on the spiritual purpose of a particular stage of the *Exercises* and the needs and talents of the individual exercitant, it can be shortened or lengthened accordingly.

study uses the method of analysis of the source texts and the literature on the subject, as well as the hermeneutic method.

1. The Place and Purpose of the Principle and Foundation in the *Spiritual Exercises* of Saint Ignatius of Loyola

Although the Principle and Foundation is numbered twenty-three (cf. *SE* 23), but this is because under numbers 1–20 are the so-called Annotations to the *Spiritual Exercises*, that is, “introductory observations [aimed] to provide some understanding of the spiritual exercises which follow and to serve as a help both for the one who is to give them and for the exercitant.” (*SE* 1) In number twenty-one, St. Ignatius describes the main purpose of the *Exercises* (cf. *SE* 21), and in number twenty-two he gives the so-called “presupposition” (*praesupponendum*), i.e. the principle of benevolent forbearance, which is a prerequisite for mature conversation with others and mutual relations (cf. *SE* 22).

Not only does the Principle and Foundation occupy a specific place in the entire Ignatian retreat, since it begins all four weeks of the *Spiritual Exercises*, but it also has an outlined purpose, linked to the overall process of spiritual development proposed by St. Ignatius of Loyola.

1.1. The Place of the Principle and Foundation in the *Spiritual Exercises*

The entire *Spiritual Exercises* of St. Ignatius of Loyola are divided into four parts, called weeks by their author. The spiritual development contained in each week of the *Spiritual Exercises* corresponds to the three classical paths of the spiritual life: the path of spiritual purification, the path of spiritual enlightenment and the path of spiritual union (cf. Rodríguez Molero 1967, 358–403). St. Ignatius himself explains in the Tenth Annotation to the *Spiritual Exercises*, explaining the actions of the various spirits according to the spiritual stage of the individual, that the stage of the path of purification “corresponds to the Exercises of the First Week” and the stage of the path of enlightenment “corresponds to the Exercises of the Second Week.” (*SE* 10) By contrast, he says nothing about which weeks of the *Exercises* correspond to the path of spiritual union. However, the more important contemporary commentators on the *Spiritual Exercises* show that these are weeks three and four (cf. Rendina 1995, 42).

All four weeks of the *Exercises* are preceded by the spiritual exercise that St. Ignatius just called the “Principle and Foundation,” described in number twenty-three in the booklet of the *Exercises* (cf. *SE* 23). In fact, they are crowned with a spiritual exercise called “Contemplation to attain the love of God” (*Ad amorem*) (cf. *SE* 230–37).

In the Autograph of the *Spiritual Exercises*, the Foundation is not placed at the beginning of the first week of the *Exercises*, nor is it an integral part of it, but precedes it, being outside its structure and introducing, as it were, the entire process of spiritual development outlined in the *Spiritual Exercises* (cf. Calveras 1969, 164). In a similar way, the *Ad amorem* contemplation is not part of the final fourth week of the *Exercises*, but is outside it, crowning and culminating the entire process of spiritual development contained in the Ignatian retreat (cf. Calveras 1969, 306). Thus, the two exercises – the Principle and Foundation and the “Contemplation to attain the love of God” (*Ad amorem*) – form a kind of bracket, encompassing the four weeks of the *Spiritual Exercises*.

It seems to have been St. Ignatius’ intention to place the Principle and Foundation at the very beginning of the entire *Spiritual Exercises* with a deep biblical sense. During his long convalescence of several months at Loyola (1521), which was the beginning of his path of spiritual conversion, St. Ignatius, in addition to reading the *Golden Legend* or *Lives of the Saints* (*Flos Sanctorum*) by the Dominican Jacobus de Voragine, Archbishop of Genoa (d. 1298), he also read a work entitled *Life of Christ* (*Vita Christi*) by Ludolph of Saxony (1295–1378).⁵ While reading the *Life of Christ*, he probably reflected on the Gospel of St. John the Apostle, which, like Genesis (cf. Gen 1:1), begins with the words Ἐν ἀρχῇ, “In the beginning” (John 1:1). The ancient Greek word ἀρχή, means, as have already been mentioned, not only “beginning,” “principle,” but also “foundation” (cf. Abramowiczówna 1958, 340). It can therefore be assumed that St Ignatius’ meditation at Loyola on the Gospels, contemplating the mysteries of the life of Jesus Christ described in them, may have influenced not only the title of this first exercise: “Principle and Foundation,” but also its place at the very beginning of the entire path of spiritual development according to the method of the booklet of the *Spiritual Exercises*.⁶

1.2. Purpose of the Principle and Foundation

The placement of the Principle and Foundation at the beginning of the *Spiritual Exercises* indicates that it is a very important spiritual exercise. Its importance is also underlined by its very content. St. Ignatius wanted this first exercise to also be a special preparation and introduction of the exercitant into the spiritual dynamics of

⁵ The book *Golden Legend, Lives of the Saints* (*Flos Sanctorum*) was written in Latin by the Italian Dominican Jacobus de Voragine, Archbishop of Genoa, and translated into Spanish as *Flos sanctorum, a honor e alabança de Nuestro Señor Jesu Christo* (Toledo 1480), while the book *Life of Christ* (*Vita Christi*) by Ludolph the Carthusian of Saxony was written in Latin and published in 1472. Its title was *Vita Iesu Christi e quator Evangeliiis et scriptoribus orthodoxis concinnata*. It was translated by Ambrose Montesino into Spanish (*Vita Christi Cartuxano, interpretado del latin en romance por fray Ambrosio Montesino...*) and published in four volumes by Stanislaus Polonus in Alcalá in 1503. Cf. Codina 1926, 200–243.

⁶ For more on the influence of St. Ignatius’ reading of the *Vita Christi* on the *Spiritual Exercises*, see Alonso 2015, 71–72; Ramírez Fueyo 2020.

the four weeks of the *Exercises* (cf. Valdés 2005, 4–20). The content of the Principle and Foundation points to its threefold purpose. First, to make the exercitant profoundly aware of the main purpose of human life. Second, to help them understand the purpose of existence of all other creatures. Third, to arouse in them a deep desire and a strong will so that, in their inner freedom, they may use creatures to the extent that they help them to bond with God the Creator, rejecting everything that would threaten this bond (principle: “as much as” – *tantum quantum*), and so that, of the creatures that help to build a relationship with God, he may choose only that which helps this union with God more (principle: “more,” “greater,” “better” – *magis*) (cf. García Bonasa 2018, 73–76).

The truth contained in the Principle and Foundation concerns the fundamental purpose of human life. The exercitant considers that they were created “in the image of God” (Gen 1:27), i.e. for loving relationships with God and with creatures modelled on the relationships that exist between the three Divine Persons.⁷ Thus, this exercise opens the way to all other meditations and contemplations proposed by St. Ignatius. This fundamental meditation on the main purpose of human life is thus a solid preparation of the exercitant for the good practice of the entire *Spiritual Exercises*.

The preparation of the exercitant by this first exercise for the practice of an Ignatian retreat involves not only a deep understanding and inner experience (mind) of the main purpose of human life and the purpose of the existence of all other creatures, but also the acquisition by the exercitant of certain volitional (will) and spiritual dispositions, and the grace of inner freedom. In fact, the Principle and Foundation are intended to help the exercitant to awaken in themselves a deep desire and a strong will of inner balance, of holy indifference or, as Jacek Bolewski puts it, of “impartiality” (Bolewski 2009, 98–105; 2010a, 91–97; 2010b, 95–101) towards all creatures so that, for the sake of the supreme value of strengthening the loving relationship with God, they “should not prefer health to sickness, riches to poverty, honor to dishonor, a long life to a short life. The same holds for all other things” (SE 23) (cf. Bottereau 1969, 1692–94). This is why St. Ignatius, before introducing the exercitant to the reflection on the truths contained in the Principle and Foundation, encourages them to begin the retreat “with magnanimity and generosity toward his Creator and Lord,” and to “offer Him his entire will and liberty, that His Divine Majesty may dispose of him and all he possesses according to His most holy will” (SE 5) (cf. Hajduk 2016, 125–38; Jesús Plaza 2008, 225–37). Offering one’s freedom to God even before the retreat begins and repeating this act of reason and will in the Principle and Foundation generates in the exercitant’s heart a strong desire and decision to use not only those creatures that “are created for man to help him in attaining the end,” but to choose from among them “what is more conducive to the end for which we are created.” (SE 23)

⁷ For more on this topic, see Kowalczyk 2023, 7–13.

2. Principle and Foundation in the Light of “Contemplation to attain the love of God” (*Ad amorem*)

Most authors who comment on the *Spiritual Exercises* distinguish two main parts in the Principle and Foundation in terms of the structure of the text and its content. The differences between them concern what belongs to each of these two parts. Some believe that the first part of the Principle and Foundation includes the first three sentences, in which St. Ignatius speaks of the main purpose of human life, the purpose of the existence of other creatures and the principle of the proper use of creatures (*tantum quantum*); while in the second part they place the remaining two sentences, in which the author of the *Exercises* speaks of the need to become interiorly free, impartial (*indifferentia*) and the principle of *magis*.⁸ According to others, the first two sentences belong to the first part and the following three sentences belong to the second part.⁹ There are also those who while analyzing the *Exercises* divide the entire text of the Principle and Foundation into four parts. According to them, the first part consists of the first two sentences, the second part consists of the third sentence, the third part consists of the fourth sentence, and the fourth part consists of the fifth and final sentence (cf. Arzubialde 2009, 113–14).

Without undermining the rationale of the above proposals for capturing the structure of the text of the Principle and Foundation, it is proposed here that the content of this first exercise of the Ignatian retreat should be read through the prism of the last exercise, which is the “Contemplation to attain the love of God,” called *Ad amorem* (cf. SE 230–37). Its essence and purpose are expressed in the request for fruit: “to ask for an intimate knowledge of the many blessings received, that filled with gratitude for all, I may in all things love and serve the Divine Majesty.” (SE 233) In this request, one can distinguish two distinct parts. In the first the exercitant asks for “an intimate knowledge of the many blessings received,” while in the second part they ask that they may “in all things love and serve the Divine Majesty.” (SE 233) In these two parts we see the dynamic of receiving God’s love and responding to God’s love – receiving and responding.

Thus, if one looks through the lens of the request for the fruit of the last exercise of the Ignatian retreat – *Ad amorem* (cf. SE 233) – to the content of the first exercise (cf. SE 23), it can be seen that already in the first, most important sentence of the Principle and Foundation, the dialectic of welcome and response is present. For in it, one can read: “Man is created to praise, reverence, and serve God our Lord, and by this means to save his soul.” (SE 23) The content of this sentence points to the main purpose of man’s life, which is loving intimacy with God, and the way to build this

⁸ Darío López Tejada (cf. 1998, 145), among others, is a representative of this group of authors.

⁹ A representative of this group of authors exploring the *Exercises* is, among others, Sergio Rendina. Cf. Rendina 1989, 8–9.

most important, life-giving relationship, which consists in receiving God's love from God. The experience of God's love generates in man a gratitude that prompts him to praise God – this is expressed by the verb “to praise” (*alabar*). The experience of being endowed by God with his love leads to a desire and decision in man's heart to respond with love to God's love – this is expressed by the verbs “to reverence” (*acer reverencia*) and “serve” (*servir*). Man's response to God is only possible if man accepts his love beforehand. In the words of St. John the Apostle: “We love [God] because he first loved us” (1 John 4:19). The content of the Principle and Foundations, framed in this way, allows its division as follows: the first part is the first sentence, in which St. Ignatius speaks of the main purpose of man's life, that is, to build a reciprocal relationship with God in a dialectic of receiving and responding; and the second part is the next four sentences, which are a development and practical application of the content present in the first sentence.

2.1. Receiving the Love of God the Creator

Man's first experience is being called into existence by God the Creator: “So God created mankind in his own image, in the image of God he created them; male and female he created them” (Gen 1:27). In this primordial experience of God's relationship with man, it is the Creator who gives and it is man who receives. In the first sentence of the Principle and Foundation, this love descending from the Creator to the creature is referred to by St. Ignatius with the verb “to praise.” For to praise the Lord God means to see and receive his gifts of love.¹⁰ From these experiences arises gratitude to God the Creator for the grace of coming into existence in him. This is what the psalmist does: “I praise you because I am fearfully and wonderfully made” (Ps 139:14). Mary, the most perfect model of gratitude to God, sings in the *Magnificat*: “for the Mighty One has done great things for me—holy is his name” (Luke 1:49). St. Paul encourages the Thessalonians: “give thanks in all circumstances; for this is God's will for you in Christ Jesus” (1 Thess 5:18). Saint Ignatius, in a letter to his sister Teresa Rejadell, written in Venice on June 18, 1536, emphasizes: “you would be giving praise to the same Lord because you are making known His gift, and you glory in Him, not in yourself.” (St. Ignatius of Loyola 1959, 20) On the other hand, in a letter to Simon Rodericks, one of the first companions of St. Ignatius, the first Provincial of Portugal, written in Rome on March 18, 1542, he notes that “ingratitude is the most abominable of sins and that it should be detested in the sight of our Creator and Lord by all of His creatures who are capable of enjoying His divine and everlasting glory. For it is a forgetting of the graces, benefits, and blessings received.” (St. Ignatius of Loyola 1959, 55)

¹⁰ For more on this form of man's relationship with God, see Schiavone 2007, 105–13; Royón Lara 2014, 159–72.

The receiving of descending Love manifests itself not only in the act of man's creation, his coming into existence in God the Creator, which gives rise to great gratitude towards him, but also in the work of creating other creatures. Indeed, in the second sentence of the Principle and Foundation, St. Ignatius reminds that: "The other things on the face of the earth are created for man to help him in attaining the end for which he is created." (SE 23) The existence of all other creatures has, according to St. Ignatius, a twofold purpose. First, they are to show man the love of God the Creator for him: "The other things on the face of the earth are created for man," (SE 23) that is, out of the Creator's love for man. Second, the other creatures, as the innumerable gifts of a loving God, are to help man to reach his ultimate goal, that is, an ever deeper loving relationship with God: "to help him in attaining the end for which he is created." (SE 23) In the Book of Wisdom, once can read that it is "Through the greatness and beauty of creatures one comes to know by analogy their maker" (Wis 13:5). St. Augustine adds that the beauty of things created "is a profession (*confessio*)" of the "Beautiful One (*Pulcher*)" (as quoted in the CCC 32, n. 9). As we read in the *Catechism of the Catholic Church*: "The glory of God consists in the realization of this manifestation and communication of his goodness, for which the world was created." (CCC 294) Thus, at the stage of Principle and Foundation, to glorify the Lord God means to accept with a great feeling of gratitude the descending Love, that is, to accept the gift of one's own life, but also the gift of the existence of all other creatures.

2.2. Man's Response to the Love of God

Becoming aware of the gifts of God the Creator – the gift of one's own life and the gifts of other creatures, accepting them and spiritually tasting ever more deeply the descending Love of God gives rise to a feeling of great gratitude in the human heart. It also gives rise to a sincere and mature desire to respond with love to Love. Mary, in the mystery of the Annunciation, after having received the love of God the Father and of Jesus conceived in her, by the power of the Holy Spirit gives a wholehearted response: "I am the Lord's servant, may your word to me be fulfilled" (Luke 1:38). St. Ignatius shows in the Principle and Foundation that there are two forms of man's loving response to the boundless love of God the Creator. He defines these forms with the verbs: "to reverence" and "to serve."

Reverencing the Lord God means respecting and fulfilling the will of God as revealed to us in the commandments of God, in the commandments of the Church, in the duties related to the state of one's life, in submission to the inspirations of the Holy Spirit or in caring for those most in need. Fulfilling God's will is thus one form of responding with love to Love: "Whoever has my commandments and observes them is the one who loves me" (John 14:21; cf. SE 165–66). Reverencing the Lord God at the spiritual stage of the Principle and Foundation is also expressed in the proper use

of creatures – “as much as” (*tantum quantum*). Even though all God’s creatures are good in themselves: “For everything God created is good” (1 Tim 4:4; cf. Gen 1:31), but because of the effects of original sin and the consequences of our personal sins, as well as the disordered feelings that we may be guided by in our daily choices, spiritual discernment is needed to apply the principle of *tantum quantum* in the use of creatures, according to which “man is to make use of them in as far as they help him in the attainment of his end, and he must rid himself of them in as far as they prove a hindrance to him” (SE 23) (cf. Calveras 1931, 193–205; Królikowski 2017a, 83–95). Practising this Ignatian principle is a viable form of reverencing the Lord God (cf. García Mateo 2007, 77–79).

An even deeper form of man’s loving response to the Creator’s love is expressed by the verb “to serve.” The most perfect model of serving God is Jesus Christ: “The Father and I are one” (John 10:30). Therefore, the Ignatian “to serve” is to imitate Jesus Christ – the obedient, despised and loving one (cf. SE 97–98, 146–47, 155, 167, 203), is to love and imitate him “in all” (SE 233) (cf. García-Rodríguez 2007, 1637–47; Kasiłowski 2023, 29–38). As Simon Decloux observes: To serve is to take the form of a servant, or rather: to choose as a master the one who first wished to clothe himself for us with the marks of a servant, and to offer him our lives precisely in order to imprint on them the clearest sign of his Gospel (cf. Decloux 1983, 145). At the stage of Principle and Foundation, serving the Lord God corresponds to the famous Ignatian *magis* and means being in total spiritual equilibrium, impartiality, so that “our one desire and choice should be what is more conducive to the end for which we are created.” (SE 23)¹¹

3. The Process of Receiving and Responding to God’s Love in the Four Weeks of the *Spiritual Exercises* of St. Ignatius of Loyola

In addition to the overarching purpose of the entire *Spiritual Exercises*, described by St. Ignatius in numbers one and twenty-one (cf. SE 1, 21), there are the objectives of the individual weeks of the *Exercises*. The objectives of the weeks of the *Exercises*, in turn, are made up of the objectives of the meditations or contemplations that follow and are set out in requests for the fruit of the exercise (for what the exercitant wants). Therefore, an analysis of the goals of the four weeks shall be undertaken, seen through the lens of the meditation and contemplation goals of a particular stage of the *Exercises*. In this way, it will be established if and how the inner dialectic of receiving of God’s love and the response to it on the part of man, which is the essence

¹¹ This more, greater, better (*magis*) is the most characteristic feature of Ignatian spirituality. Cf. Diego 2007, 1155–68; Geger 2020, 65–77.

of the content of the Principle and Foundation, deepens and develops in the further stages of the *Spiritual Exercises*.

3.1. The Process of Receiving and Responding to God's Merciful Love in the First Week of the *Spiritual Exercises*

The process of receiving God's love at the stage of the first week of the *Spiritual Exercises* concerns the grace of knowing the obstacles to man's relationship with God, i.e. sins, and the grace of deeply experiencing God's boundless mercy. The first grace is asked for by the exercitant in one of the meditations: "[for] an understanding of the disorder of my actions, that filled with horror of them I may amend my life and put it in order" (SE 63) (cf. Domínguez Morano 2004, 39–51; García Domínguez 2020, 83–86). He also asks for a second grace in one of the talks concluding the meditation: "Imagine Christ our Lord present before you upon the cross, and begin to speak with him, asking how it is that though He is the Creator, He has stooped to become man, and to pass from eternal life to death here in time, that thus He might die for our sins" (SE 53) (cf. Catalá 2015, 183–89). Concluding their meditation on their own sins, they issue "a cry of wonder accompanied by surging emotion" (SE 60) (cf. Ruiz Jurado 2010, 52–59). He concludes the whole exercise "with a colloquy, extolling the mercy of God our Lord, pouring out my thoughts to Him, and giving thanks to Him that up to this very moment He has granted me life" (SE 61) (cf. Domínguez Morano 2005, 109–23). Similarly, in the concluding discourse of the meditation on hell, the exercitant thanks God: "for this, that up to this very moment He has shown Himself so loving and merciful to me" (SE 71) (cf. Giménez Melià 2020, 87–90). The reception of merciful love is completed by the general confession, that is, the confession of one's whole life, envisaged by St Ignatius at the end of the first week of the *Exercises* (cf. SE 44) (cf. Calveras 1951, 211–17; Królikowski 2017b, 149–78). Thus, the descending Love at the stage of the first week of the *Exercises* is the love of the Savior and Redeemer. This means that at this stage the exercitant opens themselves even more to the love of God than at the Principle and Foundation stage, when he received the love of God the Creator. This is because here they additionally receive the love of God the Redeemer. As we sing in the *Exsultet*: "Our birth would have been no gain, had we not been redeemed." (*The Roman Missal* 2010, 355)

The process of giving an answer to God's merciful love in the first week of the *Spiritual Exercises* begins with seeking an answer to the threefold question: "What have I done for Christ? What am I doing for Christ? What ought I to do for Christ?" (SE 53) The deeply experienced grace of God's mercy generates in the heart of the exercitant great gratitude and a strong desire "to resolve with His grace to amend for the future." (SE 61) In the repetition meditation, in the so-called three colloquies, they ask the Lord God for two graces – to feel the ugliness of their own sins and to correct themselves and put themselves in order: "an understanding of the disorder of

my actions, that filled with horror of them, I may amend my life and put it in order.” They also ask for a knowledge of the mentality of this world and a firm rejection of it: “a knowledge of the world, that filled with horror, I may put away from me all that is worldly and vain.” (SE 63) Thus, in the first week of the *Spiritual Exercises*, the exercitant not only responds to the love of God the Creator through the right use of creatures, as desired in the Principle and Foundation stage, but, guided by grateful love for the Redeemer, they furthermore resolve to put their spiritual life firmly in order and to make a strong resolution to improve for the future.

3.2. The Process of Receiving and Responding to the Friendly Love of Jesus Christ in the Second Week of the *Spiritual Exercises*

The exercitant, full of gratitude not only towards God the Creator (Principle and Foundation), but also towards the Savior and Redeemer whom he has experienced especially in the first week of the *Exercises*, now encounters his invitation to build a relationship of friendship. Already in the first contemplation of the second week, he hears the call of the Eternal King (cf. SE 91–98): “Follow me!” (Luke 5:27) he then asks Jesus for the grace to accept his invitation: “to ask of our Lord the grace not to be deaf to His call” (SE 91) (cf. Arantxa Gavilán 2019, 189–92). Accepting the grace of Jesus’ invitation to follow him opens the exercitant to another grace, namely the gift of knowing Jesus in depth. He asks for this grace in all the contemplations of the second week of the *Exercises*: “to ask for an intimate knowledge of our Lord, who has become man for me.” (SE 104)¹² Along with receiving the grace of knowing Jesus, the exercitant also receives the gift of discerning different spirits – good and evil – which he asks for in “The meditation on two standards” (cf. SE 136–47): “to ask for a knowledge of the deceits of the rebel chief and help to guard myself against them; and also to ask for a knowledge of the true life exemplified in the sovereign and true Commander, and the grace to imitate Him” (SE 139) (cf. Cebollada Silvestre 2018, 181–84). He also receives this grace through the Ignatian Rules for the Discernment of Spirits (cf. SE 313–36).¹³ Thus, the process of receiving at the stage of the second week of the *Exercises* no longer consists only in accepting the love that creates (Principle and Foundation) or redemptive love (first week of the *Exercises*), but moreover in accepting Jesus’ invitation to grow in friendly love with him: “Jesus went up on a mountainside and called to him those he wanted, and they came to him” (Mark 3:13). At this stage of the *Exercises*, God not only creates creatures “for me,” (SE 23) but he himself becomes Man in order to be a Gift “for me.” (SE 104)

¹² For more on the inner knowledge of Jesus and the Gospel contemplations in the second week of the *Spiritual Exercises*, see Lamarthée 2018, 177–80.

¹³ For an in-depth analysis of the Ignatian Rules for the Discernment of Spirits, specific to both the first and second week of the *Exercises*, see Królikowski 2020; 2021.

The response to Jesus' gift of friendly love is expressed in a loving decision to follow him. Therefore, the exercitant asks Jesus to be "prompt and diligent to accomplish His holy will," (SE 91) to excel in this by making of themselves a sacrifice "of greater value and of more importance," (SE 97, cf. SE 98) and through this, "may love Him more and follow Him more closely." (SE 104) They ask: "to imitate Him" (SE 139) who is poor and obedient to the Father's will, desirous of scorn and insults, and humble, that is, loving (cf. SE 146); they ask Jesus "to be received under His standard, first in the highest spiritual poverty, and should the Divine Majesty be pleased thereby, even in actual poverty; secondly, in bearing insults and wrongs, thereby to imitate Him better." (SE 147) In the meditation "Three classes of men" (cf. SE 149–56) the exercitant even begs Jesus "for the grace to choose what is more for the glory of His Divine Majesty and the salvation of my soul." (SE 152) In the meditation on the "Three kinds of humility" (cf. SE 165–67) they express the desire and decision to live according to the third and most perfect kind of humility, the manner of loving Jesus Christ: "I desire and choose poverty with Christ poor, rather than riches, in order to imitate and be in reality more like Christ our Lord; I choose insults with Christ loaded with them, rather than honors; I desire to be accounted as worthless and a fool for Christ, rather than to be esteemed as wise and prudent in this world. So Christ was treated before me." (SE 167)¹⁴ Thus, the response given to God in the second week of the *Exercises* no longer concerns only the right use of creatures or a strong resolution to improve in order to avoid sins at all costs, so as not to offend God the Creator and Savior, but moreover it concerns the firm choice of Jesus Christ to follow him as the poor, despised and humble one.¹⁵

3.3. The Process of Receiving and Responding to the Sacrificial Love of Jesus Christ in the Third Week of the *Spiritual Exercises*

In the third week of the *Spiritual Exercises*, the exercitant learns to receive not only friendly love, but moreover sacrificial love, that is, the love of Jesus Christ the Suffering One who lays down his life for his friends (cf. John 15:13). The exercitant participates in this school of sacrificial love by contemplating the sorrowful mysteries of the life of Jesus Christ. He asks for the grace to receive Sacrificial Love, for "sorrow, compassion, and shame because the Lord is going to His suffering for my sins." (SE 193) The "sorrow, compassion, and shame" experienced is much greater than in the first week of the *Exercises*. There, the exercitant as a sinner contemplated "Christ our Lord present before me upon the cross." (SE 53) They gave thanks to

¹⁴ The three classic Ignatian meditations in the second week of the *Spiritual Exercises*, also known as the "Ignatian triad," are: "On Two Standards," "On Three Classes of Men" and "On Three Kinds of Humility." An extensive analysis of these can be found in Raúl Cruz 2009, 6–65.

¹⁵ In making the choice to follow Jesus, the exercitant is helped by the Rules for making a sound and good election (cf. SE 169–89). An extensive commentary on these rules can be found in Królikowski 2023.

the merciful Jesus who died for us while we were still sinners (cf. Rom 5:8). Here they experience Jesus' sorrow as their friend, for whom "the Lord is going to His suffering." (SE 193) The exercitant thus reflects on "what Christ our Lord suffers in His human nature, or according to the passage contemplated." (SE 195) They also consider "how the divinity hides itself; for example, it could destroy its enemies and does not do so, but leaves the most sacred humanity to suffer so cruelly" (SE 196) (cf. Oller Sala 2009, 229–42; Jesús Plaza 2012, 29–40). Finally, they reflect on the fact that "Christ suffers all this for my sins," (SE 197) out of love for me (cf. Catalá 2018, 165–75). Thus, the exercitant, who in the Principle and Foundation has felt the love of the Creator, and in the first week of the *Exercises* has experienced in depth the boundless love of the Redeemer, and in the second week the love of the Friend who has invited them into loving friendship, here, in the third week, learns to receive even more than before – they wish to receive the love of Jesus, who loves up to the Cross, up to the last moment of his life, up to the total gift of Himself: "He loved them to the end" (John 13:1).

The exercitant's response to Jesus who loves with sacrificial love is to feel "compassion" with him, that is, to feel his love that is so great. They therefore desire "with great effort to strive to grieve, be sad, and weep." (SE 195) Seeing how much Christ suffers for them, they consider "what I ought to do and suffer for Him." (SE 197) They therefore ask "for sorrow with Christ in sorrow, anguish with Christ in anguish, tears and deep grief because of the great affliction Christ endures for me." (SE 203) "Com-compassion" of the exercitant with Christ who is in anguish and full of sorrow is also expressed in the practice of the so-called Additions, which are meant to "help one to go through the exercises better," (SE 73) and which St. Ignatius intended for this time. In one of them, one can read: "I will make an effort while rising and dressing to be sad and grieve because of the great sorrow and suffering of Christ our Lord." (SE 206a) In another, the author adds: "I will take care not to bring up pleasing thoughts, even though they are good and holy, for example, of the Resurrection and the glory of heaven. Rather I will rouse myself to sorrow, suffering, and anguish by frequently calling to mind the labors, fatigue, and suffering which Christ our Lord endured from the time of His birth down to the mystery of the passion upon which I am engaged at present" (SE 206b; cf. SE 78) (cf. Grzywacz 2018, 123–36; López Hortelano 2018, 299–302). Compassion with Jesus who loves with sacrificial love is also expressed by the exercitant through the practice of the Ignatian "Rules with regard to eating" (SE 210–17) (cf. Guillén 2019, 289–92; Królikowski 2014a, 127–46). Thus, the exercitant's response to the felt and deeply experienced sacrificial love of Jesus Christ at this stage of the *Exercises* is expressed in an even greater love towards him than in the previous stages of the Ignatian retreat.

3.4. The Process of Receiving and Responding to the Transforming Love of the Risen Jesus in the Fourth Week of the *Spiritual Exercises*

The acceptance of God's love at the stage of the fourth week of the *Exercises* is linked to the gifts of the Risen Jesus. The exercitant, contemplating the mysteries of the Resurrection of Jesus Christ, receives transforming love from him.¹⁶ Like to the disciples and the women, the Risen Jesus wants to give the exercitant the grace of transforming fear into courage: "Do not be afraid" (Matt 28:10); sorrow into great joy: "The disciples were overjoyed when they saw the Lord" (John 20:20); disbelief into strong faith: "He saw and believed" (John 20:8), "My Lord and my God!" (John 20:28); lack of hope into a burning heart: "Were not our hearts burning within us while he talked with us on the road and opened the Scriptures to us?" (Luke 24:32); despair into strong love: "Jesus said to her, 'Mary.' She turned toward him and cried out in Aramaic, 'Rabbuni!' (which means 'Teacher')" (John 20:16) (cf. Alonso 2016, 193–95). The exercitant in each contemplation of the fourth week of the *Exercises* asks for the grace of profound transformation: "to ask for the grace to be glad and rejoice intensely because of the great joy and the glory of Christ our Lord" (SE 221) (cf. Jiménez 2018, 395–98; Renau 2018, 391–94). The grace of transformation is given by the Risen Jesus, full of "glory and joy"¹⁷. In addition to contemplating the Risen One full of "glory and joy," the exercitant in each contemplation "considers the divinity, which seemed to hide itself during the passion, now appearing and manifesting itself so miraculously in the most holy Resurrection in its true and most sacred effects" (SE 223) (cf. Parra Mora 2011, 43–59). They also contemplate the Risen One as the Consoler: "considers the office of consoler that Christ our Lord exercises, and compare it with the way in which friends are wont to console each other" (SE 224) (Martínez Morales 2011, 3–17). By observing the Ignatian Additions, specific to that week of the *Exercises*, the exercitant receives graces from the Transforming One. One of them reads: "as soon as I awake, to place before my mind the contemplation I am to enter upon, and then to strive to feel joy and happiness at the great joy and happiness of Christ our Lord." (SE 229a) In the next one, St. Ignatius adds: "to call to mind and think on what causes pleasure, happiness, and spiritual joy, for instance, the glory of heaven." (SE 229b) The exercitant also receives the grace of transformation through the beauty of creation: "as far as there is reason to believe that it might help us to rejoice in our Creator and Redeemer, to make use of the light and the pleasures of the seasons, for example, in summer of the refreshing coolness, in the winter of the sun and fire" (SE 229c) (cf. Guillén 2017, 393–97; Mollá Llácer 2017, 399–402). At the stage of the fourth week of the *Spiritual Exercises*, therefore, the exercitant receives the grace

¹⁶ The aim of the first week of the *Exercises* is to "change distortion," the second to "apply change," the third to "confirm application" and the fourth to "transform confirmation." Cf. Ruiz Jurado 1998, 19.

¹⁷ In this request for the fruit of the fourth week of the *Exercises*, the emphasis is not so much on the joy and strong joy of the exercitant, but on its Cause, that is, "the great joy and the glory of Christ our Lord." (SE 221) Cf. Casanovas 1930, 97–103.

of a profound transformation, they accept the power of the Transforming One. Therefore, like St Paul, they say: “I no longer live, but Christ lives in me” (Gal 2:20).

The exercitant’s response to the transforming love of the Risen Christ is to share with others their new life in Christ, his great glory and joy (cf. *SE* 221), and to give joyful testimony to him. This is expressed, among other things, in moderation and just measure in all things (*SE* 229d). In imitating the Risen One as the Counselor, the exercitant wishes to exercise “the office of consoler.” (*SE* 224) He desires to be a gift to others both in the material dimension, of which St. Ignatius speaks in the “Rules for the distributions of alms” (cf. *SE* 337–44) (cf. Guillén 2007, 1550–53; Królikowski 2014b, 75–91), as well as in the spiritual dimension – cf. “Rules for thinking with the Church” (cf. *SE* 352–70) (cf. Corella 1996; Molina 2019, 395–98). Thus, the exercitant’s response at the stage of the fourth week of the *Spiritual Exercises* is to live the New Life, the Risen Jesus, and to bear witness to him even in the face of persecution. It was only after being transformed by the Risen One that the disciples not only did not fear persecution, but rejoiced in him and proclaimed his teaching: “The apostles left the Sanhedrin, rejoicing because they had been counted worthy of suffering disgrace for the Name. Day after day, in the temple courts and from house to house, they never stopped teaching and proclaiming the good news that Jesus is the Messiah” (Acts 5:41–42; cf. Phil 2:17–18).

4. The Process of Receiving God’s Love in All Things and Responding to It in “Contemplation to attain the love of God”

“Contemplation to attain the love of God,” (cf. *SE* 230–37) intended by St. Ignatius as the last exercise in the Ignatian Retreat, is the culmination and crowning achievement of the entire *Spiritual Exercises*.¹⁸ As already mentioned, it is in this contemplation that the dialectic of receiving God’s love and responding to it rings out most clearly. This dialectic is particularly manifest in the request for the fruits of this exercise: “to ask for an intimate knowledge of the many blessings received, that filled with gratitude for all, I may in all things love and serve the Divine Majesty.” (*SE* 233)¹⁹

4.1. To Receive God’s Love and Be Fully Imbued with Gratitude

In this contemplation, Saint Ignatius encourages “to ask for an intimate knowledge of the many blessings received.” (*SE* 233) The exercitant, imagining how they stand “in the presence of God our Lord and of His angels and saints,” (*SE* 232) who intercede

¹⁸ For an extensive analysis of this issue, see Królikowski 2003.

¹⁹ For an extensive bibliography on this contemplation, see Królikowski 2022b, 261–65.

for them, desires to inwardly know and receive God's love, expressed in the innumerable and infinitely great gifts of God. God loves us in events done out of love for us, since love "ought to manifest itself in deeds rather than in word." (SE 230; cf. John 14:21; 1 John 3:18)

At the first point of contemplation, therefore, the exercitant recalls "the blessings of creation and redemption, and the special favors I have received [...] pondering with great affection how much God our Lord has done for me, and how much He has given me of what He possesses, and finally, how much, as far as He can, the same Lord desires to give Himself to me according to His divine decrees" (SE 234) (cf. Kotlewski 2020, 18–25). According to the second point, the exercitant is "to reflect how God dwells in creatures: in the elements giving them existence, in the plants giving them life, in the animals conferring upon them sensation, in man bestowing understanding. So he dwells in me and gives me being, life, sensation, intelligence, and makes a temple of me, besides having created me in the likeness and image of the Divine Majesty" (SE 235) (cf. Lenartowicz 2008, 148–63). In the third point of contemplation, they consider "how God works and labors for me in all creatures upon the face of the earth, that is, He conducts Himself as one who labors. Thus, in the elements, the plants, the fruits, the cattle, etc., He gives being, conserves them, confers life and sensation, etc." (SE 236) (García-Rodríguez 1996, 47–60). And in the final fourth point, they look to "consider all blessings and gifts as descending from above. Thus, my limited power comes from the supreme and infinite power above, and so, too, my justice, goodness, mercy, etc., descend from above as the rays of light descend from the sun, and as the waters flow from their fountains, etc." (SE 237) (cf. Bracken 2013, 71–82; Lera Monreal 2017, 299–303).

The receiving of God's love in this contemplation is about all that comes from God and is about God himself, who gives himself to man "as much as He can." This makes it possible to be "entirely grateful." In no previous exercise of the Ignatian retreat does the word "entirely" appear with regard to descending Love. Here, as nowhere before in the *Spiritual Exercises*, the exercitant desires to be "entirely" imbued with love.

4.2. In All to Love and Serve His Divine Majesty

Since "love consists in a mutual sharing of goods," (SE 231) therefore the exercitant desires to "in all things love and serve the Divine Majesty." (SE 233) At every point in this contemplation, being "filled with gratitude for all" and desiring "in all things love and serve the Divine Majesty," (SE 233) they reflect: "I will reflect upon myself, and consider, according to all reason and justice, what I ought to offer the Divine Majesty, that is, all I possess and myself with it. Thus, as one would do who is moved by great feeling, I will make this offering of myself (SE 234). The exercitant is invited to give all of themselves, all their freedom, will, reason and all that they possess to God. They

expresses this in a prayer of total offering: “Take, Lord, and receive all my liberty, my memory, my understanding, and my entire will, all that I have and possess. Thou hast given all to me. To Thee, O Lord, I return it. Dispose of it wholly according to Thy will. Give me Thy love and Thy grace, for this is sufficient for me.” (SE 234)

In the “Contemplation to attain the love of God,” not only does the receiving of love take place “entirely,” but also the response to love concerns “everything.” For the exercitant asks God for grace so that they can “in all things love and serve the Divine Majesty.” (SE 233)

Conclusion

The analysis of the content of the Principle and Foundation, carried out through the prism of contemplation *Ad amorem*, i.e. in the dynamics of building a relationship between man and God, makes it possible to clearly conclude that in the successive stages of the *Spiritual Exercises*, the exercitant opens themselves more and more to God’s love.

At the Principle and Foundation stage, the exercitant receives from God a love expressed above all in his gifts existing in the order of creation. The response on man’s part to the love of the Creator thus shown is the right use of his creatures. At the stage of the first week of the *Exercises*, the exercitant accepts the love of the Savior, that is, the boundless love of the merciful God. The response is a strong resolve on the part of the exercitant not to depart from love at any cost, but to abide faithfully by it. At the stage of the second week of the *Exercises*, the exercitant additionally accepts the invitation of Jesus Christ to build up mutual friendly love. The exercitant’s response is to follow Jesus generously and magnanimously in order to imitate him as the poor, despised and humble one. In the third week of the *Spiritual Exercises*, the exercitant receives sacrificial love from the suffering Christ and responds with the same love. In the fourth week, on the other hand, they receive the transforming love given by the Risen Christ. The response to this love is to bear joyful witness to it, even in the midst of persecution. In the contemplation *Ad amorem*, the exercitant opens themselves “entirely” to the love of God, which enables them to “in all things love and serve the Divine Majesty.” (SE 233)

The mature love (*caritas discreta*), “entirely” and “in all things” present in the last exercise of the Ignatian retreat, grows out of the love of God experienced at the Principle and Foundation stage and develops in the following weeks of the *Spiritual Exercises*, like the trunk, branches, branches, leaves and fruit of a tree develop from its roots. This first exercise, as one can read in the official Directory of the *Spiritual Exercises*, is therefore the ethical and spiritual foundation (*basis totius aedificii moralis et spiritualis*) (Iparraguirre 1955, 643) of the entire *Spiritual Exercises*.

Saint Ignatius de Loyola, who lived during the Spanish Golden Age, proposed, alongside many saints in the Church, a method of spiritual development which he included in the *Spiritual Exercises*. According to this method, the exercitant, by meditating on the truths of God and contemplating the mysteries of the life of Jesus Christ, opens themselves ever more to the love of the Lord God. The value of the Ignatian method of spiritual development lies in the fact that the spiritual exercises, such as meditations, contemplations, examinations of conscience and spiritual discernment, are undertaken with the help of individual spiritual direction. Spiritual accompaniment helps the exercitant to objectivize their spiritual experiences that occur during the spiritual exercises being practiced. Thus, starting from the truths considered in the Principle and Foundation, through the following four weeks of the *Spiritual Exercises*, to the culminating “Contemplation to attain the love of God,” the exercitant goes through a journey of spiritual development. This does not mean, however, that the passing of the path according to the *Spiritual Exercises* closes their further path of spiritual development. Indeed, they can attend the Ignatian retreat again to continue the process of spiritual development. In this sense, Ignatian retreats are a permanent and up-to-date tool for deepening the relationship with God.

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