

All My Liberty

Chapter 13: Norms of Catholic Orthodoxy

Fr. John A. Hardon, S.J.

A superficial reading of the Rules for Thinking with the Church may leave us with the impression that they are only a set of commonplace norms for living a Catholic life or a kind of dispensable addition to the Exercises. In reality they are a classic summation of the Ignatian spirit and so important that without them a retreat will be only partially effective in orientating a soul in its relations to God.

The best tradition on the origins of the rules says they were written either at Paris or in Italy, perhaps fifteen years after the retreat at Manresa where the Exercises were first begun. Scholars have partly traced the Rules to a list of seven questions which Francis I, King of France, ordered in 1535 to serve as the basis for conferences between theologians at the University of Paris and German Protestant divines. The latter were asked, e.g., “Whether they are willing to confess that the Church militant founded by divine right, is unchangeable in faith and morals, and under our Lord Jesus Christ is headed by St. Peter and his successors down the centuries.” [1] However, no single document did any more than suggest the rules as they stand in the book of the Exercises. Their real cause was the Protestant Reformation, from whose errors Ignatius wished to spare the faithful sons of the Church and inspire them with an intelligent zeal for the conversion of those who had lost the true faith. According to their author, the Rules of Orthodoxy “should be observed to foster the true attitude of mind we ought to have in the Church Militant,” which, the earliest commentators explain, refers to all types of retreatants, but especially two classes of persons: those who live and work among non-Catholics, and those engaged in the active apostolate. In

modern times, this means practically everyone, priests, religious and the laity in every walk of life.

We gain some idea of the respect which these rules enjoy among Protestants from the latest edition of *Documents of the Christian Church* in the World’s Classics, which cover all the main writings of Catholics and heretics during the centuries. Along with passages from the Council of Trent, the Rules of Orthodoxy are quoted in full to illustrate the spirit of the “Counter Reformation of the Roman Church.”

I. The Church and Private Judgment

We must put aside all judgment of our own, and keep the mind ever ready and prompt to obey in all things the true Spouse of Christ our Lord, our holy Mother, the hierarchical Church.

In the first rule, St. Ignatius isolates the basic error of non-Catholic Christianity which claims that private judgment in doctrine and morals is according to the will of God. “You have been baptized and endowed with the true faith,” Luther told his followers, “therefore you are spiritual and able to judge of all things by the word of the Gospel, and you are not to be judged by any man. Say, “My faith is here a judge and may declare: This doctrine is true, but that is false and evil.” And the Pope and all his crew, nay, all men on earth must submit to that decision.” [2] It was against this pretension to autonomy that Ignatius strove so zealously, because better than most of his contemporaries he foresaw what a brood of evils this spirit of independence would generate in the western world.

Where the original Reformers were satisfied with proclaiming man’s freedom to interpret the Scriptures with no other guide than the Holy Spirit, their infidel disciples have since been emancipated even from a personal God. “If there

were a God.” Writes Bertrand Russell, “I think it very unlikely He would have such an uneasy vanity as to be offended by those who doubt His existence.”

As a sane alternative to this mad subjectivism, Ignatius offers the objectivity of the Catholic faith which cannot err because it is founded on the word of God. Assuming that his listeners are Catholic, he urges them to cultivate a disposition of soul which makes the will prompt and the mind prepared to obey whatever the Church prescribes. The will must acquire an instinctive desire to submit to the Church’s authority and the mind should ever be ready to nourish the will with necessary motivation. Two motives are proposed: because the Church is the Spouse of Christ and because she is our Holy Mother.

Christ loves His Spouse in her members with a special predilection. For her sake He became man and died on the cross to save her; to her He committed the deposit of revelation, the sacramental system and the treasury of His graces. At Pentecost He sent her His own Spirit, through which He continues to animate the Church’s body and sanctify her members. He has destined her to share in His heavenly kingdom for all eternity.

In return for this love of Christ, we who form the Church are to show our love for Him, as He said, by keeping His commandments. Our obedience to Him, therefore, should not be grounded on servile fear but on the deepest gratitude, and the greater demand this makes on our generosity, the better chance we have for proving our love for Him.

In keeping with patristic tradition, St. Ignatius appeals to the Church’s motherhood as another motive for perfect obedience. As the Spouse of Christ, she gave us birth at baptism, which the Fathers have called the Church’s womb. We are nourished on the food of her sacraments, protected by her laws and discipline, and instructed by her sacred doctrine. Our response

should be a filial devotion, manifested by obedience to the Mother who gave us supernatural life and who desires our good even when her precepts place a burden on our love.

Furthermore, the character of our obedience to the Church is determined by her nature, which is hierarchical, and therefore implies subordination on a graduated level that even her enemies have praised for its efficiency. The remarkable thing, however, is not the Church’s stratified authority but the fact that with God’s grace this stratification has been kept intact for almost twenty centuries. What should this mean to me as a Catholic? It assures me that because I have a certain position in the Church’s juridical structure; as layman or religious, priest or prelate, my obedience is not a vague submission to some undefined ecclesiocracy, but acceptance of the human agency placed above me as speaking with the voice of Christ. This requires no ordinary faith in God’s providence, to recognize His will in the directives of another person like myself and perhaps inferior to me in many ways, except in the one mysterious way that he is vested with divine authority.

II. Frequent Confession and Holy Communion

We should praise sacramental confession, the yearly reception of the most Blessed Sacrament, and praise more highly monthly reception, and still more weekly Communion, provided requisite and proper dispositions are present.

If we assume that frequentation of the sacraments is a safe index of Catholic piety, this rule in the Exercises has contributed more than any other element in Ignatian spirituality to the upbuilding of the Church in modern times. The most authoritative witness for this judgment is Benedict XIV, who declared that “the universal Church owes especially to St. Ignatius and the Society founded by him the propagation of the

practice of frequent confession and Holy Communion.” [3]

By the middle of the sixteenth century, the sacraments were being received with notorious infrequency. In spite of the severe threat of excommunication and deprivation of Christian burial passed by the Lateran Council in 1215, many Catholics did not make their Easter duty. At least one contemporary, St. Robert Bellarmine, felt this was the principal cause of the Protestant Revolt, that so many people stayed away from the sacraments. Consequently, “the unique and infallible way of reforming the Church of Christ would be to induce every Catholic to receive the Eucharist once a month or, better, once a week. With frequent Communion would come frequent confession, and with these two weapons there is no evil so inveterate it could not be overcome.”

[4] Bellarmine was only echoing the teaching of the Spiritual Exercises.

Present-day teaching on the frequency and dispositions for Holy Communion was crystallized in 1905 by the legislation of St. Pius X. His decree *Sacra Tridentina Synodus* settled many questions which had vexed theologians since the Middle Ages and thus inaugurated what Pius XII has called “the modern Eucharistic renaissance.”

1. In the very title of the decree, “On daily reception,” he answered the question of what exactly frequent Communion means. Arguing from the analogy of food used by Christ Himself, and “the almost unanimous interpretation” of the Fathers that “daily bread” in the Lord’s Prayer means daily Communion, Pius X concluded that “the Eucharistic Bread ought to be our daily food.” [5]
2. But granted that daily Communion is permissible, is it commendable to all classes, priests and religious, lay people and children? Unequivocally, “the desire

of Jesus Christ and the Church is that all the faithful should daily approach the sacred banquet.” [6] This was directly contrary to the Jansenist rigorism which excluded most people from the holy table, “except once a week, or once a month, or once a year.” Although implicit in the decree of 1905, frequent Communion for children had to be expressly promulgated in subsequent decrees: twice in 1906 to urge “frequent reception even for children,” and in 1910 to require their admission to First Communion “as soon as they begin to have a certain use of reason.” [7]

3. The vital question of necessary dispositions was answered by the Pope when he decided in favor of the minority school of theologians who required only the state of grace and a right intention. He explained that “a right intention consists in this: that he who approaches the holy table should do so, not out of routine or vainglory or human respect, but for the purpose of pleasing God, of being more closely united with Him by charity, and of seeking this divine remedy for his weaknesses and defects.” [8] When it is remembered that moralists for centuries had required other conditions, such as absence of habitual venial sin, Pius X’s decree stands out as a monument of generosity to the Catholic world.
4. Underlying the practical norms of the decree is a dogmatic principle which involves the nature and purpose of the Eucharist as a sacrament of the New Law. In the sixteenth century, the Reformers had so emphasized the remedial function of the Eucharist that the Council of Trent condemned “anyone who says that the principal fruit of the Most Holy Eucharist is the remission of sins.” [9] A century later and into modern times the Jansenists went to the other extreme. So far from

considering the Eucharist remedial, they considered it only remunerative. The subtitle of the Jansenist classic on frequent Communion was *Sancta Sanctis*, meaning that no one but persons of high sanctity should receive the Eucharist, as a reward for their practice of virtue. St. Pius followed the Church's tradition in avoiding both extremes and at the same time clarified the Catholic position on what the Protestants had exaggerated and the Jansenists practically denied, namely, that the Eucharist is an extension of the redemptive work of Christ. "The desire of Jesus Christ and the Church that all the faithful should daily approach the sacred banquet is directed chiefly to this end, that the faithful, being united to God by means of this sacrament, may thence derive strength to resist their sensual passions, to cleanse themselves from the stains of daily faults, and to avoid those graver sins to which human frailty is liable." [10]

Frequent confession in the sense of confessing only venial sins has been practiced from earliest times. But like Holy Communion, the custom fell into abeyance until resuscitated by the Council of Trent. St. Ignatius was something of an innovator on this score, by urging weekly confession even for the laity and prescribing for priest members of his order confession *ad minimum* once a week.

The mind of the Church on frequent confession was authoritatively declared by Pope Pius XII in his encyclical on the Mystical Body, where he rebuked "the opinions of those who assert that little importance should be given to frequent confession of venial sins." He admits that venial faults can be remitted in other ways, but confessing them sacramentally we produce a variety of spiritual effects. "Genuine self-knowledge is increased, Christian humility grows, bad habits are corrected; spiritual neglect and tepidity are resisted, the conscience is

purified, the will strengthened, a salutary self-control is attained and grace increased in virtue of the sacrament itself." [11] It should be noted that both in this encyclical and later when writing on the Sacred Liturgy, the pope branded as "completely foreign to the spirit of Christ and His Immaculate Spouse, and most dangerous to the spiritual life," any disparagement of frequent confession – which emphasizes the enduring value of St. Ignatius' regulation in the Spiritual Exercises.

III. Liturgical and Vocal Prayer

We ought to praise the frequent hearing of Mass, the singing of hymns, psalmody, and long prayers whether in the church or outside; likewise the hours at fixed times for the whole Divine Office, for every kind of prayer, and for the canonical hours.

If ever the Spiritual Exercises are accused of being unliturgical, this rule gives the answer. Every phase of the liturgical life is encouraged by St. Ignatius, and should be so impressed upon the retreatants: the hearing of Mass, the recitation or chanting of the Divine Office, the singing of hymns, the offering of prayers at stated times and for specific ends. Ignatius' own devotion to the Holy Sacrifice was so great that he spent a full year in preparing to ascend the altar for the first time. "After his ordination," according to one who knew him intimately, "he hardly began to recite the canonical hours when he met with a serious difficulty. Spiritual consolation, interior feelings and tears flowed in upon him. It took him nearly a day to finish, and he wore himself out in the task. He could not be helped." Before the end of his life the trial became so heavy that the pope was asked to commute his recitation of the Office to a certain number of Paters and Aves. "But even so, the vehemence of his grace and the Spirit often threw him into an ecstasy." [12]

The original reason for recommending the liturgy in the Exercises was to neutralize the hatred of the sectarians for Catholic worship and external piety. Luther described the Mass as “a sacrilegious abuse,” and the Office as “a confused sea of babbling and howling.” Calvin denounced adoration of the Eucharist as idolatry, for which every popish priest deserved to be hanged. In our day, when the liturgical movement has developed to a degree unknown since the Reformation, the Ignatian attitude towards the liturgy has an ascetical value that may not be apparent. The public worship of God is not only recommended but considered essential to the spirit of Catholicism, and any de-emphasis of the liturgy savors of heresy. But, as Pius XII pointed out, the accent in the liturgical revival should be placed where it rightly belongs, within the minds and hearts of the faithful and not in external ceremonies. “The chief element of divine worship,” he cautioned, “must be interior. For we must always live in Christ and give ourselves to Him completely, so that in Him, with Him, and through Him the heavenly Father may be duly glorified.” [13]

Thus prudently balanced, the constant stress of the Exercises on personal holiness becomes perfectly, even necessarily, consonant with liturgical piety. Whether the liturgy is equated with Eucharistic worship, centered on the Mass and the Office in choir, or extended to every form of public devotion to God and the saints, the source of its efficacy, on man’s side, remains the internal disposition with which the liturgy is performed. Even where grace is given *ex opere operato*, as in the sacraments, a certain minimal condition of soul must be present to make the sacraments fruitful, and their fruitfulness increases as the recipient is more detached from creatures and better disposed to do the will of God, which according to St. Ignatius is the whole purpose of the Spiritual Exercises.

IV-V. The Counsels and Works of Supererogation

We must highly praise religious life, virginity, and continency; and matrimony ought not to be praised as much as any of these.

We should praise the vows of religion, obedience, poverty and chastity, and vows to perform other works of supererogation conducive to perfection. However, it must be remembered that a vow deals with matters that lead us closer to evangelical perfection. Hence, whatever tends to withdraw one from perfection may not be made the object of a vow, for example, a business career or the married state.

One of the surest signs of the heretical spirit against which Ignatius wrote the fourth and fifth rules is the denial of spiritual perfection as a lawful ambition of the Christian life. A contemporary statement of Protestant doctrine, the Anglican Articles of Religion, stated that “Voluntary works besides, over and above, God’s commandments, which they call works of supererogation, cannot be taught without arrogance and impiety. For by them men do declare that they not only render unto God as much as they are bound to do, but that they do more for his sake, than of bounden duty is required: whereas Christ said plainly, ‘When you have done all that is commanded to you, say, We are unprofitable servants.’” [14] This follows from the Protestant notion of man’s nature as wholly corrupted by the fall and consequently incapable of contributing anything of its own even to rising from sinfulness, let alone performing acts of generosity beyond what is strictly mandatory.

If the Christian counsels and particularly virginity had to be vindicated in the sixteenth century, they must also be defended and promoted today. Although the excellence of virginity and celibacy, and their superiority over

the married state were defined by the Council of Trent, “recent attacks on this traditional doctrine” prompted Pius XII to write an encyclical on the subject which might serve as a commentary on the two Rules we are considering.

1. It is against common sense, the faithful are told, to consider the sexual instinct as the most important and deepest of human desires, and to conclude from this that a person cannot restrain his passions for a life-time without injury to his nervous system or “the harmony of his personality.”
2. Equally erroneous is the opinion that the sacrament of marriage, which gives grace *ex operato*, is a better instrument than virginity for uniting souls with God. If this were true, how could St. Paul recommend periodic abstinence as an aid to better prayer?
3. As a practical corollary to the preceding, those are to be censured “who strive to turn young people away from the Seminary or Religious Orders and Institutes and from the taking of sacred vows, persuading them that they can, if joined in marriage, as fathers and mothers of families pursue a greater spiritual good by an open and public profession of the Christian life.” [15]

There is a natural tie-up between these two rules and the retreat Election. Among the principal subjects for the Election is the choice of a state of life and its improvement, to be made with the fullness of generosity in imitation of Jesus Christ. If the retreatant has not yet made a choice it is essential to a good retreat that he consider the life of virginity – in the priesthood, the religious life or the world – as a possible vocation to which God may be calling him. If the retreatant is a priest or religious (or destined to perpetual celibacy), the Election may take the

form of remotivation to strengthen him against future temptations and develop his evangelical chastity. If he is in the married state, he should at least be urged to practice that self-restraint without which, as the national divorce rate is proving, men and women scarcely remain faithful to the obligations of their conjugal life.

VI-VIII. Relics and Images, Saints and Indulgences

We should show our esteem for the relics of the saints by venerating them and praying to the saints. We should praise visits to the Station Churches, pilgrimages, indulgences, jubilees, crusade indulgences, the lighting of candles in churches.

We ought to praise not only the building and adornment of churches, but also images and veneration of them according to the subject they represent.

The non-Catholic mind has not greatly changed since the time of St. Ignatius in its attitude towards the veneration of saints and the use of images and relics to foster piety. According to one highly-placed critic, “the veneration of images and the relics of saints is a practice which above most others is odious and absurd to the Protestant mind,” which assumes that “images and relics are employed not as aids to devotion but as a channel, if not actually a fountain, of miraculous power.” [16]

Catholic doctrine on the veneration of the saints, their relics and images, was solemnly defined by the Council of Trent. For our purpose, one statement of the Council has special bearing on the asceticism of the Spiritual Exercises. Among the reasons why saints should be venerated is the fact that through them “salutary examples are put before the eyes of the faithful, so that they fashion their lives and actions in imitation of the saints.” [17] In other words, it is intrinsic to Catholic piety to strive after holiness not only by

imitating Jesus Christ but also by following the saints whom the Church infallibly declares to have been the best imitators of their divine Master.

Spiritual heredity among the saints is a commonplace in Christian hagiography. When St. Paul told the Corinthians to be followers of him as he was of Christ, he intimated a principle that lies deep in the psychology of sanctity. Ignatius himself was converted by reflecting on the heroism of Saints Dominic and Francis of Assisi, and on more than one occasion in the Exercises he offers the virtues of the saints, especially the Blessed Virgin, for our imitation.

Our relation to the saints, therefore, is at least twofold: to beg their intercession for us before the throne of God, and to venerate them by imitating their imitation of Christ. Without suggesting which of the two functions, intercessory or exemplary, is more important, it seems the first has been taken for granted and the second frequently overlooked. Yet it is of capital importance as a guidepost on the road to sanctification. The saints were mere creatures like ourselves. Their virtues were perfections of a human spirit whose actions, even the most heroic, were not essentially different than our own. They drew their motive power and inspiration from the person of Christ, giving us an example of how to follow His example and proving by experience how sanctifying this imitation can be. They lived in times and circumstances that reflect our own, and suffered temptation not only from the devil and the world, but also (except Mary) from the flesh and their fallen nature. We see them as our companions in tribulations, whose lives are at once a mirror of the sanctity of Christ and a picture of our own peculiar trials. What we share in common with them is a finite personality striving for perfection; what we admire and try to emulate is their transformation “through the power and grace of Jesus Christ.”

Not unlike the worship of saints, indulgences played a dominant role in the Protestant revolt, if only because most of Luther’s ninety-five theses of opposition to Rome dealt with this subject. Perhaps in modern times indulgences do not enjoy the dogmatic reputation they had in the sixteenth century, but they are still ascetically important and, in the spirit of the Exercises, should not be overlooked. Preparing for confession, the retreatant is told to examine what actions he may have committed against “things approved by Superiors,” notably “indulgences, like those granted for confessions and Communion offered to obtain peace.” A judicious stress on the gaining of indulgences will set in relief the profound difference between Catholic and non-Catholic Christianity. When Luther was condemned for teaching that “the treasures of the Church, from which the Pope grants indulgences are not the merits of Christ and the saints,” the underlying error was not regarding the character of indulgences but the nature of the Catholic Church. The ultimate reason why the Church can confer indulgences derives from her character as more than a human society, however conceived, being the Mystical Body of Christ which incorporates His own divine Spirit and of which the Son of God is the Head.

VII. Fasting, Abstinence and Exterior Penances

We must praise the regulations of the Church with regard to fast and abstinence, for example, in Lent, on Ember Days, Vigils, Fridays and Saturdays. We should praise all works of penance, not only those that are interior but also those that are exterior.

About the same year that St. Ignatius wrote the Rules of Orthodoxy (1536), John Calvin published his *Institutes of the Christian Religion*, where he decried “the superstitious observance of Lent which priests recommend as a holy imitation of Christ, whereas it is plain that

Christ did not fast in order to set an example to others.” [18] The general attitude of the Reformers is succinctly described by Melancthon in the Confession of Augsburg, where he dismissed external penances as “childish and useless activity.”

The Catholic Church has never taught that Christ was a penitent in His own right, expiating His own sins, which would be blasphemy. But since apostolic times she has urged the faithful to imitate Christ in salutary acceptance (and infliction) of pain, as a powerful instrument for moving the divine mercy. Elsewhere in the Exercises, St. Ignatius gives three reasons why external penances are chiefly used: first to satisfy for past sins; secondly, in order to overcome oneself, i.e., subject the senses and all that is inferior to the superior forces of the soul; and thirdly to obtain some special grace from God, like a deeper sorrow for sin or the solution of a doubt or difficult problem.

The satisfaction for past sins flows as a clear duty from the dogmatic teaching of the Church that when a person sins mortally he contracts two obligations before God: the stain of culpability or guilt, for turning away from the Creator, and a debt of eternal punishment, for turning instead to a creature. When the sin is forgiven by salutary contrition, the stain of guilt and eternal punishment are taken away, but temporal punishment may still remain. Venial sins, too, may be forgiven without all the punishment they deserve being simultaneously removed. Hence the need for penance to remit the temporal penalty which remains, and which the practice of so many penitent saints leads us to believe may be considerable. “Since it is impossible for sin to go unpunished,” says St. Augustine, “let it be punished by you lest it be punished by Him.” [19]

Even non-Christians recognize the value of voluntary mortification to gain self-mastery and modern psychology confirms the Church’s traditional doctrine. At least in the beginning,

bodily mortification acts as a sort of depressor which tends to subdue by under-stimulation the more assertive emotions of the soul, something like dark hangings help to create an atmosphere of passivity and gloom. Frequent experiments indicate that a strong incentive for doing an unpleasant task is the reflection, “I have been able to do this before.” Finally a general readiness to bear suffering and pain can become habitual from the practice of mortification. By the repetition of penitential acts, the body and spirit can, within limits, become inured to the privation inherent in the faithful following of Christ, especially by a judicious emphasis on that type of mortification which best equips a person for meeting difficult situations in the future.

The utility of penance as a type of petition for grace rests on the teaching of Christ, who declared that some kinds of demon are not driven out except by prayer and mortification. Its doctrinal basis is a combination of two familiar Christian truths: that prayer is the ordinary method for obtaining divine grace, and that the merit of our actions largely depends on the degree of their voluntariness. Since prayer may be either explicit as in formal petition, or implicit, as in every sacrifice, acts of mortification are implicit petitions for divine assistance addressed to the throne of God. Correspondingly, since attention and will energy are normally heightened in the more difficult actions of life, voluntary penance can increase the merit of ordinary prayer by making it more attentive and willful, and therefore adds to the efficacy of our prayer when joined to mortification.

IX. Obedience of the Intellect

We must praise all the commandments of the Church, and be on the alert to find reasons for defending but never for criticizing them.

It is not surprising that St. Ignatius should wish to transmit through the Exercises the same spirit of obedience to the Church that characterized the Constitutions of the religious order which he

founded. What he wrote in the classic Letter on Obedience, that “whoever aims at making an entire and perfect oblation of himself, besides his will, must offer his understanding, which is the highest degree of obedience,” applies with equal cogency outside the cloister and, in fact, comprehends the present rule.

There are three degrees of obedience, according to St. Ignatius. The first and lowest is the obedience of execution which carries a command into external effect, but without internal submission of the intellect and will. This, says Ignatius, scarcely merits the name of obedience. The second degree, or obedience of the will, is praiseworthy and highly meritorious because it involves the sacrifice of human freedom for the love of God. At the highest level stands obedience of the intellect which is possible because, except in the face of intrinsic evidence to the contrary, the will for its own motives can bend the understanding; it is reasonable because nothing could be more intelligent than submission of our minds to infinite wisdom; it is necessary to insure proper subordination in a hierarchical society and protect the subject from internal conflict; and it is perfect because it immolates our noblest faculty and thereby renders the greatest glory to the divine majesty.

Retreatants generally need to be told that the degrees of perfection in evangelical obedience are equally valid in the ecclesiastical obedience for the Rules of Orthodoxy. Just as a religious in obedience to his institute can be satisfied with external observance, or can rise to conformity of his will and intellect with the Superior, so a Catholic of whatever rank may adopt the same three attitudes regarding the commandments of the Church. And if he rises to the degree of intellectual submission, his obedience has reached its highest perfection, within the ambit of divine precept as distinct from the evangelical counsels.

When St. Ignatius urges obedience to the precepts of the Church, he recommends this third

degree, which requires a conformity of the whole man with the dictates of authority: of his body for external execution, his will for internal submission and his mind for perfect consent. The function of the mind “is to find reasons to defend” the Church’s commandments against an unruly tendency to disobedience partly occasioned by the nature of the Christian religion, and partly determined by the character of the precept and the attitude of the person affected.

Sometimes we overlook the fact that Christianity is founded on the truths of revelation which demand our belief in the word of God. This holds quite as much for truths that are naturally knowable as for strict mysteries, and as much for doctrines that are simply to be believed as for commandments that are also to be obeyed. Since, therefore, faith is essentially obscure, i.e., accepted on divine authority and not because intrinsically evident, its very nature places a burden on the intellect that needs to be recognized and properly handled. For example, the Church tells me to assist at Mass on Sunday under penalty of mortal sin. The human mind, no matter how intelligent, will never see on purely rational grounds why the Sunday precept should be so grave or even why hearing Mass is important. Apart from revelation, a man has no motive for going to Mass on Sunday and he will naturally rebel against the imposition unless he has faith and acts on the reasons that faith proposes for submitting to the obligation. The fundamental reason is the Church’s divine mission, given to her by Christ, to establish laws and prescribe their observance under pain of sin. Corollary motives are the dignity of the Mass and the necessity of grace, with all their implications. These and similar reasons must be accepted on faith, and when need arises, invoked in order to obey the Sunday precept intelligently. The same applies to all the commandments of the Church, and not only the universal precepts but every command, even personal, made by valid ecclesiastical authority.

There is another aspect to the obedience of the intellect. Besides the essential need for finding reasons to defend the Church's commandments, as explained, other needs may also arise. It may happen that a command seems unreasonable on the score of inefficiency, ineptitude, or any one of a dozen natural causes. Assuming that due representation has been made and there is no suspicion of sin if the order is carried out, the obedient man in the Ignatian sense will look for reasons to support the precept or regulation and instinctively avoid any mental criticism. The ground for this attitude is again a matter of faith. From a natural standpoint the order may be a poor decision and scarcely suited to achieve the purpose intended, but supernaturally I know that my obedience can never be fruitless. When the apostles cast their nets into the water at the bidding of Christ, they were obedient, as Peter said, only to the word of the Master; and the miraculous draught which followed symbolizes this higher than ordinary providence, which disposes all things surely to their appointed end as foreseen and directed by God and beyond the calculations of men. There is no question here of conceiving a *deus ex machina* or relying on miracles, while admitting their possibility. It is rather a firm belief that my submission to the divine will has a guarantee of success that I can always hope for from the One whom I ultimately obey, because it involves the prevision of a myriad hidden forces, which He infallibly foresees, and their infinite combinations, which He infallibly designs.

Or again, the difficulty with obeying ecclesiastical authority may be a persuasion that the commandment is too hard for me. Marital obligations interpreted by the Church are examples of this difficulty. To meet it effectively over a period of years and in spite of a hostile atmosphere requires courage of a high order, which in turn requires cultivation of the mental attitude prescribed in the Rules of Orthodoxy. Feelings of inadequacy, poor health, the memory of past failures, the dread of being estranged or humiliated, and the fear of all sorts of

possibilities, real or imaginary, will conspire to make a precept of obedience seem like a piece of tyranny unless the mind uses a heavy counterpoise to maintain a balanced judgment. The counterpoise, which comes from the deposit of faith, is a settled conviction that "God does not command the impossible. But when He commands, He warns you to do what you can, and also to pray for what you cannot do, and He helps you so that you can do it. For His commandments are not burdensome; His yoke is easy and His burden light." [20] This conviction is indispensable. Unless nourished and developed, even the gravest obligations of the Catholic religion will be disobeyed and their gravity obscured by the pressure of the emotions on the mind. Moreover, as Ignatius recommends, we should do more than defend the Church's laws against the objections of our lower nature, we must avoid criticizing them, not only to others but especially to ourselves.

Psychologically this can be a talisman for protecting our obedience and raising it to a high degree of excellence. As objections arise, the will stands on the alert to order the mind to reject them, not dally with them and above all not to put them into action. In order to do this rationally, the will must be properly motivated and can draw its motives from the whole gamut of reason and revelation. Peace of mind, personal integrity, an effective apostolate, trust in God—in fact anything which answers the need of the moment—can be used. The important thing is to use it and to know that human nature is so vacillating that any mood or stream of thought, no matter how oppressive, will pass away if it is not encouraged but resisted to the best of our ability.

X. Respect for Obedience Under Trial

We should be more ready to approve and praise the orders, recommendations, and way of acting of our superiors than to find fault with them. Though some of the orders, etc., may not have

been praiseworthy, yet to speak against them, either when preaching in public or in speaking before the people, would rather be the cause of murmuring and scandal than of profit. As a consequence, the people would become angry with their superiors, whether secular or spiritual. But while it does harm in the absence of our superiors to speak evil of them before the people, it may be profitable to discuss their bad conduct with those who can apply a remedy.

“This was the special gift of God to St. Ignatius,” according to Pius XI, “to lead men back to the practice of the virtue of obedience.” [21] The order which he founded was to be so dedicated to this virtue that a special vow of obedience to the pope was to be added to the three substantial ones of evangelical perfection. All through life, in formal directives and in letters of spiritual counsel, it was obedience that Ignatius emphasized. In this respect the Exercises are no exception, starting from the examination of conscience before the general confession and ending with the Rules for Thinking with the Church.

The striking feature of the rule we are considering is not its insistence on the value of obedience, which may be assumed, but that it boldly deals with the delicate question of how to act when superiors or their directives are apparently out of order. No other passage in the Exercises was more carefully weighed and qualified than the present rule which, in the author’s opinion, is one of the most realistic statements of St. Ignatius.

All kinds of superiors are included, “temporal as well as spiritual”; consequently everyone who has authority in the Church or civil society, from the pope or head of the national government to the lowest constabulary members. Also every possible source of criticism is visualized. It may be a law or regulation, a recommendation or simple counsel, the personal habits or conduct of an official or superior, either at present or in the past. Regardless of the source or the person

concerned, the guiding principle should be a readiness to approve and praise rather than blame, and this will determine the course to be followed when anything censurable is found in those in authority.

Superiors are not to be criticized in public, whether in formal discourse or conversation with ordinary people, because this will give rise to scandal and complaints, without correcting the evil criticized. Common experience proves this fact, of which the Protestant Revolt is a tragic example. Thousands of simple people who had no special grievance against the pope and the bishops were whipped to a frenzy of hatred for the Church’s authority by the fulmination of the Reformers. No matter how valid the complaint may be, there is no wisdom in exposing the evil before an emotional public which, at least in the Church’s juridical structure, cannot apply an effective cure. If anything, the correction may be delayed or prevented altogether after men’s feelings are aroused and demands are made for radical changes dictated by passion instead of prudence and considerate reason.

Right judgment suggests and circumstances may even oblige the exposure of maladministration or defects of character in persons of authority. But if the end in view is to correct an objective evil, the criticism will not be made indiscriminately, but only to those who can effect a suitable remedy. When civil authorities in a democratic society are concerned, this may require public censure before the people, but even then within the limits of justice and right order, with the intention to promote a common good and not simply to make news or discredit a hostile political party.

This “readiness to approve” the dictates and person of authority is the keystone of the Church’s social stability. It anticipates two factors that are inseparable from any human society, not excluding the Mystical Body on its human side. Where men are in authority there will be weakness and mistakes, from which

Christ did not fully exempt His Church except on the highest level, where the universal interests of salvation are concerned. Unless the faithful had this antecedent readiness to approve the policy and conduct of their ecclesiastical superiors, the natural tendency to criticism and independent judgment would dominate, and obedience would become difficult if not impossible. Finally, an element seldom considered in church and state discussions is the contribution which the true Catholic spirit makes to the peace and prosperity of civil society. It teaches the faithful to praise the laws of the state and the person of secular rulers, and abstain from any criticism, however provoked, that destroys the respect for public authority. So intrinsic to her doctrine is the Church's belief that "all authority is from God," that this fact alone should commend her to the state as a most faithful ally, whose allegiance is a matter of principle accepted on the word of God.

XI. Positive and Scholastic Theology

We should praise both positive theology and that of the Scholastics.

It is characteristic of the positive doctors, such as St. Augustine, St. Jerome, St. Gregory, and others, to rouse the affections so that we are moved to love and serve God our Lord in all things.

On the other hand, it is more characteristic of the scholastic doctors, such as St. Thomas, St. Bonaventure, the Master of the Sentences, and others, to define and state clearly, according to the needs of our times, the doctrines that are necessary for eternal salvation, and that help to refute and expose more efficaciously all errors and fallacies.

Further, just because scholastic doctors belong to more recent times, they not only have the advantage of correct understanding of Holy Scripture and of the teaching of the saints and

positive doctors, but, enlightened by the race of God, they also make use of the decisions of the Councils and of the definitions and decrees of our holy Mother Church.

Any question why the Exercises should include a rule on theological method is answered by a glance at the history of the Reformation. In order to be freed from the Church's authority, the Reformers discarded the teachings of tradition and canonized the Bible as the only norm of faith. Their bibliolatry led them to discredit first the Fathers of the Church and then her scholastic Doctors, whose unanimous testimony to the Roman Primacy was a refutation of Protestant autonomy. When Luther brazenly declared that "Jerome should not be numbered among the teachers of the Church because he was a heretic," or "St. Augustine and St. Ambrose cannot be compared with me," he was perfectly in character. [22] Yet if it suited his fancy, he appealed to patristic authority against the teachings of the Church, as when he rejected part of the Old Testament on the strength of a private opinion of St. Jerome. But there was no compromise with scholastic teachers like Thomas Aquinas, whose clear explanation of Catholic doctrine was a constant irritant to the Reformers.

However, the present Rule of Orthodoxy has more than historical interest. Its accent on scholastic theology expresses a permanent need for preserving the Church's dogmatic integrity against heretical opposition and, no less, against the tendency to uncontrolled speculation among her own members. At the turn of the century, St. Pius X condemned as "Modernists, those who exalt positive theology in such a way as to despise the scholastic." [23] And more recently, Pius XII complained that some Catholic lovers of novelty "easily pass from disdain of scholastic theology to neglect or even despise the Magisterium of the Church." [24]

The relevance of this attitude to priest and seminary retreatants need scarcely be elaborated.

Through the Exercises they can be helped to arrive at a balanced appreciation of both positive and scholastic theology. If the second is exaggerated at the expense of the first, priests and teachers may be able to refute heretics and know the theological value of a thesis but not be ready “to stir up the affections to the love and service of God.” Which is indispensable in the ministry. On the other hand, and with Ignatian emphasis, if positive theology overshadows the scholastic, those who are to guide and instruct others will not have the scientific hold on revelation required “to explain for our times what is necessary for salvation, and to expose all errors and fallacies.” Whatever need there was for scholastic theology in Ignatius’ day, it is greater than ever today when the educational level of the faithful (and of the world in which they live) has reached an all-time high, and consequently calls for a deep and intelligent grasp of the faith.

XII. Prudence in Evaluating Sanctity

We must be on our guard against making comparisons between those who are still living and the saints who have gone before us. For no small error is committed if we say, “This man is wiser than St. Augustine. He is another St. Francis or even greater. He is equal to St. Paul in goodness and sanctity.”

The historical occasion for this rule seems to have been the number of false mystics and dubious saints that plagued the Church in the sixteenth century, so that Ignatius himself was imprisoned for a while on suspicion of being one of the *alumbrados*. The danger against which he cautions is deception due to hasty judgment in favor of a living person’s sanctity or reputed mystical experiences. If there is less of a problem today, it is only a matter of degree. A recent statement of the Assessor of the Holy Office warns against the current wave of pseudo-revelations in Catholic circles and cautions

priests especially about the danger to souls unless their natural credulity is properly restrained. [25]

As a general norm which underlies St. Ignatius’ rule, we should regularly prefer the virtue of canonized saints to that of living persons, no matter how great their reputation for sanctity. Unless they were martyrs, saints would not have been canonized unless they had practiced heroic virtue. And, in fact, one of the main reasons why they are raised to the honors of the altar is precisely to serve as models for our imitation. The long years of scrutiny into their writings and conduct, plus the Church’s assistance from the Holy Spirit, give us an assurance of holiness that no living person can duplicate with equal certainty. Not the least benefit of a retreat, therefore, is to acquire a better appreciation of spiritual reading, with concentration on the lives and writings of the saints.

Therefore, the normal attitude to adopt towards contemporary revelations and mystical phenomena should be one of great reserve. Within less than a decade, the hierarchy of at least six countries (Italy, France, Belgium, Germany, the Philippines and the United States) had publicly to censure the unauthorized popular approval of reported supernatural communications. In spite of the canonical prohibition against “books and pamphlets which treat of new apparitions, revelations, visions, prophecies and miracles” (Canon 1399), there is no lack of such publications readily available to Catholics, who need to be reminded of the Church’s legislation and impressed with the harm that a single brochure of this kind can cause. On the practical side, in line with spiritual reading, the writings of genuine mystics like Teresa of Avila and John of the Cross, and accounts of authentic revelations and miracles like Lourdes and Fatima, should be recommended. Very often people indulge in useless or harmful reading in this area because they have not been introduced to the treasury of

mysticism which the Church has approved and which offers one of her main titles to sanctity.

XIII. Perfect Submission to the Church's Magisterium

If we wish to proceed securely in all things, we must hold fast to the following principle: What seems to me white, I will believe black if the hierarchical Church so defines. For I must be convinced that in Christ our Lord, the bridegroom, and in His spouse the Church, only one Spirit holds sway, which governs and rules for the salvation of souls. For it is by the same Spirit and Lord who gave the Ten Commandments that our holy Mother Church is ruled and governed.

Probably no statement of the Exercises has been more quoted and criticized by non-Catholics than St. Ignatius' directive that "What seems to me white, I will believe black if the hierarchical Church so defines it." Even Catholics may suspect something strange in being asked to contradict their convictions. Yet there are few mental attitudes that need to be more urgently cultivated than the willingness to submit our private judgment to the infallible teaching of the Church.

The difficulty arises from a misconception of the nature of faith, which is an intellectual assent to revealed truth, made with the assistance of supernatural grace and under the influence of the will; as against the Protestant Reformers who claimed that faith was an act of the will, wherein I trust that God's mercy has covered over, without actually deleting, my mind with objective truth is dispensable, and even in its absence I may be said to believe as long as I vaguely trust in the goodness of a God about whose nature and relations to me I may be in doubt. There can be no white or black, i.e., true or false, under this notion of faith, and the variety of sectarian opinions on such fundamentals as the Trinity and Incarnation

followed logically on the denial of the intellectuality of faith and reducing it to an operation of the will or the blind instinct of religious feeling.

However, the present rule also pertains to Catholics who consider faith an act of the mind, on which the edifice of all other virtue depends. While knowing this and perhaps because of this knowledge, they may not appreciate the function of the will in placing an act of faith and consequently fail to use this power as they ought, especially when some teaching of the Church seems to contradict their own judgment. For the laity, a truth like the sinfulness of divorce with remarriage is a good example. Married people can be so involved under various emotional pressures as to convince themselves that divorce and "trying again" are perfectly all right. Then arises a familiar clash of judgments, personal and ecclesiastical. To me divorce may seem white, but the Church says it is black, so I submit my intellect. But is this possible? Yes, for two reasons. First, because in the instance divorce seems to me to be white and therefore I do not know it is white with the same assurance that I exist or that two and two are equal to four. Secondly and more pertinently, since faith means the acceptance of God's word that something is true, my will can command the intellect to believe—indeed it must—without any violence to my rationality. In secular affairs most of our daily actions are directed by this kind of creedal knowledge, where the free will orders the mind to believe, on the word of other people who are just as fallible as myself. "If we receive the testimony of men," says St. John, "the testimony of God is greater," and therefore to be followed, my own judgment to the contrary notwithstanding.

But granted that my will should command the intellect to believe, how can I do this when, in a crisis, all my emotions are against some doctrinal position of the Church? The method is not despotic but diplomatic, and demands conscious remotivation of the will by concentrating

attention on a great benefit to be gained or a terrible evil avoided in order to have the imperative faculty command a reluctant intellect to assent. Quietly but deliberately I recall the advantages of submitting to the Church's magisterial authority—peace of mind, the consolation of receiving the sacraments, the promise of special assistance from God, the security of my salvation; likewise the harm that will follow if I do not believe—the torment of conscience, deprivation of sacramental graces, loss of merit and the friendship of God and the risk of losing my soul. Braced by the supernatural help which is never wanting, my will becomes disposed to enjoin the mind to believe, moved ultimately by the conviction that the same Spirit which governs the world and its destiny also animates the Catholic Church and her teaching, but proximately urged by the hope of reward or the dread of God's punishment for belief or unbelief.

It may help us appreciate the power of the will to move the intellect by seeing what happens whenever a person falls into error. In the face of all evidence to the contrary, he can declare that something is true or false simply because he wants it to be so. He may refuse to examine the evidence offered, or, having the evidence, will not see it through the haze of emotion or prejudice which the will does not care to remove. A large part of modern advertising is based on this principle: that properly stimulated the irrational impulses can be activated and the mind made to believe that an article is necessary or useful, not on the score of objective need but by the force of suggestion operating on the credulous will. The moral is obvious. If the will can so easily sway the mind in the direction of error, in the absence of objective evidence, why not in the direction of truth, when the latter has only to be looked at willfully to be recognized ?

XIV-XV. Some Cautions on Predestination

Granted it is very true that no one can be saved without being predestined and without having faith and grace, still we must be very cautious about the way in which we speak of all these things and discuss them with others.

We should not make a habit of speaking much about predestination. If somehow at times it comes to be spoken of, it must be done in such a way that the people are not led into any error. They are at times misled, so that they say: "Whether I shall be saved or lost, has already been determined, and this cannot be changed whether my actions are good or bad." So they become indolent and neglect the works that are conducive to the salvation and spiritual progress of their souls.

When St. Ignatius warned against careless preaching on the subject of predestination, he had more in mind than protecting the faithful from needless worry about their future destiny. In the Institutes of the Christian Religion, John Calvin laid down a principle which, carried to its logical extreme, would subvert not only Christianity but the foundation of all religion. "By predestination," wrote Calvin, "we mean the eternal decree of God, by which He has decided in His own mind what He wishes to happen in the case of each individual. For all men are not created on an equal footing, but for some eternal life is pre-ordained, for others eternal damnation." [26]

Always practical, Ignatius recognized predestination as a deep mystery which must be handled carefully in preaching and public discussion because, unlike other doctrines, it is too intimately bound up with human responsibility to be treated only academically. Even appealing to the Fathers may be risky. To quote St. Augustine, for example, that "the great

majority of mankind is not saved,” [27] would hardly be encouraging.

St. Francis de Sales confessed that one of the heaviest trials of his life was the obsessing fear he had as a young man that he was certainly damned. It came upon him as the result of careless teaching on the subject of predestination. “If I am not fortunate enough to belong to those who are predestined,” he said to himself, “I should never succeed in sanctifying myself and consequently lose the love of God for all eternity.” After months of a violent struggle he finally shook off the temptation, once he realized that predestination is not independent of our use of God’s grace, and therefore not an arbitrary commitment to heaven or to hell.

Although, as a general rule, “we should not make a habit of speaking much about predestination,” this allows plenty of latitude. Perhaps there is less danger of discussing the subject nowadays than there was in the sixteenth century, when Calvinism was in the air, or in the 1700’s when Jansenism infected whole schools of theology. But whenever discussing predestination, the treatment must be dogmatically sound and properly balanced, so that man’s autonomy is not absorbed by the divine sovereignty. Otherwise, as Ignatius warns, men will neglect the works that lead to salvation because, they say, God has already determined whether I shall be saved or lost; consequently it makes no difference what I do.

Historians trace the beginnings of rationalism to the Reformation doctrine of absolute predestination, as illustrated in men like Thomas Jefferson, who repudiated Christianity on the score that “it would be more pardonable to believe in no God at all, than to blaspheme Him by the atrocious attributes of Calvin.” [28] Modern Catholics, especially intellectuals, are in too frequent contact with both streams of thought, Protestantism and infidelity, not to require light and protection in handling (without

solving) one of the deepest problems of human existence.

XVI. Faith and Good Works

In the same way, great caution is necessary lest by much talk about faith, and much insistence on it without distinction or explanation, occasion be given to the people, whether before or after they have faith informed by charity, to become slothful and lazy in good works.

The Spiritual Exercises have been described as a Catholic reaction to the Protestant theory of faith without good works. While over-simplified, the estimate is correct in highlighting the fundamental thesis of Ignatian spirituality, which is the service of God, as against the sectarian isolation of trustful confidence or faith as the essence of the Christian life. Luther’s caricature of the two positions is worth quoting in full:

A Capuchin says, ‘Wear a grey coat and a hood, a rope around the body and sandals on your feet.’ A friar says, ‘Put on a black hood.’ An ordinary papist says, ‘Do this or that work, hear Mass, pray, fast, and give alms.’ But the true Christian says, ‘I am justified and saved only by faith in Christ, without any works or merits of my own.’ Compare these together and judge which is the true righteousness. [29]

This confidence in God without works of my own is not a historical relic that has only speculative value for professional theologians. It has entered modern thought at so many angles that Catholics should at least be alert to recognize its presence, no matter how disguised.

More directly, however, those who teach sacred doctrine are warned against speaking so much about faith, without qualification, that they obfuscate the rest of Catholicism. The question here is quite distinct from the erroneous concept of faith as opposed to good works, excogitated by the Reformers. Even the true notion of faith as assent to God’s revelation should not be stressed

to the point of obscuring other equally grave duties of the Christian life. We would never subscribe on principle to the thesis that no matter what a man does in the moral order, if he has the true faith he should not be overly blamed because a believing Catholic, though bad, is better than a law abiding pagan. There are no grounds for the accusation that professing the Catholic creed absolves a man from other responsibilities; confession and indulgences will take care of whatever guilt was incurred. Nevertheless there are times when the bad example of nominal Catholics may not be sufficiently criticized, or the danger of scandal so minimized that people outside the Church draw the mistaken conclusion that we subordinate ethical values to doctrinal conformity.

XVII. Grace and Free Will

Likewise we ought not speak of grace at such length and with such emphasis that the poison of doing away with liberty is engendered.

Hence, as far as possible with the help of God, one may speak of faith and grace that the Divine Majesty may be praised. But let it not be done in such a way, above all not in times which are as dangerous as ours, that works and free will suffer harm, or that they are considered of no value.

The radical error of the Reformation was to make the grace of God the only operative agent in the performance of good works. "I will not lie or dissemble before God," wrote Luther, "I am not able to effect the good which I intend, but await the happy hour when God shall be pleased to meet me with His grace." [30] This was correlative to saying that "after the fall of our first parents, we have altogether a confounded, corrupt, and poisoned nature, both in body and soul; throughout the whole of man there is nothing good. Free will is utterly lost." [31]

When St. Ignatius called "poisonous" the "teaching which takes away free will," he allowed himself this rare epithet because he saw

latent here the seed of a blind determinism that could, as it did, vitiate the moral principles of a large segment of the western world. Ostensibly pious because it seemed to give due credit to God for our practice of virtue, the doctrine of sola gratia actually made God a monster of iniquity by making Him responsible for our sins and reduced man to less than a manikin by denying him the faculty of choice in his service of God.

It is no coincidence that when Jansenism arose in the seventeenth century, St. Vincent de Paul declared "the new heresy can best be understood if Jansenius is viewed as the antithesis of St. Ignatius." Among other points of contradiction with the author of the Spiritual Exercises, Jansenius held that "in the state of fallen nature, interior grace is never resisted." We have no intrinsic power of resistance. Consequently, "to merit or demerit in the state of fallen nature, man does not need to have freedom from (internal) necessity, but freedom from (external) constraint is enough." [32] Again there is the same preoccupation with God's absolute sovereignty as in Luther and Calvin, with the same disastrous potential against which Ignatius had warred a hundred years before. By depriving man of responsibility for his moral actions, Jansenism paved the way for the French Revolution and the "Age of Reason," whose infidelity spread far beyond the confines of France and encouraged, among others, the deistic philosophy of England and colonial America.

The plain lesson which the present rule intends to teach is prudence in speaking of supernatural grace and not allowing a laudable desire of extolling the Divine Majesty to hide the elusive power of human Freedom. We are here in the presence of a mystery, perhaps the deepest and certainly the most consequential in moral conduct. However there is something tantalizing about mysteries that should keep the teacher or preacher always on his guard. Faced with a mystery, we are tempted to resolve the problem by cutting the Gordian knot and accepting a

rational explanation which satisfies the mind at whatever cost. In the mystery of man's cooperation with divine grace the "rational" alternatives are comparatively easy: either say that God so completely rules His creatures that despite appearances to the contrary, we are not free agents in the work of salvation but everything we do is entirely produced by Him. Or say that man is so fully master of his destiny that he is independent of God in the practice of virtue and, if anything, freely determines the Creator to give him what he needs. Both solutions are heretical, the first Protestant and the second Pelagian, and both are seductive to the natural man. Both errors are still prevalent in modern times, with perhaps a stronger temptation among believing Christians to ignore their native liberty in favor of divine omnipotence, which points up the need for greater caution against this kind of aberration, as indicated by St. Ignatius.

XVIII. The Fear and Love of God

Although the zealous service of God our Lord out of pure love should be esteemed above all, we ought also to praise highly the fear of the Divine Majesty. For not only filial fear but also servile fear is pious and very holy. When nothing higher or more useful is attained, it is very helpful for rising from mortal sin, and once this is accomplished, one may easily advance to filial fear, which is wholly pleasing and agreeable to God our Lord since it is inseparably associated with the love of Him.

St. Ignatius was concerned to preserve the value of fear against the protestant hostility to this virtue as a valid motive in the spiritual life. Among the doctrines on justification defined by the Council of Trent is a condemnation of anyone who says that 'the fear of hell, which makes us turn to the mercy of God in sorrow for sins or which makes us avoid sin, is itself sinful

or makes sinners worse than they were before." [33]

The specific object of the last Rule of Orthodoxy is to urge the importance of a salutary fear of God as a means of avoiding grievous sin. To appreciate fully the wisdom of this recommendation, we must review the different kinds of fear that theologians, following St. Thomas and the teachings of Trent, have distinguished with relation to sin.

On the broadest level, there is a fear of creatures that may lead a person to offend God and that, in some form or another, enters into the previous motivation of almost every sin. Thus from fear of losing his reputation a man tells a lie, or out of dread of persecution a Catholic denies his faith. St. Thomas calls this worldly fear. At the other extreme is a fear of the Creator which can move us to sacrifice a creature that would otherwise lead us to sin. Every meditation of the retreat presupposes this type of fear, which Ignatius commended in the final paragraph of the Spiritual Exercises.

But not every fear of God is necessarily good. If it is a slavish dread that cringes only at God's punishments and does not detach the heart from sin; if I remain attached to sinful intentions but, out of fear of being punished, fail to carry them into overt effect – there is no merit in my conduct and no profit, except the possible restraint which keeps me from giving scandal or causing injury to my neighbor. Slavish fear is not even referred to in the Exercises, yet deserves consideration at least for the historical reason that Luther and his followers falsely accused the Church of teaching that mere apprehension of divine punishment with no detachment of the will from sin is virtuous and salutary in the eyes of God.

Servile fear, unlike the slavish, not only shrinks from the pain that follows upon sin, but has the positive effect of detaching the will from affection for sinful creatures and keeping it

attached to the will of God. Fear of this kind is praiseworthy and highly practical in resisting temptation, particularly where neglect or the strength of passion has weakened the motivating power of the love of God. Ignatius says it will help a man “escape from mortal sin,” which isolates the main role of servile fear, apart from its use as a minimal basis for sacramental absolution. Psychologists say that under the stress of violent emotion, only a comparably strong emotion can neutralize the undesirable feeling-state and prevent its overriding right reason. Something of this kind takes place when servile fear is used to conquer temptation, whose pleasant character exerts a powerful attraction, via the feelings, on the human will. Unless measures are promptly taken to counteract the seduction, the will is liable to give in. Ideally the virtue of charity and a desire to please God alone should neutralize the attractiveness of a prospective sin. But my love of God may not be sufficiently deep to effect the counteraction or, if deep as a virtue, may be unable to act because passion keeps it from rising to the surface of consciousness. The fear of God, on the other hand, is so elemental and instinctive, that if a man has even a spark of faith he should be able to rouse his sense of anticipated pain and counterpoise the pleasure-feelings of the temptation.

However, servile fear has another purpose beyond its ability to resist temptation. It can easily develop into filial or reverential fear, “which is altogether acceptable and pleasing to God because it is inseparable from divine love.” St. Thomas distinguishes these two fears according to the different evils that each of them seeks to avoid. In servile fear, the evil dreaded is punishment; in reverential the fear of offending God. But on closer analysis both types are seen to proceed from the love of God, although filial fear is par excellence inspired by pure charity, and, in that sense, “inseparable from divine love.” When I dread the loss of heaven and the pains of hell, my fear, though servile, is basically motivated by the love of God whom I am afraid

of losing by my sins, since heaven is the possession of God and hell the loss of Him for eternity. To that extent, therefore, even servile fear cannot be dissociated from supernatural charity. On a higher plane, however, when the object of my fear is not personal loss, though it be heaven, but injury to the Divine Majesty, then clearly the motive is not only an implicit love of God but love to a sublime degree.

The sources of divine charity from which servile and filial fear arise correspond to the familiar distinction between perfect and imperfect love of God, the one of benevolence and the other of concupiscence. In the pure love of benevolence, I love God for Himself alone, and not for any benefit He can bestow upon me. To this corresponds filial fear, wherein I dread to offend God, whom I love above all things, because I know that sin would “deprive” Him of the only good I can “give” Him, which is the gift of my voluntary affection. In the love of concupiscence, my love is egotistic. I love God because love of concupiscence, my love is egotistic. I love God because of the good things, including Himself, that attachment to His will can bring me. To this corresponds the servile fear that causes me to dread the loss of those very things to which the love of concupiscence inclines me.

Against this background we can understand how readily servile fear may become filial, much as imperfect love can develop into perfect charity. I begin by fearing the pain that God may send me if I commit a mortal sin. The crisis of temptation passes away and spontaneously I am grateful for being delivered from my folly and escaping the consequences of the sin. Since gratitude is the normal food of love, when the reason for being thankful is deliverance from the greatest possible evil, the result is – or should be – the greatest possible love.

Chapter 13 References

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- [31] *Ibid.*, p. 165.
- [32] Denzinger, 1093-1094.
- [33] *Ibid.*, 818.

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