

FACULTAD DE TEOLOGÍA

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TEARS AND COMPUNCTION AND THE FIRST WEEK OF THE SPIRITUAL EXERCISES OF ST. IGNATIUS OF LOYOLA

TESINA PARA LA OBTENCIÓN DEL GRADO DE
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INTRODUCTION

Tears and compunction and the First Week of the *Spiritual Exercises* of St. Ignatius of Loyola

Within the context of the classic, month-long *Spiritual Exercises* of St. Ignatius, the exercises of the First Week constitute a certain *sine qua non* of fully and deeply experiencing the whole of the *Spiritual Exercises*. The exercises of the First Week, through the *Principal and Foundation*, the examinations of conscience (both the *particular* and *general*), the invitation to the sacrament of confession and frequent communion, lay down the basic ground work for the conversion experience. They instill in the *exercitant*¹ the important disposition and attitude for continual conversion – a disposition that incisively opens the exercitant up to all the subsequent exercises in an unparalleled way. As such, it is crucial that the exercitant be carefully and completely exposed to all of the dynamics of the meditations of the exercises found within the First Week.

Clearly, the central part of the structure of the exercises contained within the First Week hinges upon the meditations on sin and all of its implications and repercussions: from the vile reality of sin and personal sin to the real possibility of damnation and the great gift of salvation wrought by Christ. Compunction is the principal catalyst in the conversion experience. As we shall see in this investigation, all of the point, preludes, meditations and contemplations of the First week are in view of helping the exercitant dispose himself to receive the grace of compunction. Interestingly enough, the word “compunction” does not even appear once in the *Concordancia Ignaciana*, while such word as “composición” appears eighteen times and the word “coloquio” appears more than thirty-five times and you almost could not count how many times the word “lágrimas” appears (over seven pages of the *Concordancia*).² In this light, it is interesting how, compunction, the most important dynamic of the First week of the *Exercises*, is not mentioned at all, while dynamics such as

¹ Although the word “exercitant” is not formally recognized in many English dictionaries, it has entered into the parlance of Ignatian nomenclature in the English-speaking world. In the interest of avoiding verbosity, the word “exercitant” will, henceforth, substitute the expression “he or she who is doing the exercises”.

² “composición”, “coloquio”, *Concordancia Ignaciana*, Echart, I. ed., Mensajero – Sal Terrae, Bilbao – Santander 1996, pp. 195, 169.

the *colloquies*, *composition of place* and the *application of the senses*, are explained in great detail within the *Exercises* themselves.

Although the word “compunction” never actually appears in any of the texts of the First week, it is the dynamic that invites the exercitant to: “demandar pena, lágrimas y tormento” (EE 48); “pedir crecido y intenso dolor y lágrimas” (EE 55); “pedir interno sentimiento de la pena que padecen los dañados” (EE 65). The key terms that hint at the fact that compunction underlies this dynamic are when the exercitant particularly asks for “growing pain” and “intense sorrow”. As we shall see, pain and sorrow are two important components of compunction. Moreover, there is an important connection between tears and compunction. Furthermore, their connection to the experience of conversion is fundamental. There is no enduring or true conversion without authentic compunction. As, tears and compunction need to be examined with more attention. This is especially true because their effects are significantly felt far beyond the dynamics of the First week. In fact, how well or poorly the exercitant lives the exercises of the First week will determine, to a great degree, how he will experience all of the other exercises that follow in the subsequent weeks. Moreover, the attitude and the disposition come from compunction are arguably meant to last far beyond the special moment of the *Spiritual Exercises*. As we shall see, they are meant to last a lifetime.

Except for a few instances, the great body of Ignatian text dealing with tears has them almost invariably linked to consolation. Much of what is recounted of Ignatius’ own personal experience with tears is so often associated with a joy derived from God’s consolation. We see this in an exemplary way in his *Spiritual Diary* where Ignatius chronicled much of his interior life as he struggled through issues and questions that were involved in the process of putting together the *Constitutions* of the nascent Society of Jesus. During his drafting of the *Constitutions*, Ignatius would submit to God his day’s work of discernment and deliberation regarding a specific point of the Rule of his incipient religious order. He would typically do this during the celebration of the Eucharist. He made notes of what he experienced during Mass in his *Spiritual Diary*.³ In it, he recounted how his experiences of tears of joy were, for him, signs of God’s consolation. He accepted the consolation as a confirmation of his discernment and approval of the decision he had made regarding a particular point of the

³ Ignacio de Loyola, *Autobiografía*, Edited by Josep M.^a Rambla Blanch, S.J., Mensajero – Sal Terrae, Bilbao – Santander 1983, p. 105.

Constitutions.⁴ Furthermore in his *Autobiography*, during a particular moment which involved a mystical experience of the presence of the Most Holy Trinity as it appeared to him, Ignatius describes the “gift of tears” that resulted from this experience, “con tantas lágrimas y tantos sollozos, que no se podía valer [...] nunca pudo retener las lágrimas hasta el comer; ni después de comer podía dejar de hablar sino en la santísima Trinidad [...] con mucho gozo y consolación” (AU 28). In fact, in the *Autobiography*, almost every single instance that Ignatius had experienced the gift of tears was accompanied by joy and consolation.⁵

Because two fundamental texts in Ignatian Spirituality (the *Spiritual Diary* and the *Autobiography*) contain so many associations between tears and joy in Ignatius’ own personal experiences, Ignatian Spirituality may, at times, run the risk of becoming myopic in its treatment of the gift of tears. However, relegating the gift of tears to the limited confines and context of joy and consolation can give one a terribly limited view of Ignatian Spirituality. This is especially true when one realize that in the First Week of the *Spiritual Exercises*, the gift of tears clearly goes well beyond a type of consolation that is circumscribed merely by an experience of joy and peace.

To wit, during the course of the First week of the *Spiritual Exercises*, Ignatius, on numerous occasions, instructs the exercitant to pray for the gift of tears.⁶ What is particularly noteworthy is the context within which he places the gift of tears. Instead of joy, the exercitant here asks for the opposite: tears with sorrow. Furthermore, Ignatius even goes as far as to counsel the exercitant to ask for tears not only of sorrow, but also of pain, “demandar pena, lágrimas y tormento con Cristo atormentado. Aquí será demandar vergüenza y confusión de mí mismo” (EE 48). Requesting to experience the tears of shame, pain and sorrow, which are attributes of compunction, is indeed radically different from the usual associations of tears of joy and consolation that we are often familiar with. As we may begin to surmise, the gift of tears in Ignatian Spirituality is far more complex than its usual association with joy and consolation. Within the context of all the *Spiritual Exercises*, the gift of tears and compunction that are experienced in the exercises of the First Week can be

⁴ As we all know, the issue of poverty in the Society was one that Ignatius was never able to conclude definitively.

⁵ The exception is n.18 of the *Autobiography*, where Ignatius sheds tears for the poor man who was wrongly persecuted for having worn the attire that Ignatius had left behind. In all of the other instances of the *Autobiography*, tears are linked to joy and consolation, i.e., nn. 28; 33; 98; 100.

⁶ *Spiritual Exercises* nn. 48; 50; 58 – cf. also nn. 87; 203; etc...

viewed as laying the foundation for the disposition and attitude that foster the conversion process – a process that continues throughout the exercises that follow and beyond. To better appreciate how the gift of tears in the First week of the *Spiritual Exercises* can be a gift or “grace” that leads to a true and authentic conversion, the phenomenon of tears must be understood through the prism of compunction.

Therefore, the simple scope of this license thesis is threefold. First, it will examine the phenomenon of tears both in its anthropological and spiritual dimensions. Second, it will examine compunction, especially the intricate components (*pénthos* and *catányxis*) within it. The third final part will examine compunction within the particular context of the First week of the *Spiritual Exercises* with an emphasis on the structure and inner dynamics of the contemplations and meditations within the exercises found therein.

Chapter One

Tears

I. Anthropological considerations.

A) The physical dimension of tears

On a purely physiological level, tears are drops of clear, salty liquid that are secreted by the lachrymal gland of the eye. Tears have a dual function: 1) to lubricate the surface between the eyeball and eyelid – keeping them from drying and 2) to clean the eye by washing away any irritants that can aggravate and damage the eye. In fact, not only do tears wash away irritants, but they also keep the eyes continually covered with lysozyme. Lysozyme is an enzyme that can effectively eliminate ninety to ninety-five percent of all the bacteria in the eyes in a mere five to ten minutes.⁷ Tears effectively purify and cleanse the eyes. Without the presence of lysozyme, eye infections would cause most of us to become blind. Thus, tears help maintain the health of the eye so that we can continue to see. Does the shedding of tears only serve to keep us from going blind or is there more to it?

Tears certainly do have another function. In fact, they serve a multiplicity of functions that affect different parts of our life. Interestingly enough, tears can also help to decrease and reduce stress. An important connection has been made between the shedding of tears (“crying”) and the alleviation of stress and emotional turmoil. “Scientific studies have found that after crying, people actually do feel better, both physically and physiologically – and they feel worse by suppressing their tears”.⁸ In the same study, which was conducted at St. Paul Ramsey Medical Center in Minnesota (USA), scientists discovered that there is a specific kind of tear that affects the emotions. In the study, subjects were made to watch very sad movies that made them cry. In another instance, the same subjects were made to cry by chopping onions. What the study found was that the tears that flowed from the sad movie actually contained greater amounts of toxins than the tears that flowed from the irritation of chopping the onions. The implication of this study is that the tears that flowed from sadness

⁷ Dr. Jerry Bergman, *The Miracle of Tears*, Creation 15(4); 16-18, <https://answersingenesis.org/human-body/the-miracle-of-tears/>, September 1993.

⁸ Gregg Levoy, *Tears that Speak*, Psychology Today, July – August, 1988, pp. 8, 10.

carried away more toxins from the body. As such, the chemicals that were built up by the body during the stress were removed by “emotional tears”, which consequently lowered the stress levels within the test subjects.⁹ To reiterate, one set of tears flowed from emotions (those triggered by the sad movies) and another set of tears flowed only because of the irritation caused by chopping the onions. The “emotional tears” (the ones caused by the movie) reduced the stress levels, while the tears from “irritation” had less of an effect on stress levels. The study establishes that not only is there a real connection between “emotional tears” and the chemical balance within the body, but that same chemical balance has a direct effect on the mood (the emotional dimension) of the individual.

B) The psychological dimension of tears

From this study on tears and others, researchers and scientists are realizing that there are more dynamics involved in the phenomenon of tears. The act of shedding “emotional tears” is not just a simple physiological event. Rather, it is a concatenation of events involving many different levels: physiological, psychological, neurological emotional, social and many other levels yet to be discovered. Ad Vingerhoets, a Dutch professor of clinical psychology at Tilburg University and an expert on the phenomenon of tears notes that “although there is vast scientific literature on emotions and moods [...] astonishingly little is known about crying. One will search in vain the indices of the major textbook on emotions for terms such as ‘crying’, ‘weeping’, or ‘tears’.”¹⁰ According to Vingerhoets, a multidisciplinary effort is required to attempt a full understanding of emotional tears and crying. He himself believes that crying is the result of an interaction between the psychobiological, cognitive, emotional and sociocultural processes. Vingerhoets explicitly concludes that “crying is not just a symptom that accompanies emotions. Rather, it is a complex biopsychosocial phenomenon. [...] The shedding of tears is governed not only by neurophysiological processes, but also to a large extent by culture.”¹¹ The significance of the words “biopsychosocial” and “neurophysiological”¹² that Vingerhoet uses need to be

⁹ Tom Kovach, *Tear Toxins*, Omni, December 1982.

¹⁰ Ad Vingerhoets, *Why only humans weep: Unraveling the Mysteries of Tears*, Oxford University Press, Oxford 2013, Kindle location 134-136.

¹¹ *Ibid.* Kindle location 223-226, 380-381, 384-385.

¹² Although I will not elaborate on the significance of the word “neurophysiological” (in my opinion, its

scrutinized carefully because of repercussions contained within each word.

The word “biopsychosocial” implicates that the processes of the biological, psychological and social dimensions are not only present in the event of tears, but that they are at work together and with one another. Likewise, the word “neurophysiological” implicates that the neurological and physiological processes are also functioning together. Ultimately, all of these processes are functioning in tandem with one another in the process of producing tears and crying. A study by Judith K. Nelson, a specialist on tears and crying, has borne out these connections, especially on the psycho-sociological level. In her studies on crying and attachment, she observes that newborns and infants, while yet in their vulnerable state, innately seek attachment for many primal reasons (comfort, food, protection, etc...) and so they cry – they shed tears. This primordial drive to attachment eventually develops into a desire for relationship. Nelson notes that “crying is above all a relationship behavior, a way to help us get close and not simply a vehicle for emotional expression or release. We do not [only] cry because we need to get rid of pain, but because we need connection.”¹³ The actuation of tears on this psycho-sociological level in view of attachment and eventual relationship is not only limited to newborns and infants, but in different degrees of consciousness, this psycho-sociological phenomenon is also present in adults – in all of us. The dynamics obviously are more complex, but the undergirding principle (i.e., the impulse and draw to attachment and relationship) fundamentally remain the same.

C) The language of tears

When tears and crying are understood to be connected to the processes of attachment and relationship as we have just observed, the next logical step in the investigation points to language because all relationships are ultimately built up on communication (whether verbal or non-verbal). In fact, quoting another specialist in the field, Nelson points out that tears and crying are a language in themselves – a language that transcends verbal words with its own

implications to our thesis on *tears and compunction* are not consequential enough to be pursued), it is nevertheless important to point out the great scope of the effects tears and crying have on the whole human person, including the field of neurology.

¹³ Judith K. Nelson, *Seeing Through Tears: Crying and Attachment*, Routledge Taylor & Francis Group, New York 2005, Kindle location 240-242.

unique set of vocabulary and grammar.¹⁴ Oxford doctor and scientist, Michael Trimble takes the idea of tears as non-verbal language further. In his research, he postulates that in man's primordial state, because tears and crying preceded verbal communication (or as he puts it, "expository language"), tears were an important form of communication long before human beings were able to put into words what they were feeling or thinking. And not only were tears an incipient form of communication, but they were also among the most profound precisely because they were linked to the emotions. Truly, the "language of tears" developed long before "expository language" came to be. This is why for Trimble, "tears communicate states of mind that are often so difficult to express in words."¹⁵ They ineffably and directly connect to the moods and states of being of the individual.

He elaborates on the non-verbal language of tears when he observes that "emotional crying is a human communication revealing suffering and pleading for nurture and help."¹⁶ For Trimble, there is a deep connection between tears/crying and our ability to feel compassion. He theorizes that the facial expressions involved in shedding tears trigger neural circuits in our brain that are "related to theory of mind and empathy, which to some extent overlap, and involve, in part, those brain areas that give us our visceral, emotional feelings."¹⁷ Trimble's observation that tears profoundly communicate the suffering experienced (of mine own or of another) and the "plea for help" (of mine own or of another) is very significant and important for us. Why? Because by making the connection between tears and suffering and the plea for help, Trimble is, in effect, making the connection between the non-verbal language of tears and arguably two of the most important words in communication and relationships: "sympathy" and "empathy".¹⁸

As we now move into the section involving the *spiritual considerations* of tears, we have seen that tears and the shedding of them involve not only a biological (physiological/neurological) process, but they also touch upon the psychological (affective) and the sociological (relational) dimensions. In a certain way, tears are bookends to our life

¹⁴ *Ibid.* Kindle location 324-327.

Here Nelson draws from Jeffrey Kottler's research contained in his book, *The Language of Tears* (1966). Unfortunately, I did not have direct access to this source.

¹⁵ Michael Trimble, *Why Humans like to Cry: Tragedy, Evolution and the Brain*, Oxford University Press, Oxford 2012, Kindle location 69.

¹⁶ *Ibid.* Kindle location 145.

¹⁷ Gareth Cook, *Why Humans Like to Cry* – interview with Michael Trimble, *Scientific American*, <http://scientificamerican.com/article/why-humans-like-to-cry/Mind & Brain/>, January 2013.

¹⁸ Michael Trimble, *Why Humans like to Cry: Tragedy, Evolution and the Brain*, Oxford University Press, Oxford 2012, Kindle location 31-32.

As we shall see later, "sympathy" and "empathy" are among the most important "building blocks" of compunction.

experiences on earth. From the very beginning of life, one of the first human experiences we have is that of tears – at the very moment of birth, the doctor induces us to cry. Fittingly, at the end of our life with death, the experience of tears is also present when we cry over our own death or that of another. Indeed, tears accompany us all throughout our lives at different times – punctuating moments of joy, sadness, mirth and a myriad of other emotions that we cannot often always put in to words. Through this, tears become a unique vehicle for human interaction and relationship through its non-verbal language of sympathy and empathy.¹⁹ Thus, tears are capable of expressing depths that no verbal words could ever communicate. As such, tears have a very special and unique part to play in the building and development of relationships. What starts out as a mere human reaction on a neurophysiological level, leads to the transitional gateway of the psycho-social level, which can then eventually become an opening in to the depths of the soul and the spiritual dimension.

¹⁹ As we shall see ahead, *sympathy* is an important component that helps render the individual to become disposed to compunction.

II. Spiritual considerations.

A) The “veracity and falsity” of tears

We noted in the previous section that tears and crying are a language in and of themselves – a non-verbal one at that. Just as in any language, what can be communicated can be either truthful or deceptive; tears can express authentic emotions or become vehicles for deceit and lies. As we embark upon the spiritual consideration of tears, there are a couple of points to keep in mind before we begin. The first point being that we will limit ourselves to examining only the *authentic* and *truthful* experience of tears and crying. We will not enter into the consideration of how tears can deceive or be used to deceive.²⁰ Since the purpose of our investigation involves the tears and compunction and the First Week of the Spiritual Exercises of St. Ignatius, the tears and crying discussed are presumed to be authentic and truthful as they are considered to be “gifts” from God. Furthermore, real compunction, unlike scruples, presupposes and builds upon the truth and the authenticity of the emotions and the veracity of the conversion experience. Scruples, on the other hand, by definition are founded upon a distorted vision of sin and, ultimately, of God’s justice and forgiveness.²¹ As such, our consideration and discussion of tears and crying will only involve the truth and authenticity of the experiences and expressions of compunction.

The second point regards to how, in general, our society today often has the mistaken notion that someone who possesses the “gift of tears” is someone who is easily disposed to crying – who can almost cry at will, which elements of our society today consider a gift. However, traditionally in Christian spiritual life, it is not the tears in and of themselves that are most important, but rather the internal dynamics and the internal motions that provoked the tears that are of greatest consideration and consequence.²² Tears are just the sensible and “sacramental”²³ signs of the inner dynamics of the soul’s experiences. The “value” of tears

²⁰ Raul Reyes, *Tears of Deception: Sentimentality Used as a Tool for Political and Social Change*, Amazon Digital Services, December 2011, Kindle Edition.

²¹ Without going into a long elaboration on scruples here, what I mean by “scruples” in this context is what Ignatius in the *Spiritual Exercises* observes as, “llaman vulgarmente escrúpulo el que procede de nuestro proprio juicio y libertad, es a saber, cuando yo liberamente formo ser pecado lo que no es pecado” (SE n. 346).

²² “c’est la qualité des états supérieurs don’t ells [larmes] procèdent, et non leur abundance matérielle”. “Larmes” in *Dictionnaire de Spiritualité*, Tome IX, Pierre Adnès, Beauchesne, Paris 1976, p. 303.

²³ What I mean by “sacramental” is obviously not in reference to the seven sacraments of the Church. Rather,

in the spiritual life can be determined by the measure in which they are an authentic and true expression of an genuine interior experience and reality. As such, tears acquire their great importance in their capacity to be guideposts or markers to what may be occurring within the soul. Moreover, in as far as tears can be an expression of emotions, pursuing the questions of how and why the emotions were touched, (i.e., discovering the origins of the causes of the emotions), can give us a certain glimpse into some of the individual's set of values²⁴ – that to which a person holds most dear. To better illustrate this, let observe three particular people in the New Testament right at the poignant moment when they shed tears. The people we will examine are the sinful woman in the gospel of Luke, the disciple Peter in the Synoptic gospels and Jesus himself in John's gospel.

B) Tears as observed from the Gospels

Beginning in chapter 7, verse 34 of Luke's gospel, we are introduced to a sinful woman who comes uninvited to the home of a Pharisee who is having dinner with Jesus. She bathes Jesus' feet with her tears, dries them with her hair and then kisses them. The Pharisee is appalled by the scene, but keeps his thoughts to himself. Jesus, knowing what the Pharisee is thinking, proceeds to tell him a parable in which two debtors are forgiven their debts by their creditor. One is forgiven a far greater amount than the other to which Jesus asks, "Now which of them will love him [the creditor] more?" (*Lk. 7: 42*).²⁵ The answer to this question reveals the relationship between forgiveness and love that Jesus establishes. Furthermore and more importantly for our discussion, Jesus is making a connection between forgiveness and tears. The sinful woman cries because of her sins; she seeks forgiveness. Moreover, it is very significant that all throughout this gospel narrative, the sinful woman does not utter a word, not even one! It is precisely because her very own tears communicate more profoundly her desire for forgiveness than words ever could.²⁶ Jesus understands this, which is why he tells the Pharisee, "Do you see this woman? [...] she has wet my feet with her

"sacramental" in the generic sense that the exterior phenomenon, in this case "tears", is actually only an exterior sign of a deeper interior experience (for example, compunction) occurring within the individual.

²⁴ "Elles [larmes] relèvent d'une philosophie des valeurs."

Ibid., p. 288.

²⁵ Revised Standard Version of the Bible. All biblical citations will come from this translation.

²⁶ As we shall see in the next chapter, her tears are ultimately, an expression of her compunction, contrition and penitent heart.

tears²⁷ [...] Therefore I tell you her sins, which are many, are forgiven, for she loved much” (Lk. 7: 47). The consequence and fruit of Jesus’ forgiveness is love. Because Jesus forgave much, he enables the sinful (and now forgiven) woman to “love much”. The shedding of tears thus becomes not only a cry for forgiveness, but after the pardon, tears also become the non-verbal “words” of gratitude and love that the forgiven woman has for Jesus. There is no mistaking that through the woman’s tears and crying, she connects with Jesus at a most deep level and in a most profound way. It is precisely through the language of tears (and all of profound spiritual experiences that undergird it, such as faith, hope and love), which elicits Jesus’ forgiveness that a new relationship is established between the woman and the Lord. Let’s now move on to the experience of the disciple Peter.

The scene of Jesus’ betrayal by Peter is recounted in all four of the gospels. This is clearly an indication of the singular importance of the event. Interestingly enough, although what transpires is a betrayal of epic proportions (a master is betrayed by the very disciple that was chosen to be the leader of all the others), nevertheless the narrative of the scene occupies no more than a couple of verses in the gospel accounts. Why is the betrayal narrative so brief? Why is there not a detailed account of the event, especially since there are no words of any kind uttered by Peter or Jesus? There is, in fact, no verbal dialogue between Peter and Jesus. Paradoxically, it is precisely because of the paucity of words in the betrayal narrative and the lack of verbal dialogue that makes possible the emphasis of a “language” that is even more profound and expressive than words. That “language” of course, is the “language of tears”. Indeed, although there is no verbal dialogue that transpires between Peter and Jesus, there is, however, the presence of tears; Peter weeps deeply. A closer examination of the Biblical texts shows how tears are capable of communicating and expressing more than any words could ever explain or recount.

1. The use of two different Greek verbs for the flowing of tears

²⁷ When Jesus compares what the woman did for him (washed him with tears) to what the Pharisee did not do for him (he gave no water for washing to Jesus before the meal), it is interesting to notice that Jesus draws a parallel and thus, a connection, between water used for purification acts and the tears of the sinful woman. It almost seems as though Jesus is implying that the woman’s tears also have “purifying” quality to them. This interpretation is especially significant in the light of our discussion on compunction in the next chapter.

Looking at each of the Synoptic gospels' individual texts of the betrayal scene, we notice that there is a certain verb that is common to and links all of the betrayal narratives together. In Matthew's gospel, we read that "Peter remembered the saying of Jesus [...] and he went out and wept bitterly" (*Mt.* 26: 75). The gospel of Mark reads, "And Peter remembered [...] and he broke down and wept" (*Mk.* 14: 72). Finally, the gospel of Luke also recounts that "he [Peter] went out and wept bitterly" (*Lk.* 22: 62). The common denominator in all three is the verb "to weep". Peter is recounted as to having wept in all three of the narratives. Noteworthy is the fact that the same Greek verb is used in all three accounts. The specific use of the verb "to weep" is key here because it alerts us to the fact that there is an important distinction that needs to be made between the verb "to cry" and the verb "to weep". "To cry" is generic; it simply describes the physiological phenomenon of tears – simply, when water falls from the eyes. In contrast, "to weep" (specifically in its original Greek form "κλαίω") not only takes into account the tears that fall from the eyes, but it goes further and opens up to the affective dimension; it implicates the interior experiences that the individual is going through that are causing the tears to be shed. Thus, the Synoptic narratives' purposeful use of the verb "to weep" connotes that there is much more to Peter's tears than biology alone could ever answer.

"Weeping" then, is a specific kind of crying. Earlier, we made reference to a scientific study that determined that there are two kinds of tears: those caused by the simple irritation of the eyes (the slicing of the onions) and those that were shed because of an emotional reaction (those caused by the viewing of sad films). These can be called tears of irritation and tears of emotion, respectively. In the case of Peter's betrayal of Jesus, Peter is clearly shedding tears of emotion. This is evident by the verb used to describe the weeping, which is same one used in all of the three Synoptic accounts. If we examine the original infinitive form of the verb "to weep" used in the texts, which is κλαίω, we begin to get a better glimpse into the nature of Peter's interior and emotional experience. To wit, according to Strong's dictionary, κλαίω means "to mourn, weep, lament; – weeping as the sign of pain and grief for the thing signified (i.e. for the pain and grief); – of those who mourn for the dead [...] to bewail one."²⁸ As such, we glean that Peter's tears are laden by a sense of mourning and lamentation and tinged with pain and grief. Furthermore, the adverb that accompanies the verb κλαίω in both Matthew and Luke is πικρῶς. Peter wept "bitterly"

²⁸ "κλαίω". Def. 1 & 2. *The Complete Koine-English Reference Bible: New Testament, Septuagint & Strong's Concordance*. Joshua Dickey, Kindle edition 2014.

– that is, “resulting from or expressive of severe grief, anguish, or disappointment.”²⁹ Furthermore, the original Greek adverb for “bitterly”, πικρῶς emphasizes that there is a “poignant grief” and “violence” to his tears.³⁰ Truly, Peter is not just crying. He is weeping, Peter is experiencing a whole concatenation of strong and violent emotions from the depths of his body and soul – the physical and spiritual realms. This whole emotive process, by its very profundity, necessarily goes beyond words. Consequently, the outlet of the whole experience can solely be expressed by tears of emotion.³¹

2. The unique quality of Jesus’ experience of tears

Let’s now examine the tears of Jesus at the death of his good friend Lazarus. As a preamble to this, it is useful to observe that there is a similarity between the tears and weeping of both the sinful woman and Peter. In the presence of Jesus, both them become singularly aware of their sins and become exceedingly repentant of them. In fact the same Greek verb (κλαίω) is used in both instances of their weeping. However, the weeping that Jesus exhibits at the death of his good friend Lazarus is altogether different. The Greek verb used to depict Jesus’ tears bears this point out. Instead of the verb κλαίω that punctuated the tears of the sinful woman and Peter, the verb “δακρύω” is used to express Jesus’ tears. The definition of “δακρύω” is rather generic and non-descript; it simply means, “to weep, to shed tears”.³² As we have discussed, the verb “κλαίω” not only implicates to weep, but it also comprises: to mourn, to grieve, to bewail, to lament painfully. In the narrative of Lazarus’ death (*Jn.* 11: 1-44), many different people are weeping, including Mary, Martha, a number of Jews and, of course, Jesus. The verb employed to signify weeping in all the instances (except one) is “κλαίω”. However, with Jesus, the verb “δακρύω” is used. That verb is uniquely applied to Jesus’ experience of tears. Noteworthy is the fact that the verb “δακρύω”

²⁹ “bitterly”. Def. 5. *The American Heritage Dictionary of the English Language*. 5th ed. 2011-20012.

³⁰ “πικρῶς”. Def. 1 & 2. *The Complete Koine-English Reference Bible: New Testament, Septuagint & Strong’s Concordance*. Joshua Dickey, Kindle edition 2014.

³¹ The emotional tears Peter experiences here will move from an affective expression of his pain and sorrow to something much more profound: compunction. Compunction is the basis for the start and continuation of all true and authentic conversion experiences. We shall investigate this more at length in the following chapter on Compunction.

³² “δακρύω”. Def. 1 & 2. *The Complete Koine-English Reference Bible: New Testament, Septuagint & Strong’s Concordance*. Joshua Dickey, Kindle edition 2014.

is used only once throughout all of the New Testament. Moreover, its use is attributed solely to Jesus. What is the significance in the use of different verbs for weeping?

Given that there are two distinct verbs used to express the act of weeping in the narrative, this demonstrates that there are different ways of weeping, which in turn, produce different kinds of tears. A person's life and experiences will directly influence the "content" of his or her own tears. Thus, the tears of the sinful woman and Peter are those of pain, bitterness and sorrow for their sins (essentially compunction), while the tears of Mary and Martha are of grief, mourning and lamentation for the death of Lazarus. On the other hand, Jesus' tears are entirely of a different kind – the unique use of the verb "δακρύω" is indicative of this. While it is safe to assume that Jesus also weeps in sadness for the death of his friend Lazarus, we cannot get around the fact that the unique use of "δακρύω" implies that there is also more to the interior experience of Jesus' weeping than what appears.

Although we cannot investigate further into the exact nature of Jesus' interior experience on the basis of such a unique verb (because it goes beyond the scope of our investigation on tears and compunction), we can still appreciate how tears and weeping are able to express the complexity and mystery of the emotions of the interior life itself. For, it is precisely these interior experiences or "movements of the soul" that are the content of the tears themselves. The example of the experience of tears of the sinful woman in Luke's gospel, the example of Peter's tears of betrayal and the example of Jesus' own tears at the death of his friend Lazarus are a testament to this fact. Let us now turn our attention to an Ignatian consideration of tears.

III. An Ignatian consideration.

In the previous sections, we saw how tears and crying were a primordial means of communication of humans – a non-verbal language based on sympathy and empathy. We also saw how the impetus of this non-verbal language came from the desire of attachment (to secure the basics of food, protection and company). We then observed how this initial drive to attachment developed into relationship. We also saw, through the example of some figures of the gospels, that tears can be “sacraments”, signs or markers that give us clues, which can reveal the interior movements and experiences of the soul. In turn, these very “movements”, when examined carefully, can also shed light on the individual’s interior experiences of grief, sorrow, pain, bitterness, loss, forgiveness, joy, gratitude and more. Furthermore, the emotions that are elicited by the interior experiences can also reveal, to a certain extent, an individual’s set of values – those things that help explain the decisions and actions of an individual.³³ In essence, it reveals what is important to the individual. Together, all these qualities of tears give us a special access to the soul and the many facets of the spiritual dimension. For tears can open up and reveal to the individual so many deep and intimate truths of one’s own interior life (comprising both the emotional and spiritual) – that special part of man where God speaks and relates to man in a very direct and intimate way.

Ignatius, who was so gifted with tears that they became a constant throughout the later part of his life, experienced first-hand how tears could both reveal the experience of the interior life of the soul, but most especially, how tears could be one of the most intimate means of communication and therefore, relationship between God and man. On this point, Mossi comments that, “the gift of tears functions as a critical signpost for Ignatius. The presence of the gift of tears, more than any other infused grace recorded in the [spiritual] diary, indicates that the mystic is responding to God’s invitations.”³⁴ For Ignatius, tears become a unique platform for the reception of the profound graces that God imparts to him. They are the profound mystical means of expression and communication that God and he use in their dialogue of love and service.

³³ “Elles [larmes] relèvent d’une philosophie des valeurs.”

“Larmes” in *Dictionnaire de Spiritualité*, Tome IX, Pierre Adnès, Beauchesne Paris 1976, p. 288.

³⁴ John Mossi, S.J., *The Spiritual Experience of Tears*, Human Development magazine, Vol. 20, #3, Fall 1999, p. 20-24.

Chapter Two

Compunction: *pénthos/catányxis*

I. An approach to compunction.

A) An overview of the terms

According to the *Dictionnaire de Spiritualité*, “compunction” and “tears” were so closely associated with one another that they were virtually synonyms.³⁵ This profound association between compunction and tears is clearly evident in the examples that we saw earlier of Peter’s betrayal of Jesus and of the sinful woman who washed Jesus’ feet with her tears. Both of them, in the presence of Jesus who reveals the truth of man to himself (*Gaudium et Spes* n.22), experience the pain and sorrow for their sins and the love and forgiveness of Jesus. In Peter and the sinful woman, the interior experience of compunction was made manifest through their tears – the whole process of the experience of compunction and tears form an organic whole within the lived experience of the individual. In this sense, compunction and tears become metonymies of one another.

As we notice this close association between compunction and tears, it is equally important to observe the association between “compunction” and the two Greek terms: πένθος (*pénthos*) and κατάνυξις (*catányxis*).³⁶ There is likewise a very close relationship between those two Greek terms with compunction because both of them with compunction have sin as their fundamental object. In fact, the *Dictionnaire de Spiritualité* gives *pénthos* and *catányxis* a certain equivalency to compunction. This is, of course, because all three encompass and make up the one human experience that is a reaction to sin in the light of God.³⁷ There are, of course nuances between the terms, which we will go in to more detail as we continue our

³⁵ “[...] compunction et larmes vont tellement ensemble que la métonymie les a rendues synonymes.” “Larmes” in *Dictionnaire de Spiritualité*, Tome IX, Pierre Adnès, Beauchesne, Paris 1976, p. 290.

³⁶ For the purpose of convenience, the Greek terms, πένθος and κατάνυξις, will be referred to in their Latin equivalents of *pénthos* and *catányxis*, respectively.

³⁷ “La compunction (= πένθος, κατάνυξις) s’apparente sans doute à la pénitence. Toutes deux ont fondamentalement pour objet le péché.”

“Larmes” in *Dictionnaire de Spiritualité*, Tome IX, Pierre Adnès, Beauchesne, Paris 1976, p. 291.

investigation on compunction. However, for our intents and purposes, we will use the term “compunction” as being inclusive of the terms *pénthos* and *catányxis*. When the nuances of *pénthos* and *catányxis* come into play, then we will use the distinct words in those cases.

B) Compunction and “scruples”: interior disposition and attitude

Although compunction arises from the anguished realization and the taking responsibility of having sinned against God, it does not stay morbidly fixated on sin and damnation. But rather, it is equally rooted to the realization and awareness of God’s love and forgiveness and the sacrifice of Christ on the cross that brings about the redemption of each sinner. In an intimate way, compunction is both rooted in the suffering of Christ and to the redemption and forgiveness he offers by conquering sin. In this manner, there is ultimately a real, yet paradoxical link between compunction and the resurrection. In a certain way then, compunction is not so much about sin or guilt (although it certainly presupposes and seriously considers those realities as realities that truly do affect the human condition), as it is about the forgiveness, redemption and salvation that God gives through Christ. In order to begin to understand how, through compunction, tears can emanate from both sorrow and joy, we need to understand more deeply what constitutes compunction.

To begin with, a few initial points need to be made clear of what compunction is not. Weeping for one’s sins in the authentic spirit of compunction has nothing to do with the false scruples and fear that Ignatius warns about in the *Spiritual Exercises* (EE 346-348) – a disordered fear that is often derived from the scruples themselves. Rather, compunction has more to do with contrition and tears. For example, there is a great difference in attitude and disposition between a person who confesses his sins in order to be “purified” and “justified” in view of an ego-centric self-perfection and a person who confesses his sins because he realizes painfully the evil he has wrought and wishes to make amends in view of reconciliation with God and man. In this second instance, there is a real desire to repair a relationship than there is of securing one’s self-perfection and “justification”. Scruples and fear are often predominantly concerned with one’s own self and well-being; they are ultimately self-referential. In his book, *Theologia Spiritualis*, Santiago G. Arzubialde warns of the dangers of spiritual self-preoccupation or , “[...] el hecho religioso de ‘sentirse

pecador' no se identifica jamás con el hecho circuito del hombre encerrado en sí mismo, que utiliza lo religioso, y también a Dios, como soporte para reafirmar el 'proprio yo'".³⁸ Indeed, authentic compunction has nothing to do with a fixation on sin and the manic obsession to be "justified" and "purified" from it according to the measure of man.

In contrast, compunction does not collapse the individual upon himself, because his interior disposition and attitude is ultimately focused on and concerned about his relationship with God and his neighbor. The tears and contrition from the compunction are the movements of the individual towards repentance and reparation in the hope of re-establishing a relationship broken by sin. Because of this, it is important to realize that multiple and frequent confessions of one's sins, if one is solely motivated by fear and scruples, do not necessarily bring about authentic compunction and the spirit of true repentance. However, it is by the quality of the contrition, which is derived from the realization of having hurt another (first and foremost God), and broken a relationship by sin, that the individual becomes capable of an authentic experience of compunction and not just some mimicry of it in the form of fear and scruples. Indeed, the presence of contrition is an important criterion in being able to identify the authenticity of compunction within the individual. This is why carefully examining and discerning the religious attitude and interior disposition becomes fundamental in the understanding of compunction.

C) On the types of sorrow and joy in compunction

The sorrow and shedding of tears for one's sins is certainly one of the primary manifestations of compunction. The example of Peter and the sinful woman in Luke's gospel come to mind here once again. Nevertheless, unending joy was also seen as the fruit of an attitude of constant compunction according to some ancient monks.³⁹ Even the second Beatitude in Luke's gospel teaches, "Blessed are you that weep now, for you shall laugh" (*Lk.* 6: 21) seems to be indicative of this. What is going on here? What is the connection between weeping for one's sins and joy? What are the inner dynamics of compunction and its shedding of tears that, as a consequence, prepares and disposes the individual for such a

³⁸ Santiago G. Arzubialde, S.J., *Theologia Spiritualis: El camino espiritual del seguimiento a Jesús*. Tomo I., Universidad Pontificia Comillas, Madrid 1989, p. 115.

³⁹ Irénée Hausherr, S.J., *The Doctrine of Compunction in the Christian East*, Cistercian Publications Inc., Michigan 1982. p. vii.

Beatitude?

Irénée Hausherr's impressive work on *pénthos* is a fundamental source of reference to compunction. It is one of the most important books written on the subject within the last several decades. He begins his discussion of *pénthos* (compunction) by placing two seemingly disparate quotations alongside each other. On the one hand he quotes N. Arseniev who states that "the joy of the resurrection is the fundamental characteristic of the Orthodox Church's world-view".⁴⁰ On the other hand, he cites Abba Poemen who states, "truly you are blessed, Abba Arsenius, for you wept for yourself in this world".⁴¹ In Hausherr's selection of these two quotations, he is effectively juxtaposing the tears "of weeping for yourself" with the "joy of the resurrection", thereby emphasizing once again two paradoxical qualities that are connected to *pénthos*: "sorrow" being an inherent quality of *pénthos* itself and the resulting joy being the consequence, or "fruit" of such a religious attitude.

Not immediately beginning with the religious significance of *pénthos*, but rather drawing upon its etymological root, Hausherr notes that *pénthos* is linked to *pathos* – "suffering; feeling".⁴² Accordingly, Hausherr attributes to *pénthos* the significance of "any sort of affliction" combined with a certain characteristic of "mourning" (p. 3). Hausherr articulates the possible meanings of mourning by describing its three possible manifestations in these particular categories: 1) mourning for relatives and friends, 2) sadness over any mishap and 3) lamentation for a dead god. However, he examines these three through the lens of the Church fathers by asking the question, "what do the fathers think of these?".

In regard to the "***mourning of relatives and friends***", the way a Christian mourns the death of a relative or friend is quite different from that of a non-Christian. At the heart of the sadness of a non-Christian is the realization that the relative or friend is no more. He weeps for the dead simply because they are dead; they no longer are. Thus, his mourning goes no further than dwelling upon the loss of the deceased beloved. Non-Christian mourning has no real content other than the pain and sadness itself. It remains circumscribed and wallowing within its own affliction – a sterile experience that brings forth no fruit other than the pain and suffering itself. The *pénthos* preached by the Church fathers has nothing to do with this kind of mourning. However for Christians, because Christ has conquered death, death then becomes a "birth" that leads to true everlasting life. As a consequence, there is, at the heart of Christian mourning and grief, a light true hope – a hope that is derived from the promise of

⁴⁰ N. Arseniev, *Ducha Pravoslavia* (Novy Sad, 1927), quoted from Hausherr, p. 5.

⁴¹ Ward, quoted from Hausherr, p. 6.

⁴² "pathos", *The Oxford English Dictionary*, Oxford University Press, Oxford 2009².

God and fulfilled in the resurrection of Christ. This hope, promised by the Father, rooted in Christ and communicated by the Holy Spirit, is that seed which lies beneath and is contained within the Christian experience of sadness and mourning. It is this seed that is found within *pénthos* that will eventually spring forth and flower into joy.

In regard to the “*sadness over any mishap*”, Hausherr discusses this by dividing it into two very distinct kinds of sadness: the sadness of the world, which is known as *lúpe* (λύπη) and the sadness of God, which is described as *pénthos* (πένθος). The word *lúpe* occurs sixteen times in the New Testament. Its meanings include: sadness, grief, grievous, grudgingly, heaviness, affliction, annoyance, pain. Some instances in the New Testament where *lúpe* appears include Luke’s gospel, when Jesus goes off to pray and the disciples fall asleep from the sadness, “[Jesus] came to the disciples and found them sleeping for *sorrow*” (*Lk.* 22: 45) and in the farewell discourse in John, when the disciples are afflicted with sadness at the imminent departure of Jesus, “Truly, truly, I say to you, you will weep and lament, but the world will rejoice; you will be *sorrowful*, but your *sorrow* will turn into joy. [...] you have *sorrow* now, but I will see you again and your hearts will rejoice” (*Jn.* 16: 20-22). In the case of the word *pénthos*, it occurs only five times in the New Testament. Its meanings include: grief, mourning, sorrow, but with the added nuance of being linked to the word *πασχω*, which is a verb to experience a sensation or impression (usually painful) – feel, passion, suffer.⁴³ A particular instance of *pénthos* appears in the book of Revelation, where the Lord wipes away every tear and “neither shall there be *mourning*, nor crying, nor pain anymore, for the former things have passed away” (*Rev.* 21: 4).

From definitions and the Scriptural passages cited above, *lúpe* and *pénthos*, except for a few details, seem to be similar. In fact, to an untrained and undiscerning eye both *lúpe* and *pénthos* may initially be taken as synonyms in that they both involve some form of sadness and mourning. Nonetheless, by no means should the two be confused as actually being the same thing because they certainly are not. As Hausherr emphasizes, “we should never make the disastrous mistake of confusing the fruit of grace, *pénthos* with the seed of hell *lúpe* [...] the ascetics prefer to give another name to the sadness which is of God [*pénthos*], so great a horror have they of the sadness which is of the world [*lúpe*].”⁴⁴ The Christian monastic tradition regarded *pénthos* as a virtue to be fostered while *lúpe* was seen as a vice to be extirpated.

⁴³ “λύπη”; “πένθος”; “πασχω”. *The Complete Koine-English Reference Bible: New Testament, Septuagint & Strong’s Concordance*. Joshua Dickey, Kindle edition 2014.

⁴⁴ Irénée Hausherr, S.J., *The Doctrine of Compunction*. p. 4.

Sorrow rooted in *pénthos* flourishes in a heroic heart and a strong soul. Sorrow rooted in *lúpe* loses heart and falls into acedia, which is the fruit of *lúpe*. In fact, the acedia springing forth from *lúpe* is essentially spiritual and mental sloth that produces an overall torpor in the individual. It “deals” with sorrow and sadness by fleeing from them and seeking distraction to evade any sort of confrontation or reflection upon the condition of sorrow and sadness that the individual finds himself in. In this way, the attitude of prayer and meditation is not only avoided, but is even undermined. Truly, acedia softens and weakens the soul, effectively leaving it listless and inert. Acedia is indeed a great danger to the spiritual life. Rivas comments, “Esta pasión [acedia] nos aleja de los caminos del Espíritu e intenta impedir cualquier crecimiento en la vida espiritual, sobre todo en relación con la regularidad y la constancia, así como el silencio y la estabilidad interna”.⁴⁵ In direct contrast, *pénthos* turns the individual inward – towards a profound and intimate dialogue with God; it fosters prayer and contemplation of the crucified Christ who died for the individual. From this interior dialogue with God through the actions of prayer and contemplation, the individual is able to admit the truth of his sins and his true condition – that of being a sinner before God. This act of facing and seeking the truth of one’s condition from within, disposes the soul to receive the grace from God that will strengthen and fill the heart as it discovers and deepens its knowledge of God precisely through the cultivated and strengthened attitude of prayer and reflection.

Finally, there is the “*lamentation for a dead god*”. Hausherr refers to this as a kind of “sacred mourning” that is found in certain traditions, as a certain manner of “mourning for the Lord”. According to him, many who weep in this manner are actually not weeping the death of the Lord in and of itself. They do not only fixate upon his death, because to do so would run the risk of falling into despair. But rather, “they weep over God, over the Christ who suffered, and with respect to God our Savior they weep over themselves and their downfall”.⁴⁶ Therefore, at the center of this weeping is certainly “Christ who suffered”. But, at the same time, in meditating upon the sufferings of Christ, the individual also realizes that it is because of his sin (and all sin) that Christ suffered and died. This is why Hausherr includes the detail of “they weep over themselves and their downfall” – the “downfall” alluding to the loss of salvation and the damnation the individual deserves for having sinned against God. In the final analysis, they are truly weeping over the dead Christ as much as

⁴⁵ Fernando Rivas Rebaque, *Terapia de las enfermedades espirituales en los Padres de la Iglesia*, San Pablo, Madrid 2008, pp. 118.

⁴⁶ Irénée Hausherr, S.J., *The Doctrine of Compunction*, p. 6.

they are also weeping for themselves. Hausherr continues by emphasizing that “monastic *pénthos* will never be found related only to the death of Christ. In fact, the very thought of Christ [in this particular context] is absent from *pénthos*”.⁴⁷ *Pénthos* has less to do with a morbid dwelling on death and more to do with the awareness and appreciation of the suffering of Christ *pro nobis*. As such, an authentic spirit of *pénthos* is not to be found in a sporadic or merely seasonal form of fasting and penitence. Rather, it is found in a constant and perpetual attitude and disposition that centers its attention on the salvation that the Lord brings into the life of the individual and its effects that are imparted through the events of the entire *Paschal Mystery*.

D) *The importance of catányxis*

In order to fully comprehend the full scope of compunction, one also needs to be familiar with a fundamental catalyst of it: *catányxis* (κατάλυξις), which is considered practically synonymous with compunction, but with additional and significant nuances. *Catányxis* involves an experience of strong, sharp emotions; a certain regret is felt from the deepest recesses of the heart for having committed a sin – a certain sense of contrition, if you will. A particular scriptural passages that illustrate this well can be found in the *Acts of the Apostles* wherein the first converts, upon discovering their responsibility in the death of Jesus, are struck by a strong sense of regret and are stung by an acute feeling of sorrow at the realization of their culpability in the death of Jesus:

Let the house of Israel therefore know assuredly that God has made him both Lord and Christ, this Jesus whom you crucified. Now when they heard this they were cut to the heart, and said to Peter and the rest of the apostles, ‘Brethren, what shall we do?’.

Acts 2: 36-37.

“Cut to the heart” is the operative part of this passage. In Greek, it translates as *κατενύγησαν τήν καρδίαν*. This being “cut” (*κατενύγησαν*) to the heart harkens back to the “strong, sharp” experience of regret that was just described just above in regard to *catányxis*. Literally, *κατενύγησαν* means “to prick, pierce, to pain the mind sharply, to agitate it vehemently –

⁴⁷ *Ibid.*

especially the emotion of sorrow”.⁴⁸ Hausherr indicates that “the connection between *catányxis* and *pénthos* is clear. The former [*catányxis*] denotes a shock which comes from without; the latter [*pénthos*] is the psychological reaction” from within.⁴⁹ The initial reception of the news of their culpability in Jesus’ death cuts their hearts to the quick (this shock is specifically *catányxis*). While their reaction of wanting to do something (“brethren, what shall we do?”), opens the feeling of shock into the whole experience of compunction – the tears, sorrow (*pénthos*).

Hausherr then points out that the “shock” can come not only from *without* (as in the example above from the *Acts of the Apostles* where the first converts were stung sharply by the news of their culpability in the death of Jesus), but the shock can also come from *within* as a result of reflection, meditation or a prayer experience, such as an examination of conscience. Hausherr gives an example of a monk who night and day commits himself to vigils and unceasing prayer that pierce his heart and causes tears to flow. Thus, the relation between *catányxis* and *pénthos* can be described as one of a certain “cause and effect”. That is, the pain (*catányxis*) of realizing one’s culpability is “simultaneously” followed by the tears and sorrow (*pénthos*) of having been responsible for the regrettable act. Now, although *catányxis* is described distinctly from *pénthos*, in the actual experience of a human being during the process of conversion (*metanoia*), both *catányxis* and *pénthos* effectively form a single experience by the person experiencing them. As such, in Christian spirituality in general, both *catányxis* and *pénthos* are often used interchangeably with one another because they involve a unified and organic human experience in relation to sin and salvation. The human experience referred to here is, of course, compunction.

In fact, according to Hausherr, “in practice [...] compunction, mourning and tears go together so much that they are, through metonymy, virtual equivalents [...] compunction is the cause and tears the effect”.⁵⁰ However, because of St. John Cassian, in the Latin world, the word *compunctio* (puncture, prick) has had a greater emphasis than the word *luctus* (grief, sorrow). This is why in elaborating upon the experience of conversion in the Western tradition of Christian spirituality, there is much more importance and emphasis placed upon sin and the immediate experience of the pain and shock of realizing one’s culpability and guilt than there is in the sorrow, grief and consequent tears that follow and persist afterwards

⁴⁸ “κατενύγησαν”. *The Complete Koine-English Reference Bible: New Testament, Septuagint & Strong’s Concordance*. Joshua Dickey, Kindle edition 2014.

⁴⁹ Irénée Hausherr, S.J., *The Doctrine of Compunction*, pp. 8-9.

⁵⁰ *Ibid.* p. 9.

– this dimension of *luctus* is more characteristic of the Eastern tradition of Christian spirituality.⁵¹

However for Ignatius, as we will see in the next chapter, his treatment of compunction employs both of its aspects: *catányxis* (pain and shock) and *pénthos* (tears and sorrow). Moreover, Ignatius’ use of both dynamics is somewhat unique in the Western tradition of Christian spirituality in that he purposefully utilizes the crucial role of pain and shock (*catányxis*) as well as the bitterness of tears and sorrow (*pénthos*) in the process of helping an individual on his journey of conversion within the context of the meditations on sins in the First Week of his Spiritual Exercises.⁵² Ignatius does not only remain fixed upon the shock and pain of knowing one’s culpability in the sin – a knowledge that indeed brings forth profound tears and pain, but he also addresses and utilizes the sorrow and mourning that comes out of it to help foster a certain attitude and disposition that will be spiritually useful to the exercitant afterwards. Nevertheless, before moving directly to Ignatius and the Spiritual Exercises, there are still a few more components of compunction that need to be examined first. Let us now continue with our examination of compunction by pursuing in greater detail its sources and peculiar characteristics.

E) Compunction and asceticism: the “indelible” mark of sin

Turning our attention back to compunction itself, there is an important notion of Origen regarding sin and its relation to compunction that is important to consider. According to Hausherr, who cites Origen scholar W. Völker, Origen believed that sin leaves an “indelible” mark on the soul that will be made manifest on the day of judgment. In this sense, sins previously committed can, at times, “come back to life” in the heart as forms of temptation that seek to lure the individual once again down the path of the same sin already committed. Now for Origen, the reality of sins being able “to come back to life” as temptations in the heart, truly posed a serious problem for a lasting conversion and the pursuit of a spiritual life of renewal. Accordingly, Origen advocated the importance of a life

⁵¹ “Jean Cassien n’a pas une très bonne opinion des larmes forcées. Sur ce point, il se sépare de ses maîtres orientaux”.

“Larmes” in *Dictionnaire de Spiritualité*, Beauchesne, Paris 1976, p. 295.

⁵² Ignatius’ masterful use of the dynamics of pain and sorrow together is particularly evident in *EE* 48, “demandar pena [*catányxis*], lágrimas [*pénthos*] ... con Cristo”. This point will be addressed in detail in Chapter three of our investigation.

of incessant repentance and sorrow for one's sins in order to continually foster the disposition and attitude of being constantly desirous of the salvation that was lost by sin, but brought again by God in Jesus Christ.⁵³ "The sinner must humble himself; he must bring forth 'fruits of repentance'; when thinking of the judgment to come, he must address God with prayers accompanied by intense weeping [...] The spiritual man will remember that with the growth of perfection, temptations also become stronger; he will therefore have to live in a perpetual awareness of sin".⁵⁴

The operative terms of this citation are "intense weeping" and "perpetual awareness of sin". These characteristics describe, in part, certain key components that make up compunction. Likewise, they underscore the important role that compunction occupies in a life of spiritual conversion and renewal. Moreover, such an attitude, which compunction provides, needs to be continually fostered and maintained throughout a Christian's spiritual life for it disposes the soul towards a conversion that is both authentic and enduring. Apropos to this, Hausherr quotes a line from one of Origen's homilies, *multum compunctus est, non semel, sed semper* (there be much remorse, not once, but always).⁵⁵

Within this context then, compunction can be understood further as a spiritual or godly sorrow that gives rise to repentance. On one hand, it is a feeling of sadness and suffering resulting from the sin committed against God. On the other hand, it is also the knowledge of the loss of salvation (due to sin) and the intense desire for salvation. From this, Hausherr draws the conclusion that "nothing but what engenders salvation, then, should make us sad [...] One must absolutely not be saddened by anything in this world, but only by sin [...] In beings destined for eternity, the only justifiable sorrow is for the loss of eternal happiness through sin. [Thus] the first concept of compunction: mourning for lost salvation, whether one's own or that of others".⁵⁶

Regarding compunction as "godly sorrow", Fernando Rivas also describes this mourning and sadness for the loss of salvation and the state of one's condition as *tristeza según Dios*. According to Rivas, the realization of the loss of one's original state of innocence or loss of one's "primal perfection" and, above all, the loss of salvation caused by

⁵³ "Origène, le premier, découvre dans la Bible l'idée de la douleur 'permanente' que doit entretenir en nous le sentiment du péché [compunction]".

"compunction" in *Dictionnaire de Spiritualité*, Tome II², Joseph Pegon, Beauchesne, Paris 1953, p.1312.

⁵⁴ Irénée Hausherr, S.J., *The Doctrine of Compunction in the Christian East*, Cistercian Publications Inc., Michigan, 1982. p.13.

⁵⁵ *Ibid.* p. 13.

⁵⁶ *Ibid.* p. 18.

one's alienation from God, brings about the *tristeza según Dios* – a condition that is intimately part of compunction. He elaborates this point by describing that the person who experiences the *tristeza según Dios* undergoes strong feelings of regret and penitence that, in turn, produces pain and tears. “Este arrepentimiento lleva consigo dos elementos fundamentales para la sanidad espiritual de la persona: el *duelo espiritual* y la compunción, cuya expresión más visible es el *don de lágrimas*”.⁵⁷ The underlying connection noted here between compunction and the tears that accompany compunction is a significant one. As we shall see in the exercises of the First week, tears play an important role in the expression of compunction. For the moment, let us get back to Rivas and his thoughts on *tristeza según Dios*.

At this point, it is important to make a distinction between compunction and an “act of penance” for although they are connected, they are not the same thing. One should be careful not to confuse one with the other. A priest usually gives an act of penance to the penitent after the sacrament of Confession. It sometimes involves self-mortification or some sort of devotional act performed voluntarily to show sorrow for a sin or other wrongdoing. Penance involves the fulfillment (or “satisfaction”) of a particular action or actions that is motivated by compunction. As the *Catechism of the Catholic Church* points out, “the confessor proposes the performance of certain acts of “satisfaction” or “penance” to be performed by the penitent in order to repair the harm caused by sin and to re-establish habits befitting a disciple of Christ”.⁵⁸ Compunction, on the other hand, is much more complex. As we have seen, compunction is the experience and state of being that gives rise to the desire to undertake a penance. The (oftentimes) brief duration of a penance is in contrast to the duration of the experience of compunction. While a penance typically has a point of termination – it ends. Compunction, on the other hand, can go beyond the constraints of beginning and end. As we have observed above, compunction in the monastic tradition was adopted and fostered as an interior disposition and constant attitude of “perpetual repentance” because of the realization that sins left a mark or scar that could possibly come back to life if the individual were not vigilant. Precisely because of the reality that sins once committed could more easily be committed again, a constant attitude of compunction was necessary; it was also, to a certain degree, a form of being ever vigilant in the face of man's fallen nature.

⁵⁷ Fernando Rivas Rebaque, *Terapia de las enfermedades espirituales en los Padres de la Iglesia*, San Pablo, Madrid 2008, p. 110.

⁵⁸ Libreria Editrice Vaticana, *Catechism of the Catholic Church*, United States Conference of Catholic Bishops 2011, Kindle Edition #1494.

Moreover, while Origen believed that sins left an indelible mark on the soul, Nicodemus the Hagiorite (as cited by Hausherr) likened sin to a wound, “the imprint (τύπος) of the sin remains in the soul; it is impossible to efface it completely [...] He who has stolen once, or fornicated, or murdered, can never again become as innocent and pure as if he had never stolen or fornicated [...] That is why, each time the sinner thinks back on the sins he has committed and observes the imprints and marks of his wound, he cannot but be saddened, weep, and repent, even if we assume that his wounds have been healed”.⁵⁹ In a very real sense, the attitude of compunction was a way for a Christian to not only be vigilant to the dangerous possibility of sinning again, but it was also a way to temper one’s passions – a way to foster and live a life of virtue.

F) Compunction: sorrow, joy and the love of God

Nevertheless, it would be a mistake to relegate to compunction the sole ascetical function of promoting a life of virtue. It is important to also remember that compunction – the spirit of its very essence, helps the individual to remember that it is precisely through the unbounded and unlimited love and mercy of God that he is able to be saved and reconciled to his Divine Lord. The key point here is that compunction is not solely feeling sorry for one’s sins, but compunction is also an opening to and realization of the unlimited goodness and love that God has for man. It is not only in man’s repentance that his sins are forgiven, but it is also in his realization and experience of God’s abiding and unbounded love that he is forgiven and reconciled once again in his relationship with God. Compunction brings in to unity this two-fold experience: 1) an experience of deep and profound sadness for having offended God and lost salvation and 2) the experience of God’s unbounded and merciful love that causes an overwhelming gratitude and joy for the redemption and salvation offered to the individual. Between the two, godly sorrow and godly joy, the question of whether the sorrow or the joy is more important is, in fact, irrelevant because both the sorrow and the joy are necessary passages that ultimately comprise the one whole organic experience that we have come to understand as compunction.

In one of the meditations of the First Week of the Spiritual Exercises, Ignatius

⁵⁹ Irénée Hausherr, S.J., *The Doctrine of Compunction*, p. 20.

proposes this two-fold experience of compunction to the exercitant when he invites him to, “mirar quién soy yo [...] mirar toda mi corrupción y fealdad [...] de donde han salido tantos pecados y tantas maldades y ponzoña tan turpísima” (*EE* n. 58). This part of the meditation underscores the horror and sadness of the exercitant’s condition as a sinner before God. The next part of the meditation shifts the attention of the exercitant, inviting him to look beyond himself to God and the world around him, “considerar Dios, contra quien he pecado [...] exclamación admirative con crecido afecto discurriendo por todas las criaturas, cómo me han dejado en vida y conservado en ella” (*EE* nn. 59-60). The meditation concludes with the consideration of God’s great mercy and grace that brings to the exercitant a serene and quiet joy, “acabar con un coloquio de misericordia, razonando y dando gracias a Dios nuestro Señor porque me ha dado vida” (*EE* n. 61).

Before moving on to a more detailed examination of the causes of compunction, let us recapitulate a few key points covered thus far. First, because of the “indelible” mark of sin, an individual’s disposition to salvation is never complete or perfect while he is on earth. Therefore, it is necessary, as it were, to continually “work out” one’s salvation (*multum compunctus est, non semel, sed semper*). In this, we understand the continual need for the attitude and disposition of compunction throughout the entire life of the individual Christian. In fact, Hausherr who refers to Evagrius, notes that it is the gift of tears that will eventually soften the hardness of the heart, “first, pray for the gift of tears, to soften by compunction the inherent hardness of your soul, and then, as you confess your sinfulness to the Lord, to obtain pardon from him. Even when this pardon is obtained, tears are still needed [...] If it seems to you that you no longer need to weep in prayer for your sins, consider how far you have gone from God [...] For the moment it is enough to understand the nature of *compunction*. It is mourning for salvation lost, a mourning which must be perpetual, just as we must perpetually work out our salvation”.⁶⁰

Finally, it is also important to keep in mind that the other fundamental component of this “godly sorrow” – indeed that which makes this sorrow truly “godly” – is the dimension of thanksgiving that is involved with it. This component of gratitude is clearly present in the part of the meditation that explicitly states, “exclamación admirative con crecido afecto” (*EE* 60) – the exercitant is so grateful and happy to still be alive. And so although the individual is experiencing sorrow for his sins, he still feels and experiences a truly profound and authentic gratitude of being sustained in life as a consequence of being the recipient of God’s

⁶⁰ Irénée Hausherr, S.J., *The Doctrine of Compunction*, p. 24-25.

grace and salvation. Therefore, in true and authentic compunction, sorrow cannot exist without thanksgiving, just as true repentance cannot be devoid of an experience of God's divine mercy and love. Otherwise, compunction (or rather, a caricature of it – false scruples) would quickly degenerate into a type of sterile self-immolation that would eventually bring about a form of despair that would ultimately lead to a kind of spiritual suicide.

Psalm 126

When the Lord restored the fortunes of Zion, we were like those who dream. Then our mouth was filled with laughter and our tongue with shouts of joy; then they said among the nations, 'The Lord has done great things for them.' The Lord has done great things for us; we are glad. Restore our fortunes, O Lord, like the watercourses in the Negeb! May those who sow in tears reap with shouts of joy! He that goes forth weeping, bearing the seed for sowing, shall come home with shouts of joy, bringing his sheaves with him.

II. The causes of compunction.

A) Compunction as a gift from God

According to St. Jerome's commentary on the Bible, this psalm can be understood as a communal prayer uttered during the first few years that followed Israel's return from Babylon. "Restore our fortunes", indicates that Israel's return was not all that was hoped for.⁶¹ In the midst of this situation of sorrow, what stands out in stark contrast is the exclamation, "May those who sow in tears reap with shouts of joy!" Behind this exclamation, uttered in tears, is a heart felt trust in God who will turn their tears to joy. Likewise, the ultimate "cause" of compunction as we shall now investigate, is actually God who imparts it as a grace and gift. From the very beginning, one must understand and constantly remember that compunction is, first and foremost, a gift from God. As Hausherr remarks, to forget that compunction is God's gift is also the best way to lose it.⁶² It would be great presumption on the part of an individual to try to elicit within himself compunction. You cannot "force" compunction. Otherwise, to do so would run the risk of contrivance. Authentic compunction does not depend upon the theatrics of the individual; he is not some sort of actor in a play. Nor is true compunction some form of psychological self-suggestion

⁶¹ Raymond E. Brown, SS, Joseph A. Fitzmyer, S.J., Roland E. Murphy, O.Carm., *Comentario Biblico «San Jeronimo»*, Tomo II, Ediciones Cristiandad, Madrid, 1971, p. 670.

⁶² Irénée Hausherr, S.J., *The Doctrine of Compunction*, p. 54.

that one can convince oneself to assume. Compunction is, first and foremost, a prodigious grace from God. Any form of self-induced “compunction” is nothing more than artifice on the part of the individual – an artifice that leads to nothing other than a form of comical drama, at best. But graver still, this type of artifice is the worst form of self-deception. It is deception precisely because the truth and awareness of God’s forgiveness and salvation (which brings about the gift of tears of both sorrow and joy), can come solely from God’s initiative and revelation – not by man’s will. In the final analysis, it is God alone who can reveal to man his true condition of brokenness and sinfulness. As such, man cannot and should not, in any way, try to induce himself to “compunction”.

In the *Spiritual Exercises*, Ignatius was keenly aware of the primacy of God’s grace in all human endeavor and so prefaced all of the meditations with the preparatory prayer where man does not rely upon his own initiative, but rather relies on the grace of God to accompany him throughout his time of prayer, “la oración preparatoria es pedir gracia a Dios nuestro Señor, para que todas mis intenciones, acciones y operaciones sean puramente ordenadas en servicio y alabanza de su divina majestad” (EE 46). This preparatory prayer is, above all, an affirmation that all actions and operations begin with God and his grace; the initiative is always God’s – it’s His gift.

B) The difficulties of receiving compunction and tears

We have now seen how compunction and its accompanying tears is not something that can be arrived at on one’s own personal initiative, but must be received as a gift from God through a proper disposition – one of openness and availability. Moreover, it is a grace that one may, in the first instance, be open to receive. It may even be refused outright at first. In fact, we should not necessarily take for granted that there is even a great initial desire for such a gift.⁶³ This is especially true when we take into consideration the fact that an individual is not naturally inclined (from the point of view of fallen human nature) to admit to and accept the truth of the sins committed that is revealed by God through an authentic

⁶³ This is why Ignatius was wise in having the exercitant ask God for what he should “want and desire”, so that the exercitant may be open to anything God wills – even if it may be something that the exercitant would not have initially chosen for himself in the beginning, such as the stark truth of sin that compunction requires.

disposition of compunction. The creation narrative in Genesis (*Gn.* 2: 4-17), where after the fall, Adam reacts to the sin committed by first hiding and then blaming Eve is an example of this. For indeed, no one of his own accord (at least at first) desires the pain, suffering and shame (echoes of Ignatius and the First week of the *Exercises* ring here) of admitting the truth of one's sins and faults; this is why it is initially difficult for us to admit when we are wrong or guilty of something we committed. Because of this, there is, oftentimes, an immediate reaction to avoid taking responsibility for our bad and sinful actions. To do so would be painful and embarrassing and so we "reflexively" try to avoid it through denial or self-justification or even self-deception.

Because compunction comes initially as a divine grace, it requires one to see the reality of one's sin before God. Thus, the reality of damnation is also made clear. Furthermore, because compunction dwells in the truth, it also renders the individual capable of admitting the fault, making him desirous of "confessing" (both in the non-sacramental and sacramental sense) the guilt – notwithstanding the fact that in doing so, the admission would involve a process that implicates a painful and humiliating experience. This sharp, jabbing pain that is experienced in the acceptance and admission of the truth of having sinned is precisely part of the experience of *catányxis* within compunction! Consequently, to "arrive" at the attitude and disposition of compunction is, by no means, an easy experience, which is why it needs to be initiated by God. However, as we have seen, one must be disposed to receive this gift. This is why it is so important to cherish and foster the attitude and disposition of compunction so as to be always ready for it when God imparts such a grace. Referring to Ephrem, Hausherr remarks that "without the help of grace the soul could never fill itself with compunction or confess its sins to the Lord as it ought."⁶⁴

Additionally, it must be noted that even though God may be offering the gift of compunction and tears, it is still possible for an individual to initially refuse such a gift, given the embarrassment involved in admitting to one's sins. As such, God through His providence will, at times, use the difficult situations and complicated circumstances of our life in order to awaken in us the tears of godly sorrow. Without taking away from the depth and complexity that the problem of suffering poses, nevertheless one can, through the lens of compunction (particularly through its component of *catányxis*), glean a certain understanding of how God may make use of it in His plans. "Through these terrible blows, God takes it upon himself to give the shock – the *κατάλυξις* – which causes tears to spring up, for the salvation of those he

⁶⁴ Irénée Hausherr, S.J., *The Doctrine of Compunction*, p. 55.

loves”.⁶⁵ Thus, within this context, we are able to understand that the suffering and pain that God permits in this life can effectively become the means and the instruments through which He disposes the soul to conversion – precisely by means of a “shock” or pain that emanates from the suffering. This shock, in turn, gives rise to the truth that becomes the foundation of compunction and the consequent tears that flow thereafter.

C) Compunction and suffering

However, it would be presumptuous and simply wrong to assume that all suffering brings about compunction and conversion. We also know that there are some cases whereupon a person, who when confronted with a situation of suffering and hardship, will throw his fists up to God in spiteful anger and defiance. Since God’s grace is also mediated through suffering, how is it that some individuals, instead of experiencing compunction, react in the opposite manner to the suffering and hardship and instead become resentful and bitter? Without pretending to give an exhaustive answer to this question (it is not the scope of this paper to meditate upon suffering), we can cite Hausherr’s remark, which will point us at least, in the right direction. “What in other men causes spite and resentment will, in the ascetic, reawaken awareness⁶⁶ of his faults”.⁶⁷ The operative term here is “in the ascetic”. What is it about ascetics that dispose them more than others, to the gift of compunction and tears? What makes them capable of turning to God even in the midst of the hardships and suffering of life?

To begin with, ascetics are those individuals, who through both spiritual and corporal disciplines are constantly exercising a life of virtue in view of drawing closer in their relationship with God. The ability of the ascetic to be open and aware of his own faults is the fruit of the virtues that he practices – particularly the virtue of humility. As Hausherr points out, “If the soul is humble and unattached, everything, good and evil, in it or in others, will be turned to compunction”.⁶⁸ In this way, the heart of an ascetic is able to be open to the hardships and suffering of life in such a way that they can become vehicles capable of

⁶⁵ *Ibid.* p. 56.

⁶⁶ It is upon the reawakened “awareness of faults” that the gift of compunction and tears are built.

⁶⁷ Irénée Hausherr, S.J., *The Doctrine of Compunction*,. 59.

⁶⁸ *Ibid.*

transporting the individual to compunction and conversion. Truly then, it is the humble heart that provides the openness necessary for the reception of the gift compunction and tears. Although God's special grace through suffering is offered to all, it is only the open and humble heart that is capable to welcome and embrace such a grace, while a proud, closed and hard heart will reject and despise such a grace. In the face of every unfortunate and evil circumstance, an open and humble heart can be turned, by compunction, towards God. On the contrary, in the face of the same evil and unfortunate circumstances, a proud and hardened heart closes in on itself and grows in bitterness and spite, thus remaining in a suffering that never bears and fruit.

D) Compunction and a life of virtue

Therefore, the "virtue" of the heart and its consequent disposition become the primary criterion that help determine the ability of a person to embrace the grace offered through suffering and hardship. What ought to become increasingly evident here is that although God's grace is always free and freely given, reception and maintenance of God's grace, nevertheless requires our cooperation – most especially through a life of virtue. This is the heart of an "ascetic" that Hausherr mentioned above. Additionally, because compunction and tears are graces that are freely given by God, they should be never taken for granted. We still need to continually work on fostering the attitude and disposition that keeps the grace of compunction alive in our hearts. In the *Dictionnaire de Spiritualité*, this two-fold nature of compunction comprised of *activity* (the individual's effort) and *passivity* (God's gift) are referred to as "compunction-virtue" and "compunction-grace".⁶⁹ In the spiritual life, Ignatius himself was very aware of this important and fundamental interplay between man's nature and God's grace. This is particularly evident in his *Spiritual Exercises*. Ignatius, from the very beginning states that:

...por este nombre, ejercicios espirituales, se entiende todo modo de

⁶⁹ "Avant tout, il faut distinguer compunction-grâce et compunction-vertu." "compunction", *Dictionnaire de Spiritualité*, Tome II², Joseph Pegon, Beauchesne, Paris 1953, p. 1318.

examinar la conciencia, de meditar, de contemplar, de orar vocal y mental, y de otras operaciones [...] Porque así como al pasear, caminar y correr son ejercicios corporales, por la misma manera, todo modo de preparar y disponer el ánima para quitar de sí todas las afecciones desordenadas y, después de quitadas, para buscar y hallar la voluntad divina en la disposición de su vida para la salud del ánima, se llaman ejercicios espirituales (EE 1).

Paying attention solely to the quantity of activities that the exercitant will be engaged in (to examine, to prepare, to dispose, to seek, to find, etc...), even the title itself includes the word “exercises”, which accentuates the active role of the exercitant in the activities that he is about to embark upon. From a certain point of view, this emphasis on man’s efforts in his spiritual journey may ring of something akin to Pelagianism. However, as we all know, Ignatius was anything but a Pelagian. This is evidenced by so many of the subsequent meditations and contemplations of the *Spiritual Exercises*. However, one contemplation in particular most especially showcases the central role of Divine grace:

*... mirar como Dios habita en las criaturas [...] y así en mí dándome ser, animando, sensando y haciéndome entender (EE 235).
...considerar cómo Dios trabaja y labora por mí en todas cosas [...] dando ser (EE 236).
... mirar como todos los bienes y dones descienden de arriba [...] y así justicia, bondad, piedad, misericordia, etc. (EE 237).*

In this contemplation, Ignatius completes the beautiful balance of the interplay between human action and divine grace. Here, God’s unique and central role of Creator, Giver, and Sustainer of all Creation is lovingly contemplated. Divine grace is the origin of all gifts: life, goodness, justice, mercy and all that is good. Man’s part is to dispose himself to God, knowing that God, by His grace, will bring to fruition and completion all that is necessary.

Turning back to compunction and tears, we know that Ignatius’ own conversion experience was strongly marked by them. The *Spiritual Exercises*, particularly those meditations and activities of the First Week, resonate with the wisdom of Ignatius’ experience of compunction. We will examine this in more detail as we now embark upon the third and final chapter of our investigation. Specifically, we will look at the First Week of the *Spiritual Exercises* and compunction, keeping in mind the important interplay between human action and divine grace in the whole process of conversion and union with God.

Chapter Three

The First Week of the Spiritual Exercises and Compunction⁷⁰

*Pray therefore humbly unto the Lord that He will give thee the spirit of compunction and say in the language of the prophet, 'Feed me O Lord, with bread of tears and give me plenteousness of tears to drink.'*⁷¹

(“The Imitation of Christ” Bk I; Ch XXI)

I. The early influences of Ignatius’ conversion and compunction.

A) The Christocentric factor

From the onset of our chapter on the treatment of the First week of the *Spiritual Exercises* and compunction, it is important to consciously keep in mind that at the center, at the heart of both compunction and the First week (and all of the *Spiritual Exercises* for that matter) is the figure, the person of Christ himself. This is evidenced by the fact that the very first meditation of the First week, which involve the first, second and third sins with the three powers [of the soul], concludes with a colloquy with Christ, “Imaginando a Cristo nuestro Señor delante y puesto en cruz, hacer un coloquio” (*EE* 53). That the exercitant is invited to specifically make his colloquy with the crucified Christ is very significant, because it underscores the point that compunction and being sorry for one’s sins, is necessarily in-

⁷⁰ Because of the close association that we have seen between the experience of tears and compunction within the scope of our investigation, I have opted to use just the word “compunction” to also be inclusive of tears. Therefore, unless otherwise specifically noted, the word “compunction” also takes into account the tears shed.

⁷¹ Thomas À Kempis, *The Imitation of Christ*, Harvard Classics, Vol.7, Part 2, Dover Thrift Edition 2012, Book 1, Chapter 21, Kindle location 533.

relation-to another person – with that “other person” being my enemy, my neighbor, my friend, etc.... Of course, the archetypical “other person” one sins against is first and foremost God, especially through the person of Christ. This “in-relation-to” another person in regards to compunction is important because it is a reminder (and warning) that authentic compunction is necessarily relational and dialogical in that it involves recognition of having sinned against another person. False compunction only involves feeling pain and sorrow for oneself and feeling bad for having committed something wrong, which could be nothing other than a form of “regretting a mistake made” or some morbid fixation with one’s own “purity”. This has less to do with compunction and more to do with concern for one’s pride, image and “self-perfection”. Indeed, if one is to truly experience authentic compunction, it necessarily has to be in relation to the Lord against whom we have sinned. Santiago G. Arzubialde’s rhetorical question bears this point out:

Pero, ¿de dónde brota al hombre la conciencia purificadora del pecado? [...] El sentido del pecado es un don concedido por Dios al hombre en su amor. Y éste no se identifica jamás con la vivencia del ‘yo manchado’ [...] No es tampoco el sentimiento derivado del simple quebrantamiento de una norma o de la transgresión de un orden establecido [...] estas vivencias acaban en la tristeza y tienen como sedimento la fijación obsesiva en el escrúpulo, la depresión, la angustia, la negación o la proyección. Y son otros tantos modos sutiles y disfrazados de amor propio que, contemplándose a sí mismo, no se sitúa ante el amor de la otra persona que le rescata precisamente con su amor. Nadie se concede a sí mismo el perdón. El perdón nos viene de fuera, del otro. En este caso, de Dios. El sentimiento religioso del pecado tiene siempre un marco dialogal de amistad y de amor.⁷²

Here, we observe that the true sense of sin is a gift from God. Precisely because it is a gift, there is, *de facto*, a relational dimension to compunction, i.e., the relationship between “he who gives” and “he who receives”. As Arzubialde remarks, it is a beautiful relationship, a dialogue marked by friendship and love. Hence, the colloquies that follow each of the meditations are always done in the presence of the Lord in an intimate spirit of love and friendship, “El coloquio se hace, propiamente hablando, así como un amigo habla a otro” (*EE*

⁷² Santiago G. Arzubialde, S.J., *Theologia Spiritualis: El camino espiritual del seguimiento a Jesús*. Tomo I., Universidad Pontificia Comillas, Madrid 1989, p. 115.

54). Therefore, to properly contextualize compunction within Ignatian spirituality, especially with respect to the First week, we will begin our investigation by looking into the two Christ-centered influences that left an important mark upon Ignatius and, as a consequence, on the style of the *Spiritual Exercises* themselves. The two principle works that we will examine are: the *Life of Christ (Vita Christi)* of Ludolph of Saxony and the *Imitation of Christ (Imitatio Christi)* of Thomas à Kempis.

B) 'The Life of Christ' and Carthusian influences

During Ignatius' period of convalescence and the beginning of his conversion at his family's estate, we know that he was exposed to books on the life of the saints and also on the life of Christ. The particular version of the *Life of Christ* that he read was from Ludolph of Saxony who was a Carthusian monk (AU 5).⁷³ That fact that he was a Carthusian monk is a very important detail because it gives us a window into the first spiritualities that Ignatius was exposed to and influenced by – in this case the Carthusian spirituality. Apparently, his initial exposure to Carthusian spirituality was so strong that he, at one point, thought of possibly entering a Charter House:

Y echando sus cuentas, qué es lo que haría después que viniese de Jerusalem para que siempre viviese en penitencia, ofrecíasele meterse en la Cartuja de Sevilla, sin decir quién era para que en menos le tuviesen y allí nunca comer sino hierbas. Mas, cuando otra vez tornaba a pensar en las penitencias, que andando por el mundo deseaba hacer, resfriábasele el deseo de la Cartuja, temiendo que no pudiese ejercitar el odio que contra sí tenía concebido. Todavía a un criado de casa, que iba a Burgos, mandó que se informase de la regla de la Cartuja, y la información que della tuvo le pareció bien. (AU 12)

Now there are several important observations that we can glean from this passage. First, it affirms that Ignatius was truly interested in the Carthusian life and thus, some form of ascetic

⁷³ Ignacio de Loyola, *Autobiografía*, Edited by Josep M.^a Rambla Blanch, S.J., Mensajero – Sal Terrae, Barcelona 1983.

life of virtue, which is why he asked for a copy of its Rule and considered entering it. Second, his predilection (at the time) for practicing a life of penitence is also clearly evident in this passage. In fact, his desire to enter a Charter house was only mitigated by the possibility of not being able to practice a life of penitence as he had conceived that it was necessary for him to live at that point in his spiritual journey – hence the phrase, “temiendo que no pudiese ejercitar el odio que contra sí tenía concebido.”

All this information gathered up to this point, indicates to us that the influence of Carthusian spirituality, manifested in Ludolph of Saxony’s *Life of Christ*, helped Ignatius to draw closer to the person of Christ in a more personal way. Paul Shore’s study on Ludolph’s *Vita Christi* and on Ignatius elaborates further, “[for Ignatius] the *Vita*, despite its dependence on earlier writings, was a new experience, not only conveying details about the earthly life of Christ but also proposing ways of drawing closer to the risen and real Christ that were neither overwhelming nor impractical for the man or woman of affairs”.⁷⁴ Ignatius, who was still in the incipient phase of his spiritual life at that time of his reading Ludolph’s book, was certainly marked by this “new” way of knowing the person of Christ. In fact, Ignatius was so moved by the contemplations in the *Life of Christ* and the person of Christ therein that he would actually write down Christ’s words in colored ink on separate pages. In the end, the quantity of pages in which he meticulously wrote Christ’s words amounted to three hundred sheets (AU 11). What was it about this book that so touched Ignatius that it moved him to write numerous pages and how else might they have influenced Ignatius and the *Spiritual Exercises*?

Clearly, the most important influence that the book, *Life of Christ*, had on Ignatius was to introduce him to the person of Christ in an “engaging” way – a way that eventually helped start his conversion experience. What exactly was the “engaging” manner of the book? According to Paul Shore, in his study of Ludolph’s *Life of Christ*, he points out that “Ludolph’s style resembles that of an effective preacher: he creates vivid images of people and places, drawing upon sensory language and lovingly described detail to draw the reader into the story”.⁷⁵ This style, which engaged the senses through words and many quotes from Holy Scripture and the Church fathers, must have been a soothing balm for the convalescing

⁷⁴ Peter Shore, *The ‘Vita Christi’ of Ludolph of Saxony and its influence on the Spiritual exercises of Ignatius of Loyola*, *Studies in the Spirituality of Jesuits*, 30/1, January 1998, p. 7.

⁷⁵ Peter Shore, *Spiritual Journeys: Books Illustrating the First Two Centuries of Contemplation and Action of the Society of Jesus*, St. Louis University 2009, Exhibited: http://libraries.slu.edu/a/digital_collections/spiritual-journeys/ludolph.html

Ignatius who originally only longed for books on romance and chivalry. Interestingly, the actual presentation of the text most likely influenced Ignatius as well. Shore elaborates, “the reader first encounters the narrative (*lectio*), in which the incidents of Christ’s life are related; then he is called to meditate upon the significance of the events”.⁷⁶ This, more or less, is also the basic structure of the meditations in the *Spiritual Exercises*. Although Ignatius does not use flowery language in the *Exercises*, he still presents the points, after which, the exercitant is also invited to engage in them.

As we can now gather, the *Life of Christ* of Ludolph of Saxony as well as the Carthusian spirituality that undergirded it (such as silence, solitude, the extremely personal relationship with Christ, the use of the emotional and affective dimension, the active engaging of the individual in the narrative and so forth), helped Ignatius to acquire certain, important sensibilities that would profoundly influence his articulation of the meditations on sins in the First week – especially in regard to how compunction is treated in the colloquies. We will elaborate more on these points in the section specifically dealing with the meditations on sin– especially in regard to the colloquies. However, we must now turn our attention back to another important source, Thomas à Kempis’ *Imitation of Christ*, which likewise had an important impact on Ignatius and his experience and articulation of compunction, as we shall now see.

C) Asceticism, piety and ‘*The Imitation of Christ*’

1. The word “imitation”

Although we do not have precise records that indicate how and when Ignatius was first exposed to Thomas à Kempis’ *Imitation of Christ*, we do know that it had a profound influence on him as well. This is evidenced by the many references to it throughout many of Ignatius’ writings. In fact, the section heading on the *Imitation of Christ* in the *Diccionario de Espiritualidad Ignaciana* comments that “Ignacio de Loyola sintió una grande

⁷⁶ Peter Shore, *The ‘Vita Christi’*. p. 6.

predilección especial por el ‘Gersoncito’, como él llamó familiarmente al libro”.⁷⁷ Perhaps the greatest proof that the Kempis’ book had such a great impact on Ignatius is the fact the he specifically references the book in his *Spiritual Exercises*, “mucho aprovecha el leer algunos ratos en los libros De imitation Christi o de los Evangelios” (EE 100) – to recommend the *Imitation of Christ* along side Sacred Scripture is validation indeed. As such, let us look a little more closely at the general structure of the book, paying special attention to those elements that most probably influenced Ignatius with respect to compunction and the other dynamics of the First week related to it. To begin with, it should be made clear that although the title of Kempis’ book is the *Imitation of Christ*, the term “imitation” needs to be understood correctly. “Imitation” certainly should not be understood as merely copying the external actions of Christ and repeating his words and counsels. The book is not about mimicry. As the book itself states at the very start:

*What doth it profit thee to enter into deep discussion concerning the Holy Trinity, if thou lack humility, and be thus displeasing to the Trinity? For verily it is not deep words that make a man holy and upright; it is a good life which maketh a man dear to God. I had rather feel contrition than be skilful in the definition thereof. If thou knewest the whole Bible, and the sayings of all the philosophers, what should all this profit thee without the love and grace of God? Vanity of vanities, all is vanity, save to love God, and Him only to serve. That is the highest wisdom, to cast the world behind us, and to reach forward to the heavenly kingdom.*⁷⁸

The passage consistently criticizes the external or “superficial” appearances of things. Hence, the importance is not so much in “discussions” of the Holy Trinity as it is in the contemplation of it. It is not “deep words” that make a man holy, but an actually good life. This is the classic dichotomy of theory vs. praxis. In a certain sense, the “imitation” of Christ is not so much in trying to be “like” Christ as it is in desiring to “follow” him. In this sense, perhaps “imitation” has more to do about discipleship than anything else. Thus, it is not so much a question of technique as it is about the beauty of a relationship. “No se trata, pues, de imitar un modelo externo, ni tampoco simplemente moral, sino en el sentido profundo de

⁷⁷ “Imitatio Christi”, *Diccionario de Espiritualidad Ignaciana*, (G.E.1.ed.) Mensajero – Sal Terrae, Bilbao – Santander 2007², p. 998.

⁷⁸ Thomas À Kempis, *The Imitation of Christ*, (Bk I; Ch 3), Kindle location 157-162.

conformación y comunión del creyente con Cristo”.⁷⁹ This is why the passage ends by proffering up the primacy of the love of God, “to love God, and Him only to serve. That is the highest wisdom”. Therefore, the true spirit of “imitating” Christ is about conformation, relationship, discipleship, and communion with Christ. It is with this meaning that Ignatius ultimately understood and applied the *Imitation of Christ* to his life and to the *Spiritual Exercises*. Let us now continue with our examination of the book to glean its specific influences on Ignatius’ sense of compunction.

2. The significance of titles

Interestingly enough, the *Imitation of Christ* was also known as *El contemptus mundi*⁸⁰, which was taken from the title of the first chapter of the book, “Of the Imitation of Christ and of Contempt of the World and all its Vanities”. What this indicates to the reader is that there is a strong influence of asceticism to the book and that it will most likely have a pronounced emphasis in promoting a certain ascetic way of life. This is borne out by the fact that this book was also known by the title, “Librito de la reformación del hombre, dividido en cuatro partes”.⁸¹ The focus on reforming one’s life here is faintly echoed in the preface to the First week of the *Spiritual Exercises*, “Ejercicios Espirituales para vencer a sí mismo y ordenar su vida” (EE 21). Arguable, Ignatius’ tone here is even more ascetic and radical than the *Imitation*’s, especially when you compare the word the *Imitation* uses, “reformación” with the word that Ignatius chooses, “vencer a sí mismo”. Unlike Ludolph of Saxony’s style of presenting the *Life of Christ* in attractive narrative style, Kempis’ *Imitation of Christ* is more austere and succinct. “[El Kempis] no presenta una doctrina sistemática sobre el modo de imitar Cristo, ni sobre su vida y sus misterios, sino más bien una colección de consejos ascético-espirituales y de prácticas de piedad”.⁸² Here is an excellent example of the succinct and ascetic style of the *Imitation* that influenced Ignatius both in style and in content, “I desire no consolation which taketh away from me compunction”.⁸³ This phrase is

⁷⁹ “Imitatio Christi”, *Diccionario de Espiritualidad Ignaciana*, p. 994.

⁸⁰ *Ibid.* p. 995.

⁸¹ *Ibid.*

⁸² *Ibid.* p. 997.

⁸³ Thomas Á Kempis, *The Imitation of Christ*, (Bk. II; Ch. 10), Kindle location 979.

paradigmatic of the importance Ignatius gives to compunction and of the radical asceticism with which he promotes it. However, before we actually examine how this influenced the meditations on sin, let us first look more closely at the inner structure of the *Imitation*.

The main titles of the sections that divide a book give a fair indication of the content and direction a book takes. In scrutinizing the titles that divide the book of the *Imitation of Christ*, we find the following: *Book I: Admonitions Profitable for the Spiritual Life; Book II: Admonitions Concerning the Inner Life; Book III: On Inward Consolation; Book IV: Of the Sacrament of the Altar*. Without much effort, one can see that the common thread in all of the titles has something to do with the interior of the person (to wit: *spiritual life; inner life; inward consolation; sacrament of the altar* or “communion”). All of this indicates that a great deal of introspection⁸⁴ will be required of the person embarking upon the *Imitation*. Charles Healey elaborates, “The spirituality of the ‘Imitation of Christ’ is predominantly inward looking [...] There is, first of all, the relationship between the individual and God [...] Recognizing the importance of the knowledge of God and the knowledge of self for the growth and development of the interior life, it stresses Saint Augustine’s prayer: ‘Grant Lord, that I may know myself and that I may know thee’”.⁸⁵

3. The “ascetic” life

In order to “know oneself”, there needs to be a regimen of periodically examining oneself; this makes the examination of conscience essential. In order to “know thee” (i.e., God), one needs to have a certain knowledge of where one stands in relation to God; here, how one lives his own life (with virtue or with vice) can be indicative of the proximity or distance from God. In this regard, the sacrament of confession is particularly helpful because if at the heart of this sacrament is God’s love manifested in His mercy and forgiveness, then this sacrament is about relationship and not about getting into the “good graces” of God. But more importantly, it is about getting to know God even more. Forgiveness makes this even more possible. This centrality of confession in regard to an individual’s relationship with

⁸⁴ The word “introspection” is meant here to embrace all of various activities that require the person to recollect themselves (usually in silence and solitude). These actions can range from an examination of conscience to meditation, contemplation and everything in between.

⁸⁵ Charles J. Healey, S.J., *The Imitation of Christ Revisited*, Notes on the Spiritual Exercises of St. Ignatius of Loyola, Ed. David L. Fleming, S.J., Review for Religious Studies, St. Louis 1985, p. 129.

God gives us the proper perspective with which to situate compunction. In a way, compunction can be viewed as a kind of catalyst for confession – a means not only of reconciliation, but also of a deeper union with God. The *Imitation of Christ*, especially through its asceticism and particularly through compunction, most certainly influenced Ignatius’ development of the *examination of conscience* and the *general confession* that we find in the First week of the *Spiritual Exercises*. Again, let us continue with compunction in the *Imitation* in order to get a glimpse of how it may have had influenced Ignatius, particularly in his drafting of the *examination of conscience* and *general confession* in the *First week*.

Turning now to the chapter specifically dedicated to compunction, which is found in Book One, Chapter Twenty-one of the *Imitation*, the first thing we should note is the title, “Of Compunction of Heart”. By specifying that compunction is of the “heart”, an important detail is being revealed here. The heart, *par excellence*, is the locus of intimacy; often attributed to it, is the depth from whence our feelings and emotions emanate, which is why it is traditionally understood as the physical center of the soul. Compunction of the heart has everything to do with what is most affective, what is most personal, what is most intimate in the person. Likewise, what transpires in compunction directly affects the deepest parts of a person. With this understood, let us look at what the *Imitation* actually says about compunction:

*If thou wilt make any progress keep thyself in the fear of God, and long not to be too free, but restrain all thy senses under discipline and give not thyself up to senseless mirth. Give thyself to compunction of heart and thou shalt find devotion. Compunction openeth the way for many good things, which dissoluteness is wont quickly to lose. It is wonderful that any man can ever rejoice heartily in this life who considereth and weigheth his banishment, and the manifold dangers which beset his soul.*⁸⁶

The passage immediately begins with the subject of “progress” – spiritual progress. The dynamic that is connoted by the word “progress” is one of improvement, to make better. Fundamentally, what is being proposed here is for the individual to make a conscious effort to always improve and strive for more with respect to the spiritual life and ultimately, with

⁸⁶ Thomas À Kempis, *The Imitation of Christ*, (Bk. I; Ch. 21), Kindle location 533-537.

respect to the individual's relationship with God. From a certain point of view, we can see how the *Imitation's* concern for "progress" foreshadows Ignatius's well-known sensibility of *magis* – the importance of constantly striving for more, to continually try to do and be more in all things.

The next part counsels that the individual should strive to "restrain all [his] senses under discipline" and to not give himself up to mirth. Taken on face value, this advice seems absurd. Understood literally, it tells the individual to repress his senses and to not allow himself to be happy, thereby leaving the door only open to sorrow. This obviously is a incorrect understanding of the passage. Did not Jesus want our joy to be full?⁸⁷ However, if this advice is understood within the context of living an ascetic life, then everything changes. As such, let us now take a quick glance at some of the key points of an ascetic life. According to the *Oxford Dictionary of the Christian Church*, an ascetic life is seen in part "as a purification of the soul from its passions [...] a means for loving God more perfectly and for attaining contemplation [...] In the Middle Ages asceticism underwent a certain modification in that it became increasingly inspired by the desire for conformation to the sufferings of the Redeemer [...] It springs from the love of God and aims at overcoming all the obstacles to this love in the soul. It is thus not an end in itself but essentially a preparation for the life of union with God".⁸⁸

4. "Sympathy" and compunction of the heart

Thus, the "conformation to the sufferings" of Christ is the key point to understanding the reason behind not seeking "mirth" or happiness, as well as the impetus for restraining the senses. There is, in all this, a desire to be respectful (and if possible) participatory in the sufferings of Christ. In doing this, there is a real desire to be united with him. Therefore, behind the repression of the senses is the desire for silence and recollection; behind the repression of mirth and amusement is the keen awareness of needing to be respectful of Christ's sufferings.⁸⁹ In essence, this chapter on compunction in the *Imitation of Christ*, is directing the individual, through an ascetic life of virtue (and penitence), to seek and strive

⁸⁷ "These things I have spoken to you, that my joy may be in you, and that your joy may be full" (*Jn* 15: 11).

⁸⁸ "asceticism", *The Oxford Dictionary of the Christian Church*, Ed. F.L. Cross & E.A. Livingston, Oxford University Press, Oxford 1997³, p. 113.

⁸⁹ Here, we can begin to understand where Ignatius' sense of "discrete charity" may have come from.

for a sympathy of heart. “Sympathy” especially in the etymological sense of the word: συμπαθῆαι – “having a fellow feeling (esp. “suffering”)”.⁹⁰ The distinction that the etymological sense of the word imparts is crucial. Whereas the word “sympathy” in common parlance simply means, “to feel sorry for”, when the word is understood from the depth of its roots, we get much more. Not only is there a “feeling sorry for”, but there is the implication of “going through the same feeling” in terms of “experiencing with” – this is what is meant by “having a fellow feeling”, there is a commonality present, which the *OED* points out.

When “compunction of the heart” is understood in terms of a heart that possesses such a “sympathy”, then we truly begin to comprehend that the “imitation” of Christ is perhaps not so much about repeating or copying Christ’s way of life, as it is about actually striving to be with him, to feel with him, to suffer with him. In the final analysis, this is in effect, a real union with Christ. Perhaps it is in this “sympathy” that the *prelude* (*EE* 48) in the exercises is inviting the exercitant to ask for “pain, tears and suffering with Christ suffering” – verily, to receive the grace to share in the experiences with Christ as he suffered his passion. It’s interesting to ponder that Ignatius’ desire to be placed with Christ was not only limited to a sense of wanting to be a part of Christ’s company (as in a mere social aggregation), but it also implicated the desire to be “with him” in the sense of being of the same heart and mind and actions. We see this sentiment echoed in n. 93 of the *Exercises*, when Christ is inviting those who want to follow him, he tells them that, “quien quisiere venir conmigo ha de ser contento de comer come yo, y así de beber y vestir, etc.; asimismo ha de trabajar conmigo en el día y vigilar en la noche”. It is with this same spirit that the exercitant is invited to ask for “pain, tears and suffering with Christ suffering”. That is, to experience the passion, pains, tears and sufferings of Christ not as a spectator, but as a “sympathetic” participant.

5. Devotion, penance and the Church Fathers

However, an individual does not arrive at this compunction of the heart solely by having strong feelings or desiring it. As we have elaborated earlier, compunction is both a gift and an effort; it is a grace from God that can be received by an individual who disposes himself to it. The manner in which an individual is able to dispose himself towards God’s

⁹⁰ “sympathy”, *The Oxford English Dictionary*, Oxford University Press, Oxford 2009².

gift is through a life of virtue and penitence – the ascetic life as the *Imitation* presents above. It is important to note that there are two poles present here. On the one hand, the *Imitation* is very devotional in relation to Christ, especially in regard to his suffering and death. On the other hand, there is a strong asceticism to its counsels (“I desire no consolation which taketh away from me compunction”).⁹¹ As in Ludolph’s *Life of Christ*, the *Imitation* also drew from the wisdom and teachings of the Church fathers to impart and promote a life of virtue and penitence. In fact, Ignatius was deeply impressed and influenced by the Church fathers’ teachings. According to Hugo Rahner, “The great Fathers of the Church, Greek and Latin alike, were for him a shining light in the development of his own philosophy [...] Ignatius was well able to call upon what he learned of the Fathers in Paris and produce appropriate quotations on his own account”.⁹² Ignatius found the Church fathers to be so important, that he even made reference to them in the *Spiritual Exercises*, “Alabar la doctrina positiva y escolástica, porque, así como es más propio de los doctores positivos, así como de san Jerónimo, san Agustín y de san Gregorio [...] de mover los afectos para en todo amar y servir a Dios nuestro Señor...” (EE 363). The context in which Ignatius mentions the Church Fathers is also quite noteworthy. He mentions them within a long list of items that ought to be praised in the Church.⁹³ This formal recognition and praise of the teachings of the Church Fathers is proof of the great influence that their teachings and doctrine have had on Ignatius. Knowing this will help us to better understand some of the inner dynamics behind the *examination of conscience*, the *general confession* and other exercises of the First week, especially with respect to compunction as Ignatius experienced it.

After having examined Ludolph of Saxony’s *Life of Christ* and Thomas à Kempis’ *Imitation of Christ*, and observed how influential they have been to Ignatius’ own conversion, we are now furnished with a good lens through which we can better scrutinize and understand certain, fundamental aspects of the First week of the *Spiritual Exercises*, most certainly that of compunction.

⁹¹ Thomas À Kempis, *The Imitation of Christ*, (Bk. II; Ch. 10), Kindle location 979.

⁹² Hugo Rahner, S.J., *Ignatius the Theologian*, Trans. Michael Barry, Ignatius Press, San Francisco 1990, p. 37.

⁹³ A particularly interesting detail about the *Rules for thinking within the Church*, is that for the first half of the rules, which range from 354 through 363, each part begins with the directive “alabar” – “to praise”. The only exception to this is in 362, which has a slight variation. Instead of beginning with verb “alabar”, it states, “debemos ser más prontos para abonar y **alabar**”. The end result is still in keeping with the spirit of all the other numbers.

II. The First week of the *Spiritual Exercises* and compunction.

*A) To master oneself and to put order in one's life*⁹⁴

“Ejercicios Espirituales para vencer a sí mismo y ordenar su vida” (*EE 21*). This is the formal opening of the *Exercises* and the first line that the exercitant must consider as he embarks upon them. What is being described in austere terms is the purpose of the *Exercises*, “to conquer oneself and to place order in one's life”. There is a simplicity and economy of words here that leave no room for equivocation. In embarking upon the *Exercises*, whether they are for one day or for the whole thirty days, the exercitant must be disposed to “vanquish himself and to put order in his life, without allowing any inordinate affections to determine oneself” (*EE 21*). In all of this, there is not one mention of God or Jesus at all. In fact, even in the “Presupposition” (*EE 22*) that follows, neither God nor Christ is mentioned. It is only when the exercitant is guided through the “Principle and Foundation” (*EE 23*) that he is finally placed before God and the purpose of his existence. Truly, there is no mistaking the ascetical resonance present in this introduction to the *Exercises* and the beginning of the First week. This style harkens back to the draconian language of the *Imitation of Christ* where the individual, who is striving for compunction, is advised to “repress his senses” and to “not seek mirth” (Bk.I; Ch.XXI).

Ignatius also uses a similar austere style because for him, there is a real spiritual battle and warfare in progress. For Ignatius, the battlefield is not, first and foremost, somewhere outside of the individual, but rather, the battlefield is located within the individual himself. This gives us a better understanding of the use of the term “to conquer oneself” (*vencer a sí mismo*). Therefore within the context of the *Exercises*, the primary battle that the exercitant is engaged in is within himself. However, an important question remains to be asked: if the main “battlefield” is actually within the individual (in this case, the exercitant), what does the battle consist of? What are the “forces” at odds with one another? The answer is to be found within the same opening phrase; it is the part that states, “without allowing any inordinate

⁹⁴ A more literal translation of this would be, “to vanquish oneself”, but I opted to use “to master oneself” for the heading as it is stylistically more accessible in English. However, within the body of the text, I decided to continue with “vanquish” in order to be closer to the original language.

affections to determine oneself” (*«sin determinarse por» affection alguna que desordenada sea*) – the key term here is “inordinate affections”. It is precisely the exercitant’s very own “inordinate affections” that he must vanquish within himself (*vencer a sí mismo*).

A closer scrutiny of the dynamics behind “vanquishing oneself” and ridding oneself of “inordinate affections” reveals the close ties that the *Exercises* have with Christian asceticism that the Desert and Church Fathers taught and practiced. What Ignatius refers to as “inordinate affections”, the Desert and Church Fathers called “passions”. Just as Ignatius, through the *Exercises*, indicates to the exercitant the necessity of vanquishing his inordinate affections, so do the Desert and Church Fathers counsel the individual to rid himself of the passions that corrupt his life. John Cassian, a Father who Ignatius most likely was exposed to through the *Imitation of Christ* and through his studies in Paris, gives an excellent example of the fundamental importance of conquering the passions.

And when by subduing and destroying all our passions we have vanquished these, we shall then be permitted to hear those words of blessing: Thy hand shall be exalted over thine enemies, and all thine enemies shall perish (Conf. vii; ch. xxi).⁹⁵

It is interesting to note that there is even a similarity in the style and language between Cassian and Ignatius. The economy of words and the straightforward manner are present in both of their styles of writing. From the passage above, we see that Cassian uses forceful and aggressive verbs such as “subduing, destroying” and “vanquishing” – a word that Ignatius himself adopts. This same forceful and aggressive style can be seen in Ignatius as well. In the *Anotaciones*, Ignatius both warns and advises the exercitant, “la persona que se ejercita, por hacer contra la desolación y vencer las tentaciones, debe siempre estar alguna cosa más de la hora cumplida; porque no solo se avece a resistir al adversario, mas aun a derrocallo” (*EE* 13). The list of Ignatius’ choice of verbs is akin to a call to arms: “to go against”, “to vanquish”, “not just to resist., but to overthrow”. All of these verbs that Cassian and Ignatius employ are directed at the absolute extirpation of the “passions” or “inordinate affections”. We now begin to better contextualize Ignatius’ meaning of “vanquishing oneself” and putting “order in one’s life”. He, like the Fathers who influenced him, understood that often times the main “obstacle” between the individual and God is the individual himself – or rather, his

⁹⁵ John Cassian, *The Conferences*, Trans. Edgar C.S. Gibson, Christian Classics Ethereal Library, New York 1894, Kindle location 3853-3857.

inordinate affections and passions. It is no wonder then, that for both the Fathers and Ignatius, the question regarding passions was central. This leads us to the questions: What exactly then are passions and what are the implications in regard to the spiritual life?

B) The passions, sin and compunction

There is a multiplicity of conceptions regarding the nature of passions. What interests us are the Desert and Church Fathers with whom Ignatius had the most contact through his spiritual readings (such as the *Life of Christ*, *Imitation of Christ*, *Life of the Saints*, etc...), as well as those whom he was exposed to during his studies in Paris. From these sources, Ignatius gathered the idea that passions are detrimental and even lethal to the spiritual life. On this point, Tomáš Špidlík elaborates that “los Padres llaman a las pasiones ‘enfermedades del alma’, opuestas a las virtudes [...] La relación entre las pasiones y el pecado es íntima”.⁹⁶ The reality of the “intimate relationship” between the passions and sin is a crucial point that Ignatius took into serious consideration with respect to his own life. He opens his *Autobiography* by immediately recognizing the former ways of his life, “Hasta los 26 años de su edad fue hombre dado a las vanidades del mundo” (AU 1). In describing his past life as being “given to the vanities of the world”, he, in a very discrete way, is alluding to a life given to passion, vice and sin. In such a way, Ignatius shows the connection between the passions and sin that the Fathers commented on above.

Ignatius’ awareness of his past sins is the reason why he was so fixated on a life of penitence. We recall his great zeal in performing penitence, especially during the first part of his conversion process where we witness his often times exaggerated practices of fasting, abstinence and use of disciplines (AU 9,12,14, 55, 74, etc..). Again, in all of this, Ignatius is reacting to the realization of how his life of vice (or passions) led to many sins. It is precisely this acute awareness of the connection between the passion and sin that influenced a great number of exercises and points of the First week. In those exercises the exercitant is averted to the importance of recognizing the disorder and sin in oneself and taking the means to do away with them – this can especially be seen in the points regarding “vanquishing oneself” and “inordinate affections” (EE 21), the particular and general examination of conscience

⁹⁶ Tomáš Špidlík, *La Espiritualidad del Oriente Cristiano*, Trans. Céline Praud y Ana María Gago, Editorial Monte Carmelo, Burgos 2004, p. 321.

(EE 24,32) and the general confession (EE 44), where the exercitant seeks to correct and reform his faults (EE 25).

Going back to the passage where Špidlík enumerates the characteristics of passions according to the Fathers, namely: 1) that passions are sicknesses of the spirit, 2) passions are contrary to virtues and 3) there is an intimate relationship between passions and sin, we have briefly covered how the last two points influenced Ignatius' life and the *Exercises*. However, point number one is more complex. How are passions sicknesses of the spirit? How is knowledge of that particularly significant with respect to compunction? Fernando Rivas Rebaque, in his book on *Terapia de las enfermedades espirituales en los Padres de la Iglesia* elaborates upon this point:

Las enfermedades espirituales o pasiones propiamente dichas han nacido del uso antinatural y patológico del espíritu y habrían sido originadas, como todas las enfermedades, del pecado primigenio donde el ser humano al olvidar a Dios y orientar las facultades de su cuerpo, su alma y su espíritu a otros objetos, habría hecho surgir dentro de sí pasiones. Las pasiones no habrían sido creadas, pues, por Dios, sino que son producto del ser humano caído, extrañas a nuestra auténtica naturaleza, cuya existencia es sólo negativa (en cuanto negación de la virtud).⁹⁷

Passions, therefore, arise when the spirit is used in ways that are pathologically “unnatural” (*antinatural*) to itself. As a consequence of the spirit being used in an “unnatural” way (*en modo desordenado*, would be Ignatius' term), the spirit becomes “sick”. This sickness is what is understood as a “passion”. Hence, a passion is a sickness of the spirit. This overview of the passions as a sickness of the spirit belies an equally, if not more serious matter: the question of “primordial sin” (*pecado primigenio*). Truly, knowing how the passions are a sickness of the spirit does not address the question of their origin, i.e., how they came to be. Drawing from the Fathers, Rivas explains that when man turned away from God, he also turned away all of his faculties (especially his body, soul, spirit) from God. This “turning away” brought a disorder in man and in his operations. The passions arose from this “turning away”. The original “turning away” is, of course, the Fall found in the *Genesis* narrative. Significantly, “turning away” can also be understood as “missing the mark”.

⁹⁷ Fernando Rivas Rebaque, *Terapia de las enfermedades espirituales en los Padres de la Iglesia*, San Pablo, Madrid 2008, pp. 76-77.

Interestingly enough, we know that “missing the mark” in Greek is the definition of sin: *hamartía*. Understood in this manner, the reality of the connection between the “primordial” (Original) sin and the passions is unmistakable. This little articulation and “history” of the passions and sin becomes especially relevant because Ignatius uses this as a backbone to the meditations on sin, particularly *EE* 50, 51 and 52, where the exercitant is taken through a “history of sin” from the angels to Adam and Eve onwards.

In fact, the question of sin is the centerpiece of the First week. This is why the meditations on sins essentially comprise the main content of the exercises of the First week. Furthermore, the meditations on sins act, in part, as a catalyst to compunction. In turn, compunction is the heart and catalyst of conversion. In this light, the question of sin (and the awareness of them) is truly central to compunction. And so let us now finally turn our attention to the meditations on sins and compunction.

C) The meditations on sins and compunction

1. The structure and Christology of the meditations on sins (*EE* 45-72)

We opened this chapter stressing the importance of the centrality of Christ with respect to the meditations on sins of the First week. Now we shall examine in detail how the majority (if not all), of these meditations are profoundly Christological in nature. In his article, the Jesuit, Antonio Pérez goes as far as to remark that these meditations on sins and their intervening points constitute the “principle and foundation” of Ignatian asceticism, “Los pecados como punto de partida; Cristo crucificado, como punto de llegada: he ahí el alfa y omega, principio y fin”.⁹⁸ In a real way, the meditations on sins constitute the nucleus around which all true and authentic conversions are built upon. The contrasting and alternating meditations between God’s grace in Christ and the horror and reality of sin, form the fundamental structure upon which the grace of compunction is communicated to the individual. It is through the rhythm of this dynamic of contemplating Christ crucified and

⁹⁸ Antonio Pérez, S.J., *Primer Ejercicio «Meditación con last res potencias sobre el primero, segundo y tercero pecado.»*, vol.9; n.33; 1933/1; p.44.

acknowledging “my sins” that put Christ on the cross that compunction arises. Let us now look at the actual structure of the meditations on sins.

The meditations on sins are comprised of five exercises. The First exercise (*EE* 45) deals with the sins of others (the angels, Adam and Eve, other people) and ends with a colloquy. The Second exercise (*EE* 55) deals with the individual’s own sins. The Third exercise (*EE* 62) is a repetition of the first two exercises with three colloquies at the end. The Fourth exercise (*EE* 64) continues or “resumes” the Third and also ends with three colloquies. Finally, the Fifth exercise (*EE* 65) deals with Hell and concludes with a colloquy as well. Each meditation or contemplation is to be preceded by the *Preparatory prayer* (*EE* 46), keeping in mind the two preludes (*preámbulos*) that accompany it. Although there are five exercises that constitute the meditations and contemplations of the First week, nevertheless, they are all aimed at achieving one single purpose: to render the exercitant capable of receiving the gift of authentic compunction that will set in motion the process of true and enduring conversion. Antonio Pérez comments that the exercises of the First week are “meditaciones que, formando un todo perfecto, una cadena en la que no puede faltar ni un sólo anillo, obran gradualmente en el hombre la conversión más perfecta”.⁹⁹

Pérez’s imagery of a chain is very compelling. With the imagery of the chain, he is able to weave an image that recognizes the different nuances within each of the points of the exercises, yet maintain the unity of their purpose, which is the conversion of the exercitant. Santiago G. Arzubialde is even more detailed. Not only are the exercises aimed at the exercitant’s conversion, but more specifically, they are aimed at fostering within the exercitant the catalyst for conversion: compunction. He elaborates on this point and goes into more detail with respect to the inner processes of the meditations and contemplations of the exercises of the First week:

*Son un día de experiencia espiritual y forman una unidad indisociable, cuyas piezas no se pueden separar; una concatenación lógica íntimamente trabada; una unidad espiritual que, por circularidad y ahondamiento, se repite sucesivamente, un día tras otro, hasta llegar a la ‘compunción’, por el reblandecimiento de las capas más endurecidas del ser humano, que se abre a la gracia y del perdón y, de este modo, retorna a la ‘docilidad original’.*¹⁰⁰

⁹⁹ *Ibid.* p.31.

¹⁰⁰ Santiago G. Arzubialde, S.J., *Ejercicios Espirituales De S. Ignacio: Historia y Análisis*, Mensajero – Sal Terrae, Bilbao – Santander 2009², p. 165.

The process of how the meditations and contemplations help the exercitant to arrive at compunction is very compelling. The exercitant goes through the harrowing experience of having to face sin (his own and those of others) over and over again. It is in this repetition that the “hardened layers” of denial, of placing blame elsewhere, of self-justification, of whatever a person does in order to not take responsibility for the sin committed – all of these “layers” are peeled away as the exercitant journeys to an ever greater awareness of the gravity and horror of sin, especially his own sins. It is precisely in the variation and repetition of the meditations that the exercitant is pushed to become more increasingly aware not only of the gravity, but also the repercussions of his sins, until he finally comes face to face with the most tragic consequence of all: Christ hanging on the cross. As Arzubialde emphasizes, the singular spiritual experience that all of these different exercises aim for is, of course, compunction. Truly, it is only when the individual is before the God, meditating upon sin, upon hell, but most of all, upon the crucified Christ that the exercitant is able to finally come to a painful, bitter, sad and full awareness of his sins and his own sinfulness. Paradoxically, it is also the moment when he is capable of receiving God’s forgiveness and love. This awareness and opportunity can only come from compunction.

2. The First exercise: Preparatory prayer, colloquy and relationship

Let us begin with the First exercise where the exercitant is drawn into the meditation of the sins of others. It begins with the *Preparatory prayer*. If the efforts of the exercitant were emphasized at the beginning of the exercises (this is evident when the exercitant is told of the importance of “conquering himself” (*vencer a sí mismo*) and putting order in his life (*quitar afecciones desordenadas EE 21*), then with the *Preparatory prayer*, the grace and initiative of God is placed front and center. God’s grace makes it all possible. Reiterating what we observed in the second chapter of our investigation, Ignatius was profoundly cognizant of the primacy of God’s actions in all human endeavor, particularly so within the context of the *Exercises*. The exercitant, by asking God that all of his, “intenciones, acciones y operaciones sean puramente ordenadas en servicio y alabanza de su divina majestad” (*EE 46*), he is, in fact, recognizing the necessity of God’s grace without which he would be unable to do anything. This is why Ignatius indicates that the *Preparatory prayer* is done before all

of the contemplations and meditations (*EE* 49), because everything begins and ends with God. Recognizing God’s initiative is paramount.

Furthermore, in one of the most important texts of our investigation, we see that the exercitant is to “demandar a Dios nuestro Señor lo que quiero y deseo. La demanda ha de ser según subyecta materia; [...] si es de pasión, demandar pena, lágrimas y tormento con Cristo atormentado” (*EE* 48). On the face of it, needing to ask God for what I “want and desire” may seem to be an odd thing to request. After all, most of us believe that we are already well aware of what we want and desire. However, by having the exercitant ask God for what he “wants” and “desires”, as the prelude indicates, the exercitant is placing himself in a situation of total availability (*disponibilidad*) to God. In so doing, the exercitant demonstrates that he does not even wish to rely on his inclinations anymore, but rather he defers to God to provide for everything, including what the he “wants and desires”. The disposition of such an availability renders the exercitant capable not only of receiving the grace that God offers him, but to also receive that grace in the way that God offers it. Thus, when the exercitant asks for the grace of shame and confusion, the criterion for what exactly the shame and confusion will be is no longer in his hands, because he has placed it entirely in God’s hands. For Ignatius, this disposition of complete openness and trust in God is absolutely essential not just for receiving the grace of compunction, but also for all graces.

Now that we are aware that the exercitant is to ask for the grace of shame and confusion, we need to ask why? That is, why would Ignatius want to specifically with shame and confusion? Would it not be better to start with the fear of punishment and torture to bring the exercitant to compunction? Why tears of shame, instead of fear of punishment? In pondering these questions, we can get a glimpse of Ignatius’ “pedagogy of compunction”. Let us now briefly observe and compare a few of the dynamics behind “tears of shame” and the “fear of punishment”.

Without getting into too many nuances, fear has a tendency to be self-centered. It is “self-centered” in the sense that one’s immediate and primary concern with respect to fear, is one’s own well being – a kind of self-preservation mechanism. On the other hand, shame typically operates within the context of a relationship; a person is typically ashamed in relation to another person – especially when it comes to what another person may think of him. This is why in the meditation, the exercitant is directed to consider sin not in isolation, but in relation to the angels, to Adam and Eve and to others throughout history. The whole meditation is in relation to the sins of others.

This “in relation to” is a key characteristic of authentic compunction. True

compunction requires a personal relationship with God. Within the context of this First exercise, Pérez describes this situation in these terms, “A la vista de sus propios pecados el que tiene espíritu de esclavo teme el castigo y se arrepiente; el que tiene espíritu de hijo contempla su ingratitud y llora; el que tiene espíritu de caballero reconoce su villanía y se avergüenza y se confunde [por haber ofendido a su Criador y Señor]”.¹⁰¹ Therefore, Ignatius does not advocate a spirit of fear precisely because it engenders an impersonal relationship with God – the relationship of a slave to a master, which is tantamount to having no relationship at all. As Jesus says in John’s gospel, “No longer do I call you servants, for the servant does not know what his master is doing; but I have called you friends” (*Jn. 15: 15*).¹⁰² Jesus casts away the servile relationship that comes from fear and establishes a personal relationship; he now calls us friends. This is why Ignatius does not have the exercitant ask for fear, because it establishes an impersonal, servile relationship. Interestingly, all throughout the exercises of the First week, Ignatius has the exercitant ask for many things, such as shame, confusion, pain, tears, torments, but never once does he instruct the exercitant to ask for fear. This is because it is very important that the relationship established between the exercitant and God be filial and not servile. Indeed, only a son can feel heartfelt embarrassment for having offended his father. In contrast, a servant in the same situation could only feel fear. Therefore in asking for shame and confusion, the exercitant is, in paradoxically, asking to be placed in a personal relationship with God.

As such, it is quite fitting that the First exercise concludes with a colloquy with Christ (*EE 53*). In this encounter with Christ, the exercitant is directed to look first upon Christ, “cómo de Criador es venido a hacerse hombre, y de vida eterna a muerte temporal, y así a morir por mis pecados”. It is only after this that the exercitant is then to look upon himself. From this, we can immediately gather that authentic compunction first begins with God, which is why the exercitant is directed to look first at Christ and then only after, to look at himself. It is God alone who can truly reveal to the exercitant his sins. As Carlos Domínguez Morano elaborates, “Ese reconocimiento del pecado, sin embargo, no tendrá sentido sino en el context de un previo encuentro con Dios. No cabe sentido del pecado sino desde la experiencia de encuentro amoroso con quien es el origen y fin de la existencia”.¹⁰³

¹⁰¹ Antonio Pérez, S.J., *Primer Ejercicio*, p. 32.

¹⁰² Interestingly, the word “servants” (δουλος), originally means – a slave, bondman, man of servile condition. “δουλος”. Def. 1., *The Complete Koine-English Reference Bible: New Testament, Septuagint & Strong’s Concordance*. Joshua Dickey, Kindle edition 2014.

¹⁰³ Carlos Domínguez Morano, S.J., *Psicodinámica de los Ejercicios Ignacianos*, Mensajero – Sal Terrae, Bilbao 2003, p. 103.

Specifically, the encounter is with the crucified Christ who, by his cross, reveals the sins of the exercitant. It is within this context, before Christ, that the exercitant can now look upon himself and ask: what has he done, what is he doing and what ought he to do for Christ. By asking these questions, an even deeper and more personal relationship is being established, because the very questions themselves implicate a greater personal involvement with Christ. This is especially manifested in the final question, “what ought I to do for Christ?”

3. The Second exercise: personal sin and God’s mercy

The Second exercise now has the exercitant scrutinize his own sins. As usual, it begins with the *Preparatory prayer* followed by the petition for a grace. In this exercise it will be for “crecido y intenso dolor y lágrimas de mis pecados” (EE 55). After having had an intimate dialogue with Christ on the cross, the exercitant is now ready to look upon his own sins in earnest. The personal encounter with Christ is what allows him (it is also what moves him) to ask for growing and intense pain and tears. “Tears” and “pain” are the key terms here for they represent the two fundamental characteristics that make up compunction: *catányxis* and *pénthos*. This “growing” and “intense” pain directly corresponds to *catányxis*. As we recall from the second chapter of our investigation, *catányxis* is the experience of strong, sharp, jabbing pain. Meanwhile, “tears” harken to the experience of deep sorrow and mourning that characterize *pénthos*. Taken together, *catányxis* and *pénthos* constitute the core components of compunction. Therefore, the grace that is being asked for here, in essence, is the grace of compunction.

Once again, it is important to emphasize that compunction is a grace given by God as a gift. It is not a “feeling sorry for oneself” or some sort of self-induced tearful mourning contrived by the exercitant’s “acting” abilities. There is no psychological spectacle going on here. In fact, interpreting the experience from merely a psychological level can be dangerous. In dealing with the dimensions of guilt and culpability, there is a real danger of falling into error. An even greater danger is the possibility of self-deception with respect to the one’s culpability in regard to sin. Carlos Domínguez Morano elaborates, “Pero todos sabemos también que cabe experimentar sentimientos de culpa sin que haya pecado alguno (como es en el caso del escrupoloso) y, lo que es peor todavía, que se éste viviendo una situación de pecado sin tener conciencia de ello ni, por tanto, experimentar culpa alguna [...]”

podemos sentirnos culpable sin estar en pecado y podemos estar en pecado sin sentirnos culpable”.¹⁰⁴ In an authentic encounter with God, the gift of grace in the form of compunction does away with all those deceptions and complications. Through the colloquy, the exercitant discovers that compunction comes through the intimate and personal encounter with Christ on the cross, who reveals the full truth and consequences of the individual’s sins. But more importantly, the colloquy is also the context in which God’s also reveals His merciful love and forgiveness.

Ignatius, as we observed earlier, was mindful of the interplay between human action and divine grace. To be truly receptive to the grace of compunction, then the exercitant needs to dispose himself to it. This is why the scope of the Second exercise is to have the exercitant actively and painstakingly take apart his sins. Indeed, Ignatius has the exercitant go year by year over all his sins, going into as fine a detail as possible in recalling even the house and office involved (*EE* 56). He continues by having the exercitant dwell on the horror and malice that mortal sin contains within itself. After which, the exercitant compares himself with others (other men, saints and angels in heaven). Very noteworthy is the particularly extreme language that Ignatius employs in this Second exercise, “mirar toda mi corrupción y fealdad corpórea [...] mirarme como una llaga y postema, de donde han salido tantos pecados y tantas maldades y ponzoño tan turpísima” (*EE* 58). Ignatius certainly depicts quite a horrible image for the exercitant. What is the point of such harsh and desolate terms? Why is it so important to use them in this way? Juan Masía’s comments:

*La auténtica vivencia de fe no consistirá ni en cerrar los ojos para no verse a sí mismo ni tampoco en encerrarse en la contemplación de sí mismo, sino en verse ante Dios como primer paso de una experiencia espiritual de encontrarse en El, descubriendo que la verdad profunda de nosotros mismos es nuestro yo visto por Dios, es decir, previsto para ser-se en Cristo. Desde este trasfondo teológico deberíamos releer la expresión ignaciana de ‘confundirse en la presencia divina’.*¹⁰⁵

It is precisely because of a desire to live an authentic experience of faith (without closing one’s eyes to the truth or embellishing it over) that motivated Ignatius to use such stark

¹⁰⁴ *Ibid.* p. 104.

¹⁰⁵ Juan Masía, S.J., *Contrición y gratitud. Primera Semana de los Ejercicios en contexto japonés*. Manresa, vol. 46; n. 181; 1974/4; p. 295.

language and imagery. He wanted the exercitant to experience the unvarnished truth of himself and his sins, so that he could avoid any temptation of self-deception or self-justification. Rather, the exercitant is to take full and complete responsibility of his sins. However, Masía is careful to point out that all of this horrific language and imagery is not an end in itself, but is in view of having an encounter with God – an invitation to be seen ultimately in God’s eyes.

The text of the Second exercise bears this point out. While in the midst of the most desolate imagery, the exercitant finds himself as a “wound through which so many sins and evil and poison issue forth” (*EE* 58). Immediately after which, he turns to God. In an “exclamation of wonder” and feeling, he marvels at how his life is being sustained by God and how all of angels and saints interceded for him. Full of this gratitude, the exercitant concludes with a personal and intimate colloquy “de misericordia, razonando y dando gracias a Dios nuestro Señor” (*EE* 61). Masía’s commentary on this point is especially incisive, “Lo que aquí se intenta recalcar es la inseparabilidad de esos dos aspectos: conciencia de pecado y vivencia de agradecimiento por el perdón, momentos correlativos de una única experiencia espiritual”.¹⁰⁶ Here, Masía touches upon another fundamental characteristic of compunction. It is a unique spiritual experience that unites both pain and sadness with gratitude and joy. The horror and pain of one’s sins, combined with the joy and gratitude of God’s mercy and forgiveness. Indeed, compunction is not only about feeling sorrow for one’s sins and the loss of salvation, but moreover, it is about experiencing great gratitude towards God and His salvific love – a love that is manifested in mercy and forgiveness through the incarnate Son.

The grace of compunction, in part, exists in the holding together of these two tensions: 1) the experience of pain and sorrow for one’s sins and the loss of salvation and 2) the gratitude and joy of the experience of God’s forgiveness and salvation. It is precisely in this oscillating tension that the attitude and disposition of compunction operates in the exercitant. This “tension” of compunction is ultimately the catalyst that moves the exercitant towards conversion. Masía elucidates, “central en el modo cristiano de concebir la conversión del corazón a Dios: sentirse pecador y sentirse perdonado en el momento mismo de responder a la llamada de Dios que en Cristo nos abre los ojos [...] Esta ideas son bien conocidas y patrimonio de la espiritualidad cristiana”.¹⁰⁷ Confirmation of the exercitant’s desire for conversion, as well as proof that he is already beginning it, is found within the

¹⁰⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 295-296.

¹⁰⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 295.

dialogue he has with Christ (*EE* 53) and the questions he asks, “What ought I to do for Christ?” The verb used “ought to do” (*debo hacer*) is one of duty; it connotes an interior obligation or “movement”. It is when the exercitant “arrives” at this disposition of compunction that he will be ready to move on to the Second week of the *Exercises* to listen to the call of the Eternal king.

D) ‘Permanent’ compunction and examination of conscience

We have observed how the fruit of conversion came about through the grace of compunction in the meditations of the First week. However, we must be careful to remember that although an individual may once experience compunction and its corresponding fruit of conversion, there is no guarantee that compunction will remain, nor should it be presumed that it will remain. In fact, it was clear to the Fathers and Ignatius that we, as human beings, are in a constant war against our passions, as well as the sins and vices that issue from them. Evagrius Ponticus particularly warned about the dangers of the recurrence of passions and how they will plague man until death, “The demons presiding over the soul’s passions persist against those fighting them until death”.¹⁰⁸ In fact, the passions are a direct threat to compunction. We recall that Origen retained that all sins left a “permanent pain”¹⁰⁹ or an “indelible” scar in the heart of an individual. This scar is capable of opening up old sins over and over again, thus effectively weakening compunction, if not, doing away with it entirely. This would result in the individual’s return to his past life of sins (the “old self” as St. Paul would say). This is anything but conversion. This is why for Origen, it was of utmost importance to live in a constant disposition of compunction – a kind of “permanent compunction”, precisely because the passions were a constant threat to compunction. Evagrius comments, “Of these passions which war against compunction, there are many in the soul of which we know nothing, until temptation comes and reveals them to us. We must

¹⁰⁸ Casiday, A. M., *Evagrius Ponticus: The Early Church Fathers*, Routledge, London 2006, Kindle ed. p. 174.

¹⁰⁹ “Origène, le premier, découvre dans la Bible l’idée de la douleur ‘permanente’ que doit entretenir en nous le sentiment du péché [compunction]”.

“compunction” in *Dictionnaire de Spiritualité*, Tome II², Joseph Pegon, Beauchesne, Paris 1953, p.1312.

then keep our hearts with great attention”.¹¹⁰

This keeping the heart “with great attention” so that compunction may be protected is, in effect, a call to vigilance. What are the means to this vigilance? According to Hausherr, there are two principle means of safeguarding and maintaining compunction: the first is through the regular use of the examination of conscience and the second, through prayer (i.e., meditation, contemplation, adoration).¹¹¹ How then does the examination of conscience help to safeguard and maintain a spirit of permanent compunction? In order to address the question, let us carefully examine the text from the *Exercises* regarding the *particular examination of conscience*:

...pedir a Dios nuestro Señor lo que hombre quiere, es a saber, gracia para acordarse cuántas veces ha caído en aquel pecado particular o defecto, y para se emendar adelante; y conseqüenter haga el primer examen, demandando cuenta a su ánima de aquella cosa propósita y particular, de la cual se quiere corregir y emendar, discurriendo de hora en hora o de tiempo en tiempo, comenzando desde la hora que se levantó hasta la hora y punto del examen presente; y haga en la primera línea de la g= tantos puntos cuantos ha incurrido en aquel pecado particular o defecto; y después proponga de nuevo de emendarse hasta el segundo examen que hará (EE 25).

The first thing that strikes a person reading this for the first time, is the great detail and precision of Ignatius. He has the exercitant remember how many times he fell into a particular sin. Furthermore, the exercitant should give an account of his soul, hour-by-hour right from the moment he gets up until the actual examination itself. For some, the minutiae with which Ignatius explains how one should undertake such an examination may seem exaggerated and overly punctilious. It may even bring to mind Ignatius’ past history with scruples. However, to think that is to completely misunderstand one of the main benefits of the *particular examination*. If Ignatius instructs the exercitant to meticulously count hour by hour, since the time that he rises to the moment of the examination and to count how many times during the day that he fell into a particular sin or fault and then to make note of them on a diagram, there is indeed a good reason why Ignatius would have the exercitant do this. Far from promoting scrupulosity for its own sake, Ignatius wanted to foster within the exercitant, during his time within the *Spiritual Exercises (especially within the First week)* and beyond,

¹¹⁰ Evagrius, *Centuries*, 6.52. (quoted from Hausherr’s book p. 63).

¹¹¹ Irénée Hausherr, S.J., *The Doctrine of Compunction*, p. 60.

the attitude and disposition of a vigilant soul. John Cassian knew the importance of being mindful of one's sins and inclinations. He especially stressed the importance of taking action against them:

*Wherefore we must enter the lists against these faults in such a way that every one should discover his besetting sin, and direct his main attack against it, directing all his care and watchfulness of mind to guard against its assault, directing against it daily the weapons of fasting, and at all times hurling against it the constant darts of sighs and groanings from the heart, and employing against it the labours of vigils and the meditation of the heart, and further pouring forth to God constant tears and prayers [...] And even when he feels that he has got rid of this fault, he should still search the inmost recesses of his heart with the same purpose, and single out the worst fault which he can see among those still there, and bring all the forces of the Spirit to bear against it in particular, and so by always overcoming the stronger passions, he will gain a quick and easy victory over the rest.*¹¹²

(Conf. v; ch xiv)

Cassian's suggestion that we should make a list of our faults "in such a way that everyone should discover his besetting sin and direct his main attack against it", surely must have found great resonance with Ignatius. This making a list, or drawing of lines, is exactly what Ignatius has the exercitant do in the *particular examination*. In fact, Cassian's relentless vigilance over faults and sins is so clearly echoed in the *particular examination* in the part that states, "cada vez que el hombre cae en aquel pecado o defecto particular, ponga la mano en el pecho, doliéndose de haber caído" (EE 27). A mindfulness of sin that one would actually beat one's chest (*mano en el pecho doliéndose*) in repentance, clearly reflects Ignatius' proximity with Cassian in regard to the importance of vigilance. In the face of one's faults, Cassian directed an individual to use many concrete means to root the faults out – means such as "vigils, meditations, pouring out constant prayers and tears to God". This last detail of pouring out prayers of "tears" is an allusion to the "perpetual compunction" that Origen made reference to.

In his own way, Ignatius also followed Cassian's example. Once again, we can observe this in the *particular examination*. We must go to the end of (EE 25) where it says,

¹¹² John Cassian, *The Conferences*, Trans. Edgar C.S. Gibson, Christian Classics Ethereal Library, New York 1894, Kindle location 2601-2626.

“*proponga de nuevo de emendarse*”. The key word is “emendarse”.¹¹³ It is a verb that means to correct; to reform. This “emendarse” is the impetus behind the directives to rid oneself of one’s faults (*EE* 27-31). In a real sense, the impetus of *emendarse* – to “correct” and reform one’s life constantly, contains within it all of the characteristics of “perpetual compunction”. This is concretely manifested in the precision of directives that we noticed earlier: the beating of the chest, the counting of the times one falls in the same fault, the marking of the lines, the calling to mind from time to time, etc... All of these “exercises” echoes Cassian’s own directives of prayers, tears and vigils to God. In other words, these are the actions and prayers of an individual whose fundamental disposition is one of “perpetual compunction”.

Indeed, when you have understood your own measure, you will delight in compunction and call yourself a wretch, in the manner of Isaiah. For how, being impure and having impure lips and being in the midst of such a people (that is, of adversaries), how have you dared stand before the Lord Sabaoth [Is 6.5]?¹¹⁴

Evagrius

¹¹³ Dalmases notes that there are variations on the spelling of the actual Spanish word “enmendar” in Ignatius’ texts. For our purposes here, an explanation of the variations in spelling does not seem useful in our opinion. IGNACIO DE LOYOLA, *Obras de San Ignacio de Loyola*, Trans. Cándido de Dalmases, S.J., Ignacio Iparraguirre, S.J., Manuel Ruiz Jurado, S.J., BAC, Madrid 1991. p. 59.

¹¹⁴ Casiday, A. M., *Evagrius Ponticus: The Early Church Fathers*, Routledge, London 2006, Kindle ed. p. 194.

Conclusion

At the close of this investigation on tears, compunction and the First week of the *Spiritual Exercises*, one of the first thoughts that comes to mind is the realization of the great complexity involved in the human experience. That human experiences are complex is a fact and, unfortunately, a cliché. However, it is only when you actually try to take apart a human experience that you begin to realize (and appreciate) that there are so many different aspects that interact with one another and on so many different levels that are, at the same time, both intelligible and incomprehensible. Perhaps one of the best examples of what I am referring to here is the experience of conversion.

When I first embarked upon choosing a topic for this investigation, what initially interested me was the human experience of conversion. There are very few experiences in life that are so forceful that it can move a human being to completely alter the course of his life and beliefs – that can change how he sees things, how he understands things, even how he feels and experiences things. What is there in an experience that can change a coward into a hero, a soldier into a statesman and most especially, a sinner into a saint? What goes on in the religious experience of conversion? In my research, I narrowed the topic to tears and compunction. I found that they were essentially the two most significant components of the conversion experience.

In the section on tears, it was fascinating to discover how our emotions and feelings actually affect the chemical content of our tears. The research that discovered that tears shed from an emotional upheaval contained a greater level of toxins than those tears shed from mere eye irritations was important in scientifically demonstrating that our interior life truly does have a connection to our exterior. Furthermore, the research that determined that tears, because they predated the spoken word, were also a primordial language helps us to appreciate the capacity for tears can communicate – sometimes even beyond what words can express. On this point, the tears of Peter at the betrayal of Jesus especially struck me. He did not say a word to Jesus, nor Jesus to him. Nevertheless, Peter's tears communicated so much more than words ever could about his pain, sorrow and regret. From this, I got a new appreciation of how tears can be a kind of "sacrament" to our souls. That tears can truly be a sign of a greater event happening within our soul, just as with Peter or the sinful woman who washed Jesus' feet with her tears in the gospel of Luke.

On the topic of Peter's tears of pain, sorrow and regret, I discovered that compunction

has so much more meaning behind it. Compunction is not just feeling bad or sorry for your sins. It is so much more – sorrow, joy, shame, gratitude, relationship, man losing God, God saving man. Moreover, it was a discovery to see how our understanding of “compunction” today evolved from the influences of both Eastern and Western Christianity. Eastern Christianity focused upon the dimensions of sorrow, mourning and tears (*pénthos*), while Western Christianity concentrated upon the sense of guilt, shock and pain (*catányxis*). Looking at Western Christianity’s emphasis on pain, shock and guilt, perhaps we can better understand the origin of some of the attitudes and practices of our Latin Church: the focus on reparation, the sometimes unhealthy fixation on guilt, and so forth.

In my experience, the *Spiritual Exercises*, especially the exercises of the First week, are one of the few instances where the spiritual traditions of Eastern and Western Christianity are used together in a concrete manner. Here, I’m certainly referring to Ignatius’ treatment of compunction. We saw how the Eastern Fathers dwelt upon sorrow, mourning and tears and how the Western Fathers dwelt upon shock, pain and guilt. Ignatius managed to combine both of these in the exercises of the First week. The best example of this is when he has the exercitant specifically and distinctly ask for the grace of “*pena, lágrimas y tormento con Cristo*” (EE 48). Just in this brief request, Ignatius unites the characteristics of *pénthos* and *catányxis* with the most important emphasis on “con Cristo”. Finally, the importance of acquiring and having a disposition of continual compunction throughout one’s life is something for which I now have more appreciation. When one understands that compunction is not just about sins, but that it is also about mercy and redemption. It is all about a grace willingly received from God that moves you to conversion.

A beautiful experience of compunction can be seen in the movie, *The Mission*.¹¹⁵ In it, we witness the character of Robert De Niro who, after closing himself off in a monastery for having killed his brother, a Jesuit (Jeremy Irons) invites him to return to the Mission above the waterfall. The process of compunction begins in the monastery and concludes when his worldly belongs¹¹⁶, which he was carrying are cut and fall away. He is thus “freed” from the physical and, symbolically, spiritual weight. Significantly, he did not free himself, but was freed by another – just as a sinner cannot forgive himself, but must be forgiven by God. His process of compunction culminates with a flow of tears. He converts. In his conversion, he dedicates his life to God. The sinner becomes a “saint”.

¹¹⁵ http://www.imdb.com/title/tt0091530/?ref_=fn_al_tt_1

¹¹⁶ Among his belongings were his armor, his sword – things that represented who he was before his conversion.

Lexicon of Terms¹¹⁷

κλαίω – to mourn, weep, lament; – weeping as the sign of pain and grief for the thing signified (i.e. for the pain and grief); – of those who mourn for the dead [...] to bewail one.

δακρῦω – is generic and non-descript; it simply means, “to weep, to shed tears.

Pénthos – sorrow, mourning, tears (godly sorrow)

Catányxis – stabbing sensation, shock, pain

Compunction – in Western Christianity, a combination of *pénthos* and *catányxis*

Lúpe – sadness, heaviness, affliction (worldly sorrow)

¹¹⁷ The “lexicon” is not intended to define terms, but rather to give some characteristics that will distinguish it from other terms. *N.B.* I have listed the terms in the order that they appear in the chapters.

Abbreviations

AU = Autobiografía

EE = Ejercicios Espirituales

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