THE THEOLOGY OF BEGGING IN THE SPIRITUAL EXERCISES

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Introduction

The definition and meaning of begging may vary depending on the perspective one adopts. In the modern parlance, it would denote parasitism, dependency, or worse, indolence, which is directly opposite to the standards that the "world" dictates: independence, empowerment. On the one hand, begging can be historically conditioned – either associated with the collapse of the human socio-political structure, or with a generation's pursuit of spiritual goodness and perfection. Historically, according to John L. Gillin, who served as President of the American Sociological Society, begging could not be found in early human societies. It is, however, a phenomenon brought about by civilized society. [1] He presupposes that early humans had their own way of extending help to the needy, including travelers. Gillin suggests that begging is a product of "periods of social and economic disorganizations."[2] This aspect of begging involves moral and ethical questions.

Moreover, the concept of begging can go beyond the mere physical dimension. It can be fueled by something other than material provision for survival. Some beg voluntarily, stripping themselves of comfort and security and allowing themselves to be dependent on other people's generosity as a way of cultivating spiritual freedom. Earlier religions such as Buddhism and

[1]John Gillin, "Vagrancy and Begging," *American Journal of Sociology* 5, No. 3 (Nov. 1929): 424.

[2]Ibid., 425

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Hinduism believe and teach that begging instills virtue and a deeper understanding of oneself in relation to the world.

However, in the realm of prayer and spirituality, especially that of the Ignatian tradition, begging assumes a significant place. David Fleming suggests that Ignatius typically employs the term "poor" to depict Jesus, aligning with how the gospels portray him. Ignatius wanted his followers to imitate that poor Jesus. This is made explicit in his meditations on the three degrees of humility. [3] Thus, to pray is to be poor before God.

Begging in Church History and its Influence on Ignatius

History of Begging Leading towards the Middle Ages

Christianity, in its rich history, has its own share of begging and poverty – ideal and literal. Taking the lead from how Jesus lived and the ideals he presented and lived out, there is no doubt that it seems appealing for some followers. This imitation of Christ has been the inspiration of some religious orders. Poverty, in religious parlance, could be understood from different perspectives, either material or spiritual poverty, which will eventually aid one in ones's search for God. Thus, John Gillin says that Christianity reinvented a new perspective of looking at begging. Gillin says,

> Thus, the religious basis of beggary had its roots deep in man's desire to free himself from sin by giving to a beggar, and on the other hand, got its justification from the desire to attain salvation by becoming a beggar. From both points of view, religion sanctified begging.[4]

[3]David Fleming, SJ, *What is Ignatian Spirituality* (Chicago, Illinois: Loyola Press, 2008), 62-63.

[4]Gillin, "Vagrancy and Begging," 426.

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Poverty in the Early Christian Church

In the apostolic times, the early Church would always go back to the teachings of Jesus and pattern their lives to his. Jesus, in most of his teachings, speaks about riches and possession and how these things hinder one from following him and eventually entering the kingdom of God. It should be noted, though, that what Jesus points out is not so much the material things in themselves but rather too much attachment to them. This attitude shifts one's attention, which should be directed to God, to oneself.

Voluntary Poverty

Jesus lived out voluntary poverty, which he wanted to inculcate in his followers. Philip Mulhern, O.P. writes:

Jesus, who was poor by His own choice, asked the disciples to share his voluntary poverty. And when he sent his disciples preaching penance, He imposed on them the abandonment of all material resources. But he did not demand of all his followers and hearers to total renunciation, which he required of the chosen few.[5]

In this regard, Jesus' voluntary poverty made it possible for him to go to different places to perform healings and miracles; in short, to bring and proclaim God's kingdom on earth. One could surmise that Jesus also wanted his chosen disciples to emulate this. In a sense, letting go of one's material possessions and embracing voluntary poverty, while a test of faith, is also an essential element of true discipleship. It enables one to be more focused on one's mission while submitting oneself to Divine Providence.

[5]Philip F. Mulhern, O.P., *Dedicated Poverty* (New York: Alba House, 1972), 29.

Imitatio Christi

Voluntary poverty and asceticism sprung from the *Imitatio Christi* movement. This enterprise touches on the early Christians' idealism to recover and relive the ideals of Jesus. The *Imitatio Christi* phenomenon grew even more during the Middle Ages, particularly during the 12th and 13th centuries. Fueled by the crusades and the accounts and inspiration from the crusaders, a new consciousness of the human Jesus arose.[6] This shift was also fueled by the evident materialism of the persons in the hierarchy, which eventually caused abuses in the Church. Thus, in response, an evangelical revival took place in the 12th century, where the life of Jesus and his apostles were traced from the Gospels and held as the model on how medieval people should live out their faith. This new lifestyle in the 12th century ushered in a "new encounter between the Gospel and the world" in reference to Jesus's instruction to search the Scripture to become appropriate.[7]

Commonly known as *vita apostolica* or apostolic life, this lifestyle takes its main element from a passage in the Acts of the Apostles[8] that emphasizes renunciation of personal wealth, sharing with brethren, life in community, and preaching the message of personal salvation.[9] It is interesting to note that

[6]Ibid., 97.

[7]Brenda Bolton, *The Medieval Reformation* (London: Edward Arnold, 1983), 19.

[8]Acts of the Apostles 4:32-35. The community of believers was of one heart and mind, and no one claimed that any of his possessions was his own, but they had everything in common. With great power the apostles bore witness to the resurrection of the Lord Jesus, and great favor was accorded them all. There was no needy person among them, for those who owned property or houses would sell them, bring the proceeds of the sale, and put them at the feet of the apostles, and they were distributed to each according to need.

[9]Joseph H. Lynch, *The Medieval Church: A Brief History* (New York: Longman Publishing, 2014), 192.

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there is still an emphasis on voluntary poverty. This emphasis on voluntary poverty is supported by another scriptural passage, which is also said to be the foundation of *vita apostolica*: Luke 10:1-12. Here, there is a clear instruction from Jesus to his disciples to observe poverty as they go out on mission.[10]

The Mendicant Orders

The mendicant orders were said to be a product of the pre-dominant idealism brought about by the *vita apostolica* movement. These groups were wandering from one place to the other to preach, often labeled as itinerant preachers, and their sustenance depended on the generosity of the people they ministered to. When closely examined, this was far different from the established monasteries centuries before this reform. While the latter are self-sufficient, the former opted to embrace voluntary poverty and beg. However, it should be noted that the foundation of these orders was not solely attributed to their founder but also to the pope's approval. They were seen with potentials that might play in mending the seemingly divided Church caused by groups spreading heresies.[11]

It was during his recuperation in Loyola that Ignatius would come across two books that would eventually change his vision in life: *Vita Christi* or the Life of Christ by Ludolph of Saxony and the book on the lives of saints entitled *The Golden Legend*, where he would encounter St. Francis of Assisi and St. Dominic Guzman. The ideals and conversion of both saints were also products of their own time.

According to Margaret Miles, St. Francis lived out a literal imitation of Christ and vowed poverty patterned after Christ,

[10]Bolton, *The Medieval Reformation*, 20.

[11]James M. Powell, "Mendicants, the Communes and the Law," in *Church History* 77:3 (2008): 557.

who was "poor as he lay in the crib, poor as he lived in the world, and naked on the cross." Regarding St. Francis' extreme poverty, Miles adds:

> Practicing severe asceticism and keeping his body at the point of death for many years at a time, he denied himself sleep, shelter, and food to such extremes that those of his followers with less robust physiques could not imitate him.[12]

For St. Francis of Assisi, poverty is an end in itself. In other words, one is encouraged to be one with the God whom we believe in, a God who in his infinite graciousness and love chose to live with us, to be with us, poor and naked.

On the other hand, St. Dominic Guzman, unlike St. Francis, who considered a life of poverty and begging as an end in itself, considered these two, poverty and begging, as a means to an end.[13] From here, it can be sensed that poverty and begging acquire another dimension, i.e., they can be means of evangelization and ways of proselytizing those outside the fold.

These two mendicants might have differences in their view of poverty and begging yet some things remain constant. By choosing and living out voluntary poverty, one is submitting himself to a benevolent and assuring God who calls him.

Ignatius and Begging

It should be noted that Ignatius' conversion did not simply happen upon reading these books. Inspired by the austere life and simplicity of the holy men he read about, particularly St. Francis of Assisi, he would also end up radically changing

[12]Margaret Miles, *The Word Made Flesh: A History of Christian Thought* (Oxford: Blackwell Publishing, 2005), 160.

[13]Lynch, *The Medieval Church*, 235.

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his way of life. Ignatius would forego his status – nobility and chivalry – which received so much resistance and disapproval from his family. His brother Martin would try to dissuade him by reminding him of the "duties proper to family life."[14] Eventually, he would set his mind to go on a pilgrimage to Jerusalem.

This radical conversion would enter a new phase in Montserrat, where he holds his vigil-of-arms in the Benedictine monastery. Here, before the image of the Black Madonna, Ignatius would symbolically strip himself of the privileges of a nobleman and knight, and become a soldier of God by surrendering his sword and dagger before our Lady. This event made Ignatius value all the more "the deliberate practice of poverty as an effective way to grow in the love of the Lord."[15] Eventually, he exchanged his clothes with those of a beggar outside the monastery. However, Ignatius went to extremes. In Manresa, while begging, he also took his physical appearance for granted, letting his nails and hair grow long and engaging in severe penances. Ignatius saw bad habits that should be fixed and saw these externals as means to this end.[16]

In the succeeding years, according to his autobiography, Ignatius would uphold the importance of poverty in the following of Christ. Ignatius himself would become a beggar and lived like a beggar dependent on people's generosity. For instance, while studying for his master's studies in Paris, Ignatius struggled to support his matriculations, as documented in his letter

[14]Barton Geger, SJ, ed., *A Pilgrim's Testament: The Memoirs of St. Ignatius of Loyola* (Massachusetts: Institute of Jesuit Sources, 2011), 118.

[15]Mulhern, O.P., *Dedicated Poverty*, 146.

[16]P. Du Brul, SJ, *Ignatius: Sharing the Pilgrim Story, A Reading of the Autobiography of St. Ignatius of Loyola* (Leominster, Herefordshire: Gracewing, 2003), 46.

to Agnes Pascual dated June 13, 1522. Here, Ignatius would mention several women who have pledged and have given him support. He would name La Sepilla, Mosen Gralla, Dona Isabel de Josa and Dona Alduncia de Cardona.[17]

The poor would become special to him, and at times, Ignatius would give some of his provisions to them and would eventually be a part of his ministry. According to David Knight, SJ, Ignatius' philosophy is easy, "the poor have no contacts, nor rich relatives, ordinarily, with whom to taste for a larger life." In this manner, he materializes what he envisions to be identified with the poor of this world.[18] Ignatius would eventually set up some ministries to take care of the poor. For instance, he established the House of St. Martha in Rome, dedicated to house women who "wished to escape the shame and sin of prostitution." Interestingly, it was Ignatius who first contributed financially so that the hospice could start its operation. He was convinced that the example of one giving could persuade others to be generous. Indeed, after some time, people began to offer financial support.[19] Here, one can surmise that begging by example took place.

It is also interesting to note that poverty for Ignatius does not only dwell in the realm of the abstract; it should be lived out. In the earliest version of the Constitutions of the Socieety of Jesus, Ignatius would point that Jesuits should not accept wages or income. He pointed out the common perspective that income or wages could lead to corruption. Besides, Ignatius

[17]William Young, SJ, *Letters of St. Ignatius of Loyola* (Chicago: Loyola University Press, 1959), 12-13.

[18]David B. Knight, "Saint Ignatius' Ideal of Poverty," *Studies in the Spirituality of Jesuits* 4, no. 1 (Jan. 1972): 26.

[19]John Patrick Donnelly, SJ, *Jesuit Writings of the Early Modern Period, 1540-1640* (Cambridge: Hackett Publishing Company, Inc., 2006), 190-191.

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stressed that first, the Society could make better use of their time by equipping themselves with the necessary things for their ministry. Second, they could give more of their time to service without any income. The Society's model for poverty is that of Jesus Christ, as he himself chose poverty. According to Ignatius and his nine first companions, they chose "to go forward under his banner, to preach and exhort, as is our profession."[20] Therefore, it can be asserted that just like the prominent figures who influenced Ignatius, the poverty of Christ takes a premium. However, it should be noted that by themselves alone, they can never practice it perfectly. A life of poverty is "related always to the help of divine grace." Thus, poverty was not the cause but the effect.[21]

Begging and the Sacred Scriptures

Since the Sacred Scriptures is the soul of our Christian faith and an indispensable element of the Spiritual Exercises, it is deemed essential to also examine its teachings on begging and poverty. The *Spiritual Exercises,* as a manual, "helps the one giving the Exercises to guide other people in their experience of the mystery of Christ, God's saving revelation revealed in the Scriptures.[22] This reinforces the fact that what every Christian wanted to know about Jesus can be found in its entirety in the Gospels. With this, each scripture passage used in the *Exercises* served as a handle and door through which one, through the eyes of faith and the assistance of grace, is able to know Jesus more intimately, to love him more dearly, and to follow him closely.

[20]John Patrick Donnelly, SJ, *St. Ignatius of Loyola: Personal Writings* (London: Penguin Books, 1996), 71.

[21]Mulhern, O.P., *Dedicated Poverty*, 146.

[22]George A. Aschenbrenner, SJ, *Stretched for Greater Glory: What to Expect from the Spiritual Exercises* (Chicago, Illinois: Loyola Press, 2004), 4.

Begging in the Scriptures

Old Testament: Poor Ones of God

The term "poor" in the Hebrew language can have literal and spiritual meanings. In the literal sense, several Hebrew terms can be used to denote poor, for instance, the adjective עָנִי (*ani*). It can mean a state of distress or lowliness in a more advanced use of the term. However, in the Pentateuch, it is used to describe the Levites, the foreigners, the widows, and orphans. In other words, those without any inheritance. The spiritual nuancing of the word "poor" has been introduced in the post-exilic period. In the book of the prophet Isaiah, there is a progression in terms of the usage of the word "poor." First, in Isaiah 3: 14-15, it is used to condemn the injustices committed towards the poor. In Isaiah 14:32, the "poor" will take refuge in Zion. However, the "poor" will also be used to signify a reversal, where the poor will triumph over their enemies. Towards the end of the book, the word "poor" would signify the chosen people after their exile, who now are the recipients of "divine compassion."[23] Thus, in the Old Testament, significant events contributed to the progression of their understanding of poverty and the "poor" from literal material insufficiency to an ideal disposition and identity as the chosen people. Eventually, the *anawim* will "form the religious nucleus of the nation."[24]

[23]Bobby Worthington, "The Identity of the Poor in Luke 4:18, Jesus' Mission, and the Mission of the Church," *Criswell Theological Review* 19, no. 2 (Spring: 2022): 28.

[24]Albert Glin, *The Poor of Yahweh* (Minnesota: Liturgical Press, 1964), 32.

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New Testament: The Poor Jesus

Reading the gospels, Christians would definitely agree that the "poor" had a special consideration in Jesus' ministry. In fact, he was so focused on them that it can be generalized that his ministry was to bring God's kingdom closer to them. In the New Testament, the Greek word πτωχός (*ptochos*), would be commonly used to refer to the "poor," appearing thirty-one times, while the other three Greek words would only appear once, like πένης (*penés*), πενιχρός (*penichros*) and πτωχεύω (*ptócheuó*).[25] Strikingly, these words can be interchangeably used for poor – both the materially poor and those with a low status in society, including beggars.

The gospel of Luke makes it clear that there are two faces of the "poor" that Jesus ministers to. Aside from the materially poor and helpless, it also considered poor who "irrespective of their socioeconomic condition humbly accept their wretchedness before God and decide to live in dependence to him"[26], i.e., those who are poor in spirit. In other words, those with material possessions and security are also beneficiaries of Jesus' ministry and healing and not just the materially poor.

However, it is interesting to note that in the gospel narratives, one observes that the poor manifest a notable disposition. Whenever the poor come to Jesus to seek help for healing or raising the dead, they call on the Lord with persistence and desperation. One can notice in these two qualities a semblance of begging: going out of one's comfort zone to look for another and seek help, often out of desperation or dire need. The setting

[25]Jey J. Kanagaraj, "The Poor in the Gospels and the Good News Proclaimed to Them," *Themelios,* 23, no. 1 (Oct. 1997): 45.

[26]Kanagaraj, "The Poor in the Gospels and the Good News Proclaimed to Them," 48.

would always be among the crowd, and they would raise their voice for Jesus to recognize them.

It is interesting to note how Jesus would respond to these people in need. Jesus would stop with sympathy, "communicate with the beggar" to ask, "What is it that you desire?" Jesus then would offer "a total transformation of the person from being handicapped to being able," making the person ready to reintegrate into the community.[27] Hence, while Jesus heeded the call of those who begged for his help and God's mercy, it should be noted that it is a form of empowerment for the "poor." Jesus brought back the dignity of these persons. Therefore, it can be said that Jesus did not advocate begging in the material sense.

Begging and the *Spiritual Exercises*

Ignatius would use the Spanish word *pedir* in the earliest surviving codex of the Exercises.[28] In the basic sense of the word, *pedir* can be translated into English as to ask or to beg.[29] Furthermore, it is interesting to note that in the Spanish lexicon, *pedir* is synonymous with the words *rogar*

[27]McGlory T. Speckman, "Beggars and gospel in Luke-Acts: Preliminary Observations on an Emerging Model in the Light of Recent Developmental Theories," *Neotestamentica*, *31 No. 2* (1997): 332.

[28]In celebration of the Ignatian Year, original important documents for the foundation of the Society were restored for the general public. This collection of documents includes the surviving hand written text of Ignatius' *Spiritual Exercises* prepared in 1541. It can be accessed digitally through the *Archivum Romanum Societas Iesu* website. Cf. "Ignatian Texts Restored," *Archivum Romanum Societas Iesu*, accessed 29 August 2023, https://arsi.jesuits.global/en/digital-arsi/ignatian-texts-restored/.

[29]*Pedir* in *Diccionario Revisado Ingles-Espanol y Espanol-Ingles.* Furthermore, Mariano Velasquez' translation agrees to the translation of the word *pedir.* It can be translated as "to petition, to beg, to supplicate, to solicit.» Mariano Velasquez, *A New Pronouncing Dictionary of the Spanish and English Languages* (Chicago: Wilcox & Follett Company, 1948).

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and *mendigar*, both meaning "to beg."[30] The word "*pedir*" typically precedes a specific grace within a particular prayer in the Exercises, resulting in the phrase "*pedir gracia*." Ignatius' manuscript includes this phrase during the general examination of conscience and the meditation on the two standards.

Contemporary translators of the Exercises offer their interpretations of the term "*pedir*" and its translations, including the concept of begging within the Spiritual Exercises. Notably, the word "beg" is present in the translations of three renowned Jesuits, George Ganss[31], David Fleming[32] , and Louis Puhl. It is intriguing that the word "beg" appears in SpEx 147, in the meditation on the two standards, particularly in the standard of Christ.[33] One can surmise that these three authors put a prime on this meditation in the Exercises. Indeed, this prayer needs so much grace to boldly follow the radical way and standard of Christ. However, in David Fleming's translation, begging also appears in SpEx 233, where one begs for an "intimate knowledge of all the sharing of goods which God does in his love for me."

[30]"pedir," accessed 30 August 2023, https://m.interglot.com/es/en/pedir.

[31]In Ganss' translation, begging is addressed to Our Lady. "I beg her to obtain for me grace from her Son and Lord that I may be received under his standard." George E. Ganns, SJ, *The Spiritual Exercises of St. Ignatius of Loyola: A Translation and Commentary* (St. Louis: The Institute of Jesuit Sources, 1992), 67.

[32]David Fleming writes that begging for the grace involves Mary, Christ and the Father. David L. Fleming, SJ. *Modern Spiritual Exercises: A Contemporary Reading of the Spiritual Exercises of St. Ignatius* (New York: Image Books, 1983), 59.

[33]SpEx 147.

Ignatius and Grace

Begging in the *Spiritual Exercises* involves an attitude of reliance on grace. Pavulraj Michael, SJ, writes that in his *Spiritual Exercises*, Ignatius would refer to grace as the "total manifestation of the love of God." In addition, Michael, SJ, posits that this grace points to Christ – his "continuous activity," which does not simply mean giving graces and gifts, but "ultimately to give of himself."[34] Grace, then, is not simply a gift for Ignatius; it is a person – a person who is continuously and actively involved in each one's life. Through this ongoing revelation and giving of Himself, one could access the vast ocean offering of love.

Ignatius' concept of grace is inherently Thomistic, based on the theology of Thomas Aquinas. The medieval scholasticism of Thomas Aquinas, which shaped and dominated the Christian framework, influenced him. In his famous work *De Veritate*, Thomas Aquinas defined grace as "God's very mercy itself by which he works from within the movements of the mind and ordains external affairs to one's salvation; in this sense, one cannot perform any good work without grace."[35] Here, grace is personal and uncreated in the sense that God is operative, bestowing himself on every believer; in other words, a God who is involved. Aquinas adds that this free gift "should have the effect of elevating the essence of the soul to a kind of divine being so as to be fit for divine operations."[36] In a sense, all that there is to the person are all his or her operations. While human nature is practically inclined to the Good and to do the

[34]Michael Pavulraj, SJ, "The dynamics of *demandar lo que quiero y deseo* in the key meditations of the Spiritual Exercises," *Gregorianum* 101, no 1 (2020): 75-76.

[35]*De Veritate*, q. 24, a. 14.

[36]Stephen J. Duffy, *The Dynamics of Grace* (Oregon: Wipf and Stock Publishers, 1993), 127.

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good, it needs grace in order to grasp the divine and imitate the attributes of the divine – loving, forgiving.

Moreover, Thomas Aquinas also defines grace as something unmerited, a created gift that "perfects the essence of the soul." This perfection of the essence of the soul leads one to reflect on the wounds of sin in the Fall. That goodness that is innate in each person, born in God's image and likeness, was lost. Grace facilitates the recovery of this gift and identity. Simply put, grace allows healing to take place while at the same time empowers every Christian to actualize who he or she really is, a mastery of oneself.

When the Ignatian and Thomistic notions of grace are juxtaposed in the context of the *Spiritual Exercises*, one sees first and foremost that *grace* is *God* – the source and the gift Himself. The fourth point in Contemplation to Attain Love in the Fourth Week of the *Exercises* succinctly sums it up when Ignatius wrote that "my limited power comes from the supreme and infinite power above," like "the rays of light descend from the sun and as the waters flow from their fountains."[37]

Second, while grace is a gift, it necessitates intentionality, particularly on the part of the *exercitants,* to enter into the saving mystery of the life of Jesus Christ. That is why it is deemed important that the exercitant must have a clear conviction and realistic disposition to the demands of the reality of the sacred that they are venturing into. George Ganns, SJ, writes that the Exercises is for "willing and eager *exercitants*."[38]

In sum, grace is an indispensable element of Ignatian spirituality, particularly of the *Spiritual Exercises*. The Ignatian concept of grace is not devoid of influences, as Ignatius

[37]*The Spiritual Exercises* 237.

[38]Ganns, SJ, "The Authentic Spiritual Exercises of St. Ignatius," 7.

subscribes to the Thomistic tradition. Begging for the specific graces in particular meditations and contemplations facilitates the encounter with God, proper to each week of the *Exercises.* Moreover, it helps the exercitants enter into Christ's mysteries, which will help them to follow, love, and eventually serve Him in return.

Theology of Begging in *The Spiritual Exercises*

The foregoing historical information shows that the theology of begging in the *Spiritual Exercises* is a product of its time – both in *theology* and *spirituality*. Theologically speaking, begging in the Spiritual Exercises involves an attitude of reliance on grace. Ignatius' concept of grace is inherently Thomistic. From this scholastic theological point of view, "grace perfects the essence of the soul,"[39] i.e., grace bestows on the soul the necessary handles to reach its fullest and ultimate potential, which is to commune with God. While the human soul has the natural inclination for God, it needs grace to make it all the more possible to recognize and communicate with God. Hence, when one looks closely, this Thomistic concept of grace magnifies the necessity of grace in the *Spiritual Exercises*. In its practice, the *exercitants* beg for a specific grace for a particular week following the progressive movement of the *Exercises*. Begging for these forms of grace allows one to enter into the heart of the retreat, making a fruitful encounter with the Lord possible. These graces do not simply facilitate an encounter and renewal; instead, these graces are God himself. It is as if one is begging God to be proximate and allow us to get near Him. Therefore, these kinds of grace asked are not just means but should be considered as a person one encounters.

[39]Duffy, *The Dynamics of Grace*, 127.

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Furthermore, begging for grace would also denote intentionality, the desire *for* and *of* God. From the anthropological perspective, we have seen that beggars do this act out of dire need. Hesitation and failure to beg will lead to their physical destitution and eventual demise. When applied to the *Spiritual Exercises*, the *exercitants* are led to consider the fundamental reality of dependence on God that is the mark of our creaturehood. In other words, the human being is a beggar before God.[40] Hence, it entails intentionality on the part of the *exercitant*, not just to ask but to beg with all of his might to be near God. Begging for grace is the manifestation of our intrinsic need and dependence on God. It is also interesting to note that this can also be an acknowledgment that even prayer is a gift from God.

On another note, begging for grace in the *Spiritual Exercises* could also denote that it is a form of *agere contra,* a going against the natural tendency to stay in one's comfort zone, maintain the status quo, and control things. It seeks to debunk the idea that humans can do everything solely on their own. It challenges the *exercitants* to go out of their ordinary disposition and look at prayer as God's work: without Him initiating, prayer would not be possible.

Furthermore, *Devotio Moderna* was the trending spirituality during Ignatius' milieu. Aside from being considered a community, it was also considered a renewal movement which sought to "inflame the affect in order to achieve the heartfelt understanding required for true communion with the divine through prayer.[41] This was the breakthrough in spirituality that influenced Ignatius of Loyola. The whole of the *Exercises* is

[40]St. Augustine, *Sermo* 56, 6, 9: PL 38, 381

[41]Ulrike Hascher-Burger and Hermina Joldersma, "Introduction: Music and the Devotio Moderna," *Church History and Religious Culture* 88, no. 3 (2008): 314-315.

not just a cerebral function. On a larger scale, it involved the imagination and the heart or the affect in order to enter fully into the experience of the contemplation, that is, entering into the world of Jesus. This is found in the Fifth Contemplation of the *Spiritual Exercises,* which speaks of applying the five senses – sight, hearing, smell, taste, and touch – so as to "draw some fruits."[42] This application of the senses will significantly help the key contemplations of the life of Jesus in the *Exercises*, starting from the nativity to the resurrection. Entering this kind of contemplation will bear much fruit on the part of the *exercitant.* However, it remains a grace that needs to be begged for.

When these two notable influences – spirituality and theology – are juxtaposed, one can infer that the word "desire" can summarize the theology of begging, a *holy desire*. It is the desire *for God* and eventually, desiring to be with God. The specific grace begged for during the Second Week of the *Exercises*, particularly conveyed in the contemplation on the Incarnation, sums it up: to have "an intimate knowledge of the Lord, to love him more intensely, so as to follow Him more closely."[43] Begging in the *Spiritual Exercises* encompasses the exercitant's life from thenceforth: it does not end in the experience of the long retreat but goes beyond and continues as the *exercitants* return to their own particular realities of day-to-day life. It is good as saying that it is not a desire simply for oneself, but a desire that fuels generosity to serve.

[42]SpEx 121-125.

[43]SpEx 104. This grace is begged particularly in the Second Week of the Exercises, particularly in the Contemplation on the Incarnation.

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SpEx 104: The Ultimate Desires of the *Spiritual Exercises*

The Desire *for* God
For an intimate knowledge of the Lord

Given the scripture passages that Ignatius incorporates in the *Spiritual Exercises*, one should ultimately be led to an intimate knowledge of the Lord. The modifier "intimate" would denote knowledge beyond the conceptual and dogmatic God taught in catechesis and theology. This intimate knowledge of God is only possible through a close and personal encounter. In a sense, begging here would denote one's utmost desire to enter into a more intimate relationship with Him. In fact, the whole of the *Exercises* is a continuous process of getting to know God and letting ourselves be known by Him. Throughout the *Exercises*, we have been enabled to enter into the heart of God and unravel His ultimate desire for humanity: to call us to Himself. Indeed, without communication, no knowledge of a thing or a person can take place. When applied to our context, it is in the mediated self-communication with God that humanity can grasp who He truly is.

Moreover, we can say that before we even 'desired' an intimate knowledge of the Lord, it was He who 'desired' us first. He willed "that men should have access to the Father, through Christ the Word made flesh, in the Holy Spirit, and thus become sharers in the divine nature".[44] Humans, who have the capacity for God, became the recipient of this revelation – of who He truly is and what He desires for us. We are not made out of sheer coincidence, nor out of any need, but out of freedom and the gratuitous love of God. Pope Benedict XVI beautifully captured this thought during his inaugural address in 2005 when he

[44]Ephesians 1:9; 2-18; Peter 1:4

said, "We are not some casual and meaningless product of evolution. Each of us is the result of a thought of God. Each of us is willed, each of us is loved, each of us is necessary."[45] Since we are created in His image and likeness[46], there is an innate goodness in each of us, a capacity to know God and the capacity to love. Hence, we can surmise that this desire to desire about God does not simply end in getting to know God; rather, it reveals our true identity to us. More than a creator, He is a person who desires to be in an intimate relationship with us, and so must we.

The Desire *for* God to love him more intensely

Indeed, when one has finally resolved to enter into a relationship with God, one ought to maintain it. However, our own particular context, including our wounds, makes this desire to love God even more difficult. Loving God involves a process of freeing oneself from what hinders the relationship. Some inordinate attachments could come our way, which can be an attitude or material possessions. One of the *Spiritual Exercises*› main goals is ordering these attachments to live the life for which we are created.

Therefore, this love of God does not come overnight. It is a continuous process of knowing God on a more personal level. However, more than our effort, developing that intimate loving relationship with God involves the community since "our personal faith in Christ is supported and intensified by

[45]Pope Benedict XVI, *Homily during the Mass for the Inauguration of the Pontificate*, Homilies, accessed 8 February 2023, https://www.vatican.va/content/benedict-xvi/en/homilies/2005/documents/hf_ben-xvi_hom_20050424_inizio-pontificato.html.

[46]Genesis 1:26

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our fellow members".[47] Thus, a communitarian aspect to this desired grace will link us to the third grace of SpEx 104. More than these, we realize that along the process, in everything we do, we do not do it to gain that love, but rather, our act of faith is a response to that love continually bestowed upon us.

In all of these, this desire for God is not simply about our own human effort; it is, first and foremost, a grace, a gift that only God can give. Faith, our apt response to this gift, is further developed and nurtured by the sacraments. Through the Church, the Spirit continues to animate us through the sacraments. Through the liturgy, "especially in the Eucharist, as from a font, grace is poured forth upon us."[48] Through these outpourings of the Spirit, dispensed through the Church, we receive the necessary graces to strengthen the relationship so that we may love Him fully in return.

To Desire to be *with* God, *to follow Him more closely*

The *Spiritual Exercises* further aim to give us handles to love as we ourselves have experienced love. Basically, to follow God closely is to desire what God desires. In a sense, this desire is the most pastoral and apostolic way, as we are aligning ourselves with how Jesus, the Good Shepherd, acted. While we have our own desires, we allow ourselves to be led and aligned with the desires of the Christ of the *Exercises* – a friend of the poor, defender of the oppressed, and the voice of the neglected. We take the lead from the Head, who became poor, to bring God closer to the poor.

Inducted as members of the mystical body of Christ in baptism, we are made sharers in the divine life of the Triune

[47] *Catechism for Filipino Catholics,* 151.

[48] *Sacrosanctum Concilium,* 10.

God, as well as in their mission. This denotes that we are relational; we are made not just for ourselves but also for others. Humans have the capacity for a relationship of love and mutual self-giving. Thus, we are urged to go out of ourselves and relate with our fellow humans as a reflection of being fashioned in the image and likeness of God. Only then can one follow the Lord more closely. Therefore, "to follow him more closely" is never a personal endeavor but rather a communal one.

Hence, the whole of the *Exercises* is a progression. It is a movement that starts with a desire to know and be known by God and eventually moves on to an intimate relationship with Him. It continues to a sending-off, particularly in the Fourth Week of the *Exercises* which gives us the assurance to continue the mission God has started. The experience of the *Exercises* does not just simply end in feeling good about God and ourselves. Instead, it involves a literal going out of the self to actualize and share the gifts of being found, known, forgiven, loved, and empowered by God.

Appropriation to the Priestly Vocation

I have realized how my experience of begging for grace in the *Spiritual Exercises* benefited my seminary formation. More than deepening my faith, the *Spiritual Exercises* allowed me to discover who I am in relation to God and the vocation He has called me to. When juxtaposed with theological studies and faith life, the movement of the *Spiritual Exercises* proceeds from an intimate knowledge of the Lord to loving Him and eventually following Him, not only in His grace-filled ministry but even up to His passion and death. Moreover, this three-fold activity is confirmed in His resurrection.

Herein lies the wisdom of why seminary formation should be integral and holistic and how time is of the essence. In between

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periods of formation are episodes of begging for graces. Different pillars of formation are employed to form someone for the ministry properly. One cannot just be intellectually competent but should also have the capacity to relate with others. Consequently, pastoral formation does not just mean having social skills. Instead, the craft could be an excellent avenue for catechesis and evangelization. Holistic seminary formation implies that one must have an "intimate knowledge of the Lord" through prayer and studies so that he can "love him intensely" and "follow Him more closely," as translated in community life and the apostolate. In the updated *Ratio Fundamentalis Institutionis Sacerdotalis,* the Congregation for the Clergy posits:

> Far from being confined solely to the field of knowledge or being understood solely as a means of acquiring more information in the various disciplines, intellectual formation helps priests to listen profoundly to the Word, and also to the ecclesial community in order to learn how to read the signs of the times.[49]

Begging for grace, particularly in SpEx 104, should be done not only during the seminary formation but should continue into the priestly ministry and for one's entire lifetime. Begging for this grace is also a good reminder that our chosen life is not about ourselves but centered on God and others, a movement from the inside to the outside. A much deeper reflection should further lead us to the realization that anyone can beg for this grace. After all, we are all called to holiness.

Conclusion

In the *Spiritual Exercises*, Ignatius presents us a God of desire and providence. He is a God of desire who wishes that we, too, should desire Him. However, to desire Him is a grace we must beg

[49]*Ratio Fundamentalis Institutionis Sacerdotalis,* 117.

from Him. One would not dare to beg if there were no assurances from a provident God. Therefore, more than just making us realize our contingency and dependence, the theology of begging in the *Spiritual Exercises* makes us realize how God has been gracious and reassuring since the beginning. At the same time, begging reflects how ardent we are in our desire to have a deeper relationship with Him.