

## Reform of Life for Religious (adapted from Fr. Fuentes)

As we've been making our way through the meditations and contemplations, we've been receiving different lights, different motions of the different spirits, and various fruits (indeed, as was said at the beginning, each meditation or contemplation should have some concrete fruit I can take away from it, something that I have been given). These are all good things, but we can't leave them just at that: we need to take what we've been given and incorporate it into our daily lives, to really live the Exercises beyond the Exercises. In a sense, after living the 30 day Exercises, we need to make sure we live the 31<sup>st</sup> day well.

### 1. What is to be reformed?

Saint Ignatius tells us that the Spiritual Exercises "have as their purpose the conquest of self and the regulation of one's life in such a way that no decision is made under the influence of any inordinate attachment" [21].

At this point in the Exercises, it is to be taken for granted that, throughout the meditations we've done, we've identified four things:

- a) First, God's will for us **in the past**: we've seen this through the Holy Spirit's inspirations, His lights, and the circumstances of our lives, and the will of our superiors;
- b) Second, what God is **clearly** asking from us **now**;
- c) Third, those things in which we don't see clearly what God is asking from us. **And it's regarding these things that we need to apply the Rules of Election that Saint Ignatius gives** in order to see what God's will is.
- d) Fourth, the concrete obstacles that impede us from completely and totally following Christ.

It's on the basis of all these things that we should reform our lives.

To reform means "to give form to again," "to form anew." It's like when a potter is making something out of clay, and doesn't like the shape, so they go back and form it anew. How is this done? We must look at and examine the different aspects of our formation, taking note if something is missing in one of them, something that we need to start, remove, reform, modify, or perfect. After having those things in mind, we must make a plan of life that is both realistic and concrete.

### 2. Revision of one's life

The “revision” of one’s life means the examination we need to make of the different dimension of our life, in order to **discover** the things we need to work on. These things are:

**a) Human formation:** this means our human personality, our balance. Concretely what we need to look at here are:

- What virtues I need to acquire
- What defects I need to combat
- What is my dominant defect?
- Interior and exterior order in my life
- My emotions: my capacity for friendship, my attachments

**b) Formation in community life:**

- Life in community: my participation in the life of the community (eutrapelia), giving of my talents
- Fraternal charity
- Obedience
- Generosity and offering of my self

**c) Intellectual formation**

- How I take advantage of my studies: Am I content just to get by and do the minimum? Do I even reach the minimum? Do I believe C’s get degrees, passes say Masses, fails get veils?
- Personal participation: Do I take interest in those moments of formation: conviviums, melodiums, monthly presentations . . .
- Personal study: Am I looking to studying something more? To delve more deeply into a topic?
- Cultural formation: Can I try to reading something more, something additional? Do I do it? Am I interested in doing it?

**d) Pastoral formation**

- Prayer and mortification for my apostolate
- Preparation for my apostolate
- Development and growth of my apostolate
- Apostolic zeal

### **3. The plan for my life (the reform, properly speaking)**

Once we see the things that stand out from this examination, we must come up with a realistic plan for reforming my life.

**a) Characteristics**

- The plan should be *adjusted* to our duties of state, to my habitual occupations, the dispositions of my soul, my temperament, and my character, to my strengths, and to my real present state of perfection.

- It should be both *flexible* and *rigid*. It should be flexible enough that I'm not a slave to it, when charity to my neighbor requires it, or some serious and unforeseen circumstance, or obedience to my superiors makes it impossible to carry out what I had planned. However, it should *rigid* enough so that I don't just change it on a whim.

### **b) What it should include**

- **A basic daily schedule:** as religious, we already have a basic schedule for each house. However, we might need to adjust it or come up with one during vacations.
- **The basic projects I wanted to accomplish:** these tasks are all of the things that I've seen that I need to work on: which one is the most urgent? And after I accomplish that, where do I go from there? What follows next?
- **The development or progress of that project:** with what means will I accomplish the task that I'm proposing for myself (for instance, to acquire this or that virtue, to overcome this or that vice, what acts must I perform? How often?) The essential and indispensable mean for this is the daily examination of conscience.

### **c) Rendering an account**

Each month, in the monthly retreat, I should examine what I've done, make decisions, to impose some sort of punishment on myself if I need to, examine what steps should be the next ones, etc.

Regarding the reform of life, then, we can consider two more short chapters from Fr. Fuentes' book on maturity according to Jesus Christ: the first regards *responsibility*, since we need to be responsible in our search for holiness and perfection, and, second, we're reminded that seeking perfection is *the difficult path*. We can't take shortcuts.

*Not everyone who says to me, 'Lord, Lord,' will enter the kingdom of heaven, but only the one who does the will of my Father in heaven. Many will say to me on that day, 'Lord, Lord, did we not prophesy in your name? Did we not drive out demons in your name? Did we not do mighty deeds in your name?' Then I will declare to them solemnly, 'I never knew you. Depart from me, you evildoers.'*

*Everyone who listens to these words of mine and acts on them will be like a wise man who built his house on rock. The rain fell, the floods came, and the winds blew and buffeted the house. But it did not collapse; it had been set solidly on rock. And everyone who listens to these words of mine but does not act on them will be like a fool who built his house on sand. The rain fell, the floods came, and the winds blew and buffeted the house. And it collapsed and was completely ruined.*

Mt 7:21-27

In this last paragraph from the Sermon on the Mount, Jesus distinguishes between the true disciple and the false one based on their attitude when confronted with the Word of God. “The Word of God” is the same as saying “the Divine will,” since in His Word God expresses His will.

Here Jesus is speaking of “disciples,” that is, of those who “accept” God’s will. Those who reject it are not even to be considered in these verses.

(i) Once again we are confronted with the *mature person* and the *immature* according to the vision of Our Lord. The touchstone in order to distinguish one from another is, in the end, *responsibility*, and this is the topic that Jesus is discussing here. “Responsibility” is etymologically derived from “respondere,” *to respond*, or perhaps from “res ponderare,” *to weigh the thing*.

The responsibility of each individual is measured by the way of weighing—that is, valuing—that which with God confronts them, and by their awareness of their duty to respond before God, society, and themselves.

(ii) The immature person spoken of here does not, properly speaking, reject the divine will *outright*; the one who is opposed to God’s will in that way is the *fool* or the *crazy person* of whom Scripture often speaks. However, without rejecting God’s will, the immature do not assume it responsibly; they do not make it efficacious in their own person. The Lord says they “did not act on it.” Perhaps they did not reach the point of “pondering” it with the right value and urgency. The immature take things in—including the divine will—with superficiality; perhaps they do so with enthusiasm, as Our Lord says in the parable of the sower. However, such ones do not let God’s will transform them interiorly, becoming incarnate, as it were, in their own will. In other words, the two wills do not unite. For this reason, it should not surprise us that the things that Jesus places on the lips of these immature persons could be considered as usual “priestly” expressions: we prophesized (we preached), we expelled demons (by blessing, exorcising, forgiving), we did miracles (cancelling out sins, transubstantiating bread into Christ’s body, converting souls), etc. Among priests, there are many who are irresponsible with respect to God’s word. God is deployed by means of them (through their priestly power), but this does not transform them, just as the water that passes through a duct does not change it. They build upon sand.

(iii) In contrast, the mature *build upon rock*, as Jesus says. The firmness of the foundations of the balanced person can be understood in different senses. “The Rock is Christ,” Saint Paul says, on account of which the short parable of the house built upon rock has often been understood as built upon Christ. However, it also means every stable foundation, like God’s word and the divine will. God’s plans are immutable, and those who attempt to separate themselves from them work in vain, because men cannot frustrate those plans; these will infallibly be brought about, even though those who are opposed to them contribute to them in a way that is very different from the way that God offers them if they wanted to work according to His Will. This is because God offers everyone salvation, meaning, to freely

incorporate themselves into His plans. The one who rejects that will see it fulfilled *despite himself*. “God frustrates the plans of the nations”:

“The LORD foils the plan of nations,  
frustrates the designs of peoples.  
But the plan of the LORD stands forever,  
the designs of his heart through all generations (Ps 33:10-11).

(iv) It could be objected that if these people say that they have performed miracles and have preached in Christ’s name, then they could not have been opposed to His plans. Nonetheless, this is the way that it is. The divine plan is principally directed to the conversion of hearts; preaching, miracles, and signs of power are nothing more than “doorways” for transformation of heart. Of what use are those things if souls are not transformed in Christ? The key to understand this is in the Lord’s phrase: “I never knew you.” Those men who have expelled demons and who have preached Christ, did not know Christ, nor did Christ know them. This is because the knowledge of which Our Lord speaks is a communion of persons. These men build their lives on an externally correct frame, but their building had no soul. They acted like Christ’s disciples, without actually becoming true disciples.

(v) From here arises the tremendous drama of *responsibility*. All that God gave them (*power* over demons, *eloquence* of words, *the charism* of healing, etc.) should have been used responsibly. Responsibility demands that those powers should be used first upon oneself: expelling one’s own demons, that is, one’s vices, letting oneself be transformed by the Word. In Saint John’s Gospel the Lord says: “Whoever rejects me and does not accept my words has something to judge him: the word that I spoke, it will condemn him on the last day” (Jn 12:48). The one who preaches Christ’s word can also reject it: they preach it for others, but block it in their hearts. To preach does not mean to accept. To convert is to accept. To transport water does not mean to drink it; the aqueduct brings life to the fields, but within it, nothing ever comes to life. In its stone womb only moss can grow, and, as the water passes more dizzily, not even that. Preachers who let the Word of God pass through their minds and from their mouths like a violent river that falls down bathing others but without wetting them are *irresponsible with their own souls*.

(vi) “Everyone who listens to these words of mine and acts on them will be like a wise man.” The mature person is the one who is responsible before God for what they have received through Christ’s words—that is, God’s will. Our responsibility is that that word be transformed into “practice,” into “life.” “And everyone who listens to these words of mine but does not act on them will be like a fool,” immature, irresponsible.

(vii) —“Lord, I have raised someone from the dead.” —“But with your life, what have you done?” —“Lord, I have preached marvelously about you.” —“But, what have you done with your heart?” What the Lord awaits from us is that His word—His plans, His idea of us—

should become reality. What have you made of yourself? What are your interior fruits? What can you present me of yourself?

(viii) Regarding the immature person, Jesus says: “[he] was completely ruined.”