

# Growing into Living Faith through the Experience of the Spiritual Exercises of St. Ignatius of Loyola

Author: Martin Sebo

Persistent link: <http://hdl.handle.net/2345/2501>

This work is posted on [eScholarship@BC](#),  
Boston College University Libraries.

---

Boston College Electronic Thesis or Dissertation, 2011

Copyright is held by the author, with all rights reserved, unless otherwise noted.

**Boston College – School of Theology and Ministry**

**GROWING INTO LIVING FAITH THROUGH  
THE EXPERIENCE OF THE SPIRITUAL EXERCISES  
OF ST. IGNATIUS OF LOYOLA**

**STL Thesis**

By: Martin Sebo, S.J.  
Directed by: Melissa M. Kelley, Ph.D.  
Second Reader: John J. Shea, O.S.A., Ph.D., M.S.W.

Date: 05.15.2011

## Content

Introduction.....	4
Chapter One: Psychological understandings of God images, the work of Anne Marie Rizzutto .....	13
Principle of conceptualization of God .....	13
Object representation.....	13
Genesis of images of God.....	17
Born into the religious bubble.....	18
Mental capacities at work .....	20
Mirror has two faces .....	21
A safety harbor .....	23
Fantasy in play .....	24
Speculations about the ultimate mover.....	26
Oedipal crises .....	27
God has a face at last.....	28
Brief presentation of the Spiritual Exercises.....	33
Chapter Two: A Psychology of Conversion .....	35
William James on conversion .....	37
A perception that “something is there”.....	41
Other aspects involving the conversion .....	44
Summary.....	46
Chapter Three: A Theology of Conversion.....	48
Sin in the work of Josef Fuchs .....	48
Forsaking the sin - Josef Fuchs .....	51
Responding to the “call” - Karl Rahner .....	54
The final integration - Thomas Merton.....	56
Summary.....	59
Summary of the perspectives .....	61
Chapter Four: Healing our images of God through the experience of the Spiritual Exercises .....	63
In core we have something divine .....	63
Factors which shape our faith.....	66
Obstacles in searching for the true God.....	71
Viewing our faith through the magnifying glass.....	75
Healthy and unhealthy images of God.....	83
1. God as a harsh judge .....	86
2. God of endless mercy .....	90
3. God of death .....	93

4. The God of life.....	96
Summary.....	97
Chapter Five: Conversion through the Spiritual Exercises .....	100
The second week of the Exercises .....	101
Conversion of identity - Radical discipleship .....	104
Humility according to Ignatius.....	105
Hurdles on the way .....	107
Problem of our heart .....	109
To will or not will as God inspires us .....	115
Can we know God's will?.....	117
Our Feelings are Key to Discerning God's will .....	119
Summary .....	122
Final Conclusion .....	125
Bibliography .....	130

## Introduction

Max Lucado, a Protestant writer and preacher, tells a story of a sociologist who accompanied a group of mountain climbers on an expedition. Among other things, he observed a distinct correlation between cloud cover and contentment. “When there was no cloud cover and the peak was in view, the climbers were energetic and cooperative. When the gray clouds eclipsed the view of the mountaintop, the climbers lost their “spirit.”<sup>1</sup>

This story of Max Lucado tells us something important about us and the way we can live our faith. As long as we keep our eyes fixed on God there is a bounce in our step. But when we let our eyes focus on the dirt beneath us, our faith loses its life-giving aspect. Somehow the cross of everyday life becomes unbearable if we lose God from our “sight.” In other words, we can live life focused and troubled with earthly matters where faith has little or no meaning for us, or we can live life with living and nurturing faith which gives meaning to every moment of our life, any activity and any relationship. It all depends on how we want to live our faith and how we want to “see” God. For this reason St. Paul urged: *“If then you were raised with Christ, seek what is above, where Christ is seated at the right hand of God. Think of what is above, not of what is on earth”* (Col 3: 2).

But what is living faith? Do we really know what it is? Some Christians want to keep themselves on God’s right side and others want keep themselves as far away from God as possible. Some Christians constantly fear God, while others feel that God is controlling their lives or ignoring their needs. Do some Christians live a living faith when they believe that God is parenting them? We have many views of God and not all our views help to live our faith fully. The problem is that we are often comfortable with our faith and we do not question our faith. We

---

<sup>1</sup> Max Lucado, *Grace for the moment*, 289.

do not realize that there might be something wrong with the faith we live and in fact, it might be very poor. We have all kinds of images of God and not all our images of God help us live our faith fully. Our image of God takes its root in our childhood experiences, and in our learning about God, or in some life trauma. Sometimes negative religious experiences leave imprints on our images of God and our faith. We do not use the potential that our faith offers because of our limited and unhealthy images of God. But what could change our unhealthy images of God and what could help us grow in our faith? We may make decisions to live fully our faith without fears and prejudices about God. We need to learn to enjoy our faith and find support in it for our needs and life challenges. It is not necessary to be a theologian to have an intensive relationship with God and use the great potential that faith offers us. In our Judeo-Christian tradition we believe in a God who loves the world and every creature in it. God especially desires a close friendship with every human being. Ignatius offers his Spiritual Exercises as an effective tool which can help us to realize and enjoy better God's presence in our lives. Some people find themselves freed from the burden of their deep-seated fear, some secret sins, some sinful tendencies, or something of which they are ashamed and could not bear the light of day, when they face their fears and secrets through the experience of the Spiritual Exercises. I find the Spiritual Exercises of St. Ignatius to be a great religious experience which heal our unhealthy images of God and increase our potential to live our faith more intensively.

In my first chapter I want to analyze the principles in which we form or elaborate our images of God. In my second and third chapters, I will try to analyze religious conversion from psychological and theological perspectives. I will show how conversion can change our unhealthy images of God and conversely, how our healthy images of God may enhance our own religious conversion and development. In my fourth chapter, I will analyze some images of God

we may have when we enter the Spiritual Exercises. Based on the biblical images used in the Exercises, I also want to propose some practical hints which may help the exercitant review his faith and enhance transformation from his unhealthy images of God. And in my final chapter, I want to come to the point of my thesis: how the exercises may enable conversion of ourselves to the image from which we were created. We have been created in God's image and this image is distorted by sin that alienates us from God and continues our inclination toward sin. The Exercises help to renew us as God's created images and they enable us to experience a closer relationship with God. Christ is the ideal we are called to imitate and the Exercises provide a mechanism that can help us to reach this goal. Christ is the image in which we may become what we are meant to be as human beings. Christ renews in us a divine life and this brings blessings and order to our lives. The more we become Christ-like the more we grow in the living faith.

When we talk about God<sup>2</sup> we usually think about a Being somewhere in space who is the object of worship for many religions. There have always been discrepancies in the way we speak about God. For instance, Catholic theology speaks about a transcendent God who is One, true, holy, personal, eternal, infinite (immense) and unchangeable, incomprehensible, almighty, ineffable and living creator of the whole being.<sup>3</sup> When philosophy speaks about God, it speaks in very limited abstract concepts or ideas, as if God were not a living Being, but a product of our mind. No matter how hard we try to grasp this Being in words, our language and concepts are limited. It is because we do not have direct sensual experience of God. In spite of our limitations, in which we cannot "see" or sensually experience God, we can and we do relate to God. There are many levels and ways of relating to God, but we can generally say that religious experience of God as a Being, or beings, concept of mind, or impersonal energy is a common

---

<sup>2</sup> The focus of this discussion is a God of the Judeo-Christian belief who revealed Himself to us in many ways, but ultimately through his own Son, Jesus Christ.

<sup>3</sup> *Catechism of Catholic Church*, 268, 2115, 300, 2807.

human experience shared in many cultures. Each person has specific concepts, qualities and images of God, but certain images and concept of God are common to many people. In our Western culture, many people experience God as a personal being and also as a concept of our mind. This means that we experience the presence of God, in a “place” that is neither wholly outside nor inside us, real or fantasized.

Freud, however, asserts that God is an illusion which takes place in our psyche only.<sup>4</sup> Based on this empirical notion only, we cannot assert with certitude whether our religious experience takes place in our psyche only, as Freud stated, or if we may relate to God as theology claims for instance. This is something that neither Philosophy nor Psychology can answer. Smith<sup>5</sup> makes a distinction between faith and religion. He speaks of religions as “cumulative traditions.” He understands religion as a cumulative tradition as the various expressions of the faith of people in the past. A cumulative tradition may be constituted by texts of scripture or law, narratives, myths, prophecies, accounts of revelation. Smith understands faith as deeper and more personal than religion. Faith is “the person’s or group’s way of responding to transcendent value and power as perceived and grasped through the forms of the cumulative tradition.”<sup>6</sup> What is perhaps more interesting for us is that some people relate to God as to another human being and they experience this relating as a human – divine relationship. In spite of our effort to know whether there is a God, we can at least say that our religious experience is not illusory. A huge contribution of psychology is that it helps us to better understand the process by which we conceptualize, imagine and relate to God. Though we differ in our concepts or

---

<sup>4</sup> “Wikipedia Sigmund Freud,” last modified March, 2011, [http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Sigmund\\_Freud#cite\\_ref-84](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Sigmund_Freud#cite_ref-84), “Freud regarded the monotheistic god as an illusion based upon the infantile emotional need for a powerful, supernatural pater familias; and that religion — once necessary to restrain man’s violent nature in the early stages of civilization — in modern times, can be set aside in favor of reason and science.”

<sup>5</sup> James W. Fowler, *Stages of Faith*, 9.

<sup>6</sup> James W. Fowler, *Stages of Faith*, 9.



schemata of God because of our cultural background, religious traditions, family environment or life circumstances, Psychology contributes to help us identify the origins and varieties of our perspectives and images of God.

In our everyday life and religious practice some schemata of God enhance our relationship to God and some do not. Psychoanalysis attempts to say why it happens. According to “objects relation theory”<sup>7</sup> we encounter God with learned schemata or images of God. We elaborate these schemata from our relationships with parents and others, from religious education about God and from our past experiences with God. These images are often distorted and untrue to the real God. The problem is that these distorted images of God impoverish our experience with God and our religious life. Religious growth consists in progressive learning and experiencing more realistic images of God through prayer, sacraments, the Bible, faith sharing, or the Spiritual Exercises. This religious growth can also be seen as abandoning false images of God or idols which impede us from living true life and enriching religious experiences.<sup>8</sup> Psychoanalysis specifies these images and it also gives us some background information about these images, but it can hardly substitute for the religious experience itself. Though the concepts and images of God are important for our faith, the way we experience and relate to them goes beyond our concepts of God. It is because one does not have faith in the concept, but one has a personal relationship with another in faith. “I trust to, I commit myself to, I rest my heart upon, I pledge allegiance to.” Religious experience is relational. It is a personal investment or devotion to the Mystery we call God.<sup>9</sup>

---

<sup>7</sup> Ana-Maria Rizzuto, *The Birth of The Living God*, 54. (“Object representation and self-representation are compound memorial processes originating at all levels of development in time. These processes involve objects and the person representing them in dynamic interaction with each other”)

<sup>8</sup> W. A. Berry, *Letting God come close*, 138.

<sup>9</sup> James W. Fowler, *Stages of Faith*, 16-18.

## Explanation of specific terms

Before this discussion begins, it is necessary to explain a specific vocabulary I use in my thesis. The first term that needs to be explained is the *self*. For Fowler<sup>10</sup>, “the self means to be a human being with structuring patterns that shapes a distinctive style of being person. Selfhood depends in basic ways on our embodiment: we are our bodies. To be self is a reflexive matter. It is a matter of becoming aware of self as self, and this means in relation to, and with help of, the responses of others.”<sup>11</sup>

The next terms that need explanation are the *adolescing self* and the *adult self*. Shea<sup>12</sup> understands the *adolescing self* as a still forming self. It is a self still growing, coming together, on the way to its own self-possession and coherence. “The *adult self* is simply defined as an integral self-in-mutuality<sup>13</sup>. No longer still - forming and still dependent, the adult self is now an undivided, integral whole.”<sup>14</sup>

*Fettered imaging* – “While we are growing up, our way of imagining reality is necessarily immature. Fettered imaging, then, is simply *adolescing imaging*, the imaging that comes directly from the still-forming and still-dependent *adolescing self*.”<sup>15</sup> “*Unfettered*

---

<sup>10</sup> James W. Fowler, *Faith Development and Pastoral Care*, 55-56.

<sup>11</sup> James W. Fowler, *Faith Development and Pastoral Care*, 55-56.

<sup>12</sup> John J. Shea, *Finding God Again*, 3.

<sup>13</sup> Harold H. Oliver, “Relatedness: Essay in Metaphysics and Theology,” in *Finding God again*, John J. Shea. (Lanham: Rowman & Littlefield Publishing Inc., 2005), 67. (“The notion of self-hood which discloses itself intuitively rather than reflectively is that of the relational self. In relational selfhood there is no ‘I’ separated from a ‘Thou’; for the ‘experiential other’ signals not ‘separation,’ but ‘mutuality.’ Accordingly, it is more faithful to experience to say that the ‘I’ is created by the relation than to say that the ‘I’ creates the relation through its prior subjectivity. The ‘I’ emerges with its ‘Thou’ in the same creative act. Reality thus discloses itself relationally as ‘mutuality.’”)

<sup>14</sup> John J. Shea, *Finding God Again*, 57.

<sup>15</sup> John J. Shea, *Finding God Again*, 11.

*imagining* is a process of imagining reality that is no longer embedded, as is fettered imaging, in elements of fantasy.”<sup>16</sup>

*Mature* - The mature adult has a capacity for intimacy and a readiness, based on a firm sense of identity, to risk the self in relations of closeness to others, without a paralyzing fear of a loss or compromise of the self. This is a person who has a sense of independence, an ability to stand alone, if necessary, on matters of principle. The generative adult has a capacity for work and has developed a set of competencies that equip her to be a productive contributor to society and to carry out effectively the roles and responsibilities these bring.<sup>17</sup>

*Id, Ego, Superego* - Freud uses these terms (*Id, Ego, and Superego*) to denote the personality structure. As soon as the man is born his structure of personality develops. Freud suggests that our personality consists of three functional units: *id, ego* and *superego*. In the early childhood the man’s mental activity is dominated by the *id*. This means that in this stage of life child’s body and psyche is driven by instincts, urges, and needs. The child’s mind operates primarily unconsciously. The *id* functions in our psyche as a carrier or operator of sensual drives that body receives from internal and external impulses. Freud’s definition of *id* is: "It is the dark, inaccessible part of our personality, what little we know of it we have learned from our study of the dream-work and of the construction of neurotic symptoms, and most of that is of a negative character and can be described only as a contrast to the ego. It is filled with energy reaching it from the instincts, but it has no organization, produces no collective will, but only a striving to bring about the satisfaction of the instinctual needs subject to the observance of the pleasure principle."<sup>18</sup> Freud considers aggression and libido impulses as life instruments.

---

<sup>16</sup> John J. Shea, *Finding God Again*, 75.

<sup>17</sup> James W. Fowler, *Becoming adult, Becoming Christian: Adult Development & Christian faith*, 19-20.

<sup>18</sup> Sigmund Freud, *The Complete Introductory Lectures on Psychoanalysis*, 537.

He suggests that these impulses are good in themselves, if they are driven by love. However, if they are driven by selfishness, they may become evil in our life.<sup>19</sup> When the child's mental abilities develop it is the *ego* that becomes the organizing center of his personality. The ego functions as the conscious rational center of the personality that controls instinctual impulses of the id.<sup>20</sup> The Ego is part of the personality structure that is comprised of defensive, perceptual, intellectual-cognitive functions. Ego "thinks, decides and controls"; it is the center of the self, "I". "Thus the ego, driven by the id, confined by the super-ego, repulsed by reality, struggles to master its economic task of bringing about harmony among the forces and influences working in and upon it."<sup>21</sup> It seeks to please the id's drive in realistic ways. Freud concedes that the ego attempts to mediate between id and reality.

The *super-ego* acts as the conscience, maintaining our sense of morality. For Freud "the installation of the super-ego can be described as a successful instance of identification with the parental agency. The super-ego also takes on the influence of those who have stepped into the place of parents — educators, teachers, people chosen as ideal models."<sup>22</sup> The super-ego tends to stand in opposition to the desires of the id because of their conflicting objectives, and its aggressiveness towards the ego. Freud's theory implies that the superego develops as internalization of the father figure and cultural regulations.<sup>23</sup>

---

<sup>19</sup> Francis P. Xavier, *Guilt Feelings*, 23.

<sup>20</sup> Edward V. Stein, *Guilt: Theory and Therapy*, 32.

<sup>21</sup> Sigmund Freud, *The Complete Introductory Lectures on Psychoanalysis*, 542.

<sup>22</sup> Sigmund Freud, *The Complete Introductory Lectures on Psychoanalysis*, 526.

<sup>23</sup> "Wikipedia Id, ego and super-ego," last modified May 7, 2011, <http://www.google.com/intl/en/privacypolicy.html>.

## **Thesis**

Some people seek to become truly religious, but pursuing this goal takes much more than a routine religious practice. The Spiritual Exercises of St. Ignatius of Loyola is one way one can commence to live a living faith. In my thesis I am trying to show how the Spiritual Exercises can help people grow in their faith and their relationship with God. The special way that the Exercises can help us to reach this goal is mainly through the transformation of our unhealthy or false images of God and transformation of ourselves into the image of Christ.

# **Chapter One: Psychological understandings of God images, the work of Anne Marie Rizzutto**

## **Principle of conceptualization of God**

The question how we actually perceive and relate to God still remains fascinating. What process does it take to conceive the idea and image of God? We usually fantasize God as another human being only with much more powerful qualities; and, in addition, we often express our affections towards God. Maritan<sup>24</sup> asserts that the concept of God is a product of our reasoning, but at the same time he proposes that there are two forms of mental processes that simultaneously follow each other and elaborate our concept of God. One concept of God is an outcome of our abstraction of ideas and the other concept is result of our object representations. “The idea of God is a new concept, a more conscious secondary process. It may be connected with object representations but does not depend on them alone, nor does it even necessarily originate in them, but in inferential thinking about cause and effect.”<sup>25</sup> Both mental processes are part of our reasoning, but both involve two different forms of abstraction. For our purpose we are going to discuss the latter (object representation) and it is because we begin using this ability shortly after our birth.

## **Object representation**

“Object relations theory is based upon the assumption that human being and acting in the world have their wellsprings in interactions between people rather than, as Freud and classical

---

<sup>24</sup> Ana-Maria Rizzuto, *The Birth of The Living God*, 28.

<sup>25</sup> Ana-Maria Rizzuto, *The Birth of The Living God*, 28.

psychoanalysts supposed, intra psychic conflicts originating in repressed and suppressed biological and psychological drives, wishes and fears.”<sup>26</sup>

The concept of object representation or “*imago*” started with Freud and his theory of religious phenomena.<sup>27</sup> “The people to whom he is in this way fixed are his parents and his brothers and sisters. All those whom he gets to know later become substitute figures for his first objects of his feelings. These substitute figures can be classified from his point of view according as they are derived from what we call ‘*imagos*’ of his father and his mother, his brothers and sisters, and so on.”<sup>28</sup> “An image begins as a vague, felt inner representation of some state of affairs and of our feelings about it. The image unites “information” and feeling; it holds together orientation and affectional significance.”<sup>29</sup> Forming of an image in our mind occurs consciously and unconsciously and is prior to and deeper than our abstract ideas. The word “object” is used to refer, first, to the significant people in our lives who shape who we are. Object relations are first patterns of interaction we form with such people and then we record these patterns or schemas for the rest of our life. From now on we will use the term object representation or image as equivalent for patterns or schemas. Object representation is therefore a compounding process of representing, remembering, fantasizing, interpreting, and integrating experiences with other people through defensive and adaptive maneuvers. This process of object representation occurs when two individuals are relating or interacting one with another.<sup>30</sup> We should note that our

---

<sup>26</sup> Leroy. T. Howe, *The Image of God* (Nashville: Abingdon, 1995), 93.

<sup>27</sup> Ana-Maria Rizzuto, *The Birth of The Living God*, 5. *Imago* – “The nature and quality of the human child’s relations to people of his own and the opposite sex have already been laid down in the first six years of his life. He may afterwards develop and transform them in certain directions but he can no longer get rid of them. The people to whom he is in this way fixed are his parents and his brothers and sisters...All of his later choices of friendship and love follow upon the basis of the memory – traces left behind by these first prototypes.”

<sup>28</sup> Sigmund Freud, “*Some Reflections on Schoolboy Psychology*,” in *The Birth of The Living God*, Ana-Maria Rizzuto, 30.

<sup>29</sup> Leroy. T. Howe, *The Image of God* (Nashville: Abingdon, 1995), 112.

<sup>30</sup> Sigmund Freud, “*Some Reflection on Schoolboy Psychology*,” in *Abstracts of the Standard Edition of the Complete Psychological Works of Sigmund Freud*, ed. by Carrie L. Rothgeb, 284.

primary object representations are lifelong imprints from the significant people who make the most formative impact on our personality, object representations and God representation. In our interaction with other people we experience both “good” and “bad” object representations. “Good objects” are those people who affirm and cherish us and who nurture our development caringly, encouragingly, and with enthusiasm. By contrast, “bad objects” are persons who react to us either with indifference, rejection, or persecution; they are persons for whom we are either a problem or a thing to be manipulated.<sup>31</sup> In general, these object representations shape our character, our view of the world and other people, and our relationships. They also affect our moral evaluations. For instance, our bad object representations which stem from our past negative experiences with formative people can make us see or judge other people worse than they actually are. It means that our bad or unhealthy object representations affect our moral judgment.<sup>32</sup>

Clearly, the availability of good objects is essential to our development as human beings both at the beginning and throughout our life. Later, we will discuss availability and absence of the good objects and their effect on us and our relationship to God. Equally important for our healthy development is our capacity to respond to good objects when they make their appearance.<sup>33</sup>

Once we are familiar with our key term “object representation” we also need be familiar with another significant term: “God representation.” “The images of loving faces that we carry with us and the God representations we fashion from them are for us the most important symbols of all: They make God present to us.”<sup>34</sup> In other words, God representation is our mental conceptualization of God that originates in our past and present object representations. Our

---

<sup>31</sup> Leroy. T. Howe, *The Image of God*, 93.

<sup>32</sup> Leroy. T. Howe, *The Image of God*, 94.

<sup>33</sup> Leroy. T. Howe, *The Image of God* (Nashville: Abingdon, 1995), 93.

<sup>34</sup> Leroy. T. Howe, *The Image of God* (Nashville: Abingdon, 1995), 112-113.



image of God is attributed to and originates in our object representation that we form of those who have loved us and love us still.<sup>35</sup> But the truth is that our image of God originates in our bad object representations as well.

Howe briefly proposes a process of our imagining God. When we try to imagine God, we set in motion a scanning of interrogation or questioning. This process involves both a forming and an expression. Our memory recalls characteristics of the most formative objects we have experienced and we integrate them into one output. It is almost like putting together a slide show of images into one compact picture. In religious awakening, we question our God representation because it might be in conflict with our present situation, ideals, primary objects, present object representations or self representation. It is interesting to read, for instance, about Thomas Merton's account of his religious awakening in his autobiography.<sup>36</sup> In his account we can recognize the conflict between his present way of life or beliefs and his ideal or necessity to live the living faith. Our religious awakening may be triggered by a tragic event, sudden death of the close person or it may be triggered by something very ordinary like a touching story, falling in love, appealing music or a movie. For Merton it was an encounter with the living Christian community, reading an English poet William Blake and philosophical discussions at the Colombia University.

And conversely, not only our good and bad object representations form our God image, but it is also true that our God representation shapes who we are. They form the basic patterns of our feelings, our thoughts, and our conduct. They affect our human and religious growth in both ways, positive and negative. They may enhance or hinder our development. It is not easy to

---

<sup>35</sup> Leroy. T. Howe, *The Image of God* (Nashville: Abingdon, 1995), 112.

<sup>36</sup> Thomas Merton, *The Seven Storey Mountain*, 208. (... , I became more and more conscious of the necessity of a vital faith, and the total unreality and unsubstantiality of the dead, selfish rationalism which had been freezing my mind and will for the last seven years. By the time the summer was over, I was to become conscious of the fact that the only way to live was to live in a world that was charged with the presence and reality of God.”)

identify images of God that shape us, because many of our object and God representations operate from our subconscious. Our subconscious images of God do not always correspond with our conscious images of God. The other problem is that the image of God we consciously proclaim is not always operative or dominant in our lives. Frequently it is our subconscious images of God that determine who we are, how we feel, what we think, how we behave. And it is also true that our subconscious and conscious images of God represent our faith.<sup>37</sup> The process of integrating our God image begins early in our life and lasts through the span of our life.

### **Genesis of images of God**

When we talk about religious experience and faith in God we naturally question how it really works. How do we imagine God or how is he from our perspective? What is common and what is different in our perspectives of God? Perhaps our general perception is that we generate our image of God when we are able to reason or when we are introduced to our religion, by practicing religious rituals, religious conversion or simply by adapting the idea of God's existence. It all manifests some religious experience, but interestingly enough, we begin to process our image of God right from the dawn of our life.

Rizzuto explains the process of generating God's image in her book, *The Birth of the Living God*. She proposes a genesis of this process and she follows Freud's theory of God's representation. For Freud the image of God and the end of the oedipal complex create an internal world. The image of God is the oedipal imago of the father.<sup>38</sup> "Of all the images of a childhood which, as a rule, is no longer remembered, none is more important for a youth or a man than that

---

<sup>37</sup> Karl Frielingsdorf, *Seek the Face of God*, 19.

<sup>38</sup> Ana-Maria Rizzuto, *The Birth of The Living God*, 45.

of his father... A little boy is bound to love and admire his father, who seems to him the most powerful, the kindest and the wisest creature in the world. God himself is after all only an exaltation of this picture of a father as he is represented in the mind of early childhood.”<sup>39</sup>

Therefore, Freud proposes that the child transforms the parental image into the God representation through “exaltation” after “sublimation of instinctual wishes toward the father.”<sup>40</sup>

Rizzuto, however, states that the evolution of the person’s image of God is not an outcome of his oedipal crisis only, but it is also the outcome of his self-representation and environmental system of beliefs. “In summary, then, in the course of development each individual produces an idiosyncratic and highly personalized representation of God derived from his evolving self-representations, and his environmental system of beliefs. Once formed, that complex representation cannot be made to disappear; it can only be repressed, transformed, or used.”<sup>41</sup>

### **Born into the religious bubble**

Incredible as it sounds, we begin our religious journey right at our birth. How is this possible? Socially, when a child is born, he is already embedded in the religious environment. Most cultures have some religious tradition and, whether the parents are religious or not, the religious tradition marks the whole society. The religious tradition affects many areas of life and each culture has its own specific expression of its religious experience. The religious expression varies through religious cult, architecture, rituals, traditions, laws, or art and all this marks and shapes our beliefs and views of God and ourselves. Many religious people think that when a baby is born, the family should receive the baby as God’s gift. In religious families, the child is

---

<sup>39</sup> Sigmund Freud, “Some Reflection on Schoolboy Psychology,” in *Abstracts of the Standard Edition of the Complete Psychological Works of Sigmund Freud*, ed. by Carrie L. Rothgeb, 284.

<sup>40</sup> Ana-Maria Rizzuto, *The Birth of The Living God*, 43.

<sup>41</sup> Ana-Maria Rizzuto, *The Birth of The Living God*, 90.

introduced to his religious congregation by the religious initiation and later he becomes familiar with his religious tradition. He practices faith and tradition within his family and his congregation. The family gathers and celebrates important religious feasts together. The word God is in the vocabulary of his parents and people around him. The child sees his parents and grandparents practice religious rituals; he uses religious devotional things and decorations. By the time the child can reason, he has heard about God many times. God is introduced to the child as the most powerful and eternal being in the world. God is also addressed as the ultimate cause or creator of the world. The child notices other people have respect for this being and they refer to God as the real, existing, powerful being in charge of the world. He acknowledges that people around him praise God for good and blame him for bad and the child quickly picks up this punish and reward attitude toward God. There is felt a sense of punishment by God in the air, especially when misfortunes and catastrophes happen. People turn to God for help in desperate situations as their ultimate hope or, if God fails to help they hold him responsible. God is portrayed in many positive and negative ways by the individuals, society or official church and it shapes the child's beliefs.

When the parents conceive a child, they unconsciously awaken their own pre-oedipal or oedipal experiences of wishing to be giving or give their parents a child. They also recall their feelings from their oedipal crises and these feelings revive their God representation elaborated through the childhood.<sup>42</sup> This means that even the parents who do not practice religion revive their representation of God before the child is born. This is another aspect shaping the child's God image by his parent's own God representations. They imprint their view of God onto their children's by telling religious stories or practice for instance. Some parents might say that God does not exist. But still, they mention God in some sense. It is like passing a baton of the God

---

<sup>42</sup> Ana-Maria Rizzuto, *The Birth of The Living God*, 183.

image from one generation to another. Before the child is even born, his parents were marked by their parents' God representation.<sup>43</sup>

### **Mental capacities at work**

Rizzuto names several key elements in the process of forming God representation. Some elements provide necessary environment and other elements are mental capacities which enable us to generate God's image. Shortly after birth we commence using these mental capacities which are substantial for our object representations: representing capacity, memorizing, mirroring and fantasizing. Formative objects like parents, siblings, teachers, peers, and our physical environment are the necessary aspects we need in the process of object representations. One mental abilities emerge gradually in different stages of the human development and every stage has its own specifics that the child has to undergo in order to become a normal, mature human being. Our mental ability which develops in the early childhood is classification. "Nevertheless, one may safely assume that if the child is to become a normal human being, his experiences must be classified, organized under some biological or psychic process which sooner or later permits him to represent, however obscurely, what he is feeling, to himself."<sup>44</sup>

Starting at the oral stage, the child manifests a certain capacity to synthesize or integrate early experiences from the outer world. The child's first impulses come from his mother and she becomes his first object representation. Eye contact, smiling, child's fascination with human face, touch, feeding, voice or closeness provide the child outer impulses.<sup>45</sup> The child becomes gradually skilled to synthesize object representations and understand them.<sup>46</sup> Our capacity to

---

<sup>43</sup> Ana-Maria Rizzuto, *The Birth of The Living God*, 183.

<sup>44</sup> Ana-Maria Rizzuto, *The Birth of The Living God*, 148.

<sup>45</sup> Ana-Maria Rizzuto, *The Birth of The Living God*, 184.

<sup>46</sup> Ibid.

represent, integrate, remember and recall past experiences enables us to form object representations. The memory does not function as a record of past events only. “The most important thing about memory is not storage of past experiences, but rather the retrieval of what is relevant in some usable form.”<sup>47</sup> This means that our present wishes, conflicts, affects, fantasies bring to our mind memories of past object and self representations. If we do not find present object and self representations in harmony with our original objects, we activate specific defenses against present object and self representations. Certain conditions (conflicts, loss, wishes, and fantasies) call for the retrieval of the original object representations and prompt the person to reevaluate his present objects. It is a present condition of felt disharmony between what the person is now and what he should be, say, do, or give to elicit a feeling of well-being, safety, and appreciation.<sup>48</sup>

### **Mirror has two faces**

Mirroring is a period of narcissistic relation to the object beginning by the oral stage. The child manifests the need to be reflected and seen as appealing, wonderful, and powerful in the maternal eye. Winnicott<sup>49</sup> describe this phenomenon of need for reflection of oneself by the other or the mirror as a core experience in the process of becoming human. Winnicott assert that “the eyes of the mother, and the entire face of the mother, are the child’s first mirror. Later on, the experience is to be used directly in the first representation of God.”<sup>50</sup>

The child’s need to be reflected by others as in the mirror begins at the oral stage. Several mental and physical processes coincide in the process of mirroring at the same time. First, it is the

---

<sup>47</sup> Ana-Maria Rizzuto, *The Birth of The Living God*, 56.

<sup>48</sup> Ana-Maria Rizzuto, *The Birth of The Living God*, 55.

<sup>49</sup> Ana-Maria Rizzuto, *The Birth of The Living God*, 185.

<sup>50</sup> Ana-Maria Rizzuto, *The Birth of The Living God*, 186.

physical proximity of the caregiver who responds and supports the physical and affective needs of the infant. Second, the mirroring experience enhances the child's sense of being individual; it is the stage when the child's ego emerges and forms his distinct sense of self: "I" or "this is me and that is you." And third, a process of maternal representation emerges in the mirroring process and will affect, though not solely, all his future representations.

Physical proximity, availability and proper responsiveness of the caregiver are substantial to the infant's mirroring experience. Mother represents to the child a harbor of safety and comfort in meeting the infant's instinctual needs for safety and responsiveness: "I am held, fed, nurtured". If the caregiver is not available to the needs of the infant for a long period of time then emotional disconnection may evolve between the mother and child. "If, however, the mirroring experience has not sufficed to assure the child that for his mother he is a wonderful creature, the individual may suffer partial arrest of his development and remain fixated to a narcissistic need for psychic mirroring as well as to an actual need for mirror."<sup>51</sup> Bewilderment, narcissistic rage, vengeful grandiose wishes might be the way how the child deals with his painful state of not being mirrored. "I cannot feel you that you are there for me. I cannot see you seeing me." This object representation may lead to God representation in which the child will not find security or even belief.

Physical closeness and care create an affective bond between mother and child and this bond promotes child's basic sense of trust. Trust is absolutely necessary in healthy human interaction and it is certainly an important prerequisite for a mature relationship with God. Rizzuto asserts that later in life, the experience of the primal objects and their characteristics is used directly in the first representation of God.<sup>52</sup> Therefore, mirroring does affect the child's fate

---

<sup>51</sup> Ana-Maria Rizzuto, *The Birth of The Living God*, 186.

<sup>52</sup> Ana-Maria Rizzuto, *The Birth of The Living God*, 186.

and his representation of God. The way the mother views her child and the child reflects his mother's view on him does affect the child's self representation and his image of God. Another element having later an effect on child's faith through the mirroring experience is how the child views God and how he thinks he is seen by God. If the child has a prevailing positive image of God, then he might have positive self image too.

### **A safety harbor**

Around the anal stage (1 - 2years old)<sup>53</sup> the child begins to walk, and he gradually acquires sense of his autonomy. It is the stage when children have inflated self esteem or self-representation ("I want or I want to do it myself"). When the mirroring process evolves normally and the toddler attains a cohesive sense of self then a process of individuation follows. Though still dependent on the caregiver, the child wants to do things on his own, wants to control his body and wants to be autonomous. By this time the child masters his physical environment and maintains his self esteem. When the child succeeded his goals and is cherished by his parents, his self esteem grows; whereas if he fails the expectations of his parents or does something wrong his self doubt and shame grow. The role of shame and guilt will later play an important role in the child's religious experience. Emerging of shame and guilt is related to the parental control of the child's behavior. The child will later assign or transfer his parent's controlling voice to his God representation. Therefore, the child experiences the same emotions of fear, shame or guilt with his God representations as he did with his parents when he had failed to behave in certain way for instance. The child imagines that God can punish him like his parents.

---

<sup>53</sup> Ana-Maria Rizzuto, *The Birth of The Living God*, 186.



“Now, in the transitional space between mother and child, the child finds and creates his first transitional object and his first transitional representation.”<sup>54</sup> The child at this stage (3 years old) unconsciously generates in his psyche a transitional object in the momentary or permanent absence of the loving person. The function of the transitional object is to provide a feeling of safety and a substitute for the caregiver. The transitional object might be a fictional friend or pet. Transitional objects are symbols in a sense. The presence which they mediate many people feel as real and strong. In general, the transitional objects provide a substitutional presence of the loving object. Later, the child will place his God representation amid his transitional objects. “By the age of three the child’s mind is blooming with fantasies, reflections, theories about things, and is deeply involved emotionally with people, pets, and toys, as well as monsters and fictional characters. God finds his place among them somewhat inconspicuously in spite of his noticeable importance to grownups.”<sup>55</sup>

### **Fantasy in play**

Fantasizing plays another important role in forming the God representation. Earlier psychologists, Freud or Piaget, suggested that children might be unable to discriminate between reality and fantasy, truth and imagination. But empirical research has shown that this also is simply not true. In fact, the children have natural capacity and passion for fantasy. The children may love fantasy not because they can't appreciate the truth or because their lives are difficult. Children may have such passion for the imaginary just because they are naturally oriented to finding the truth. We may think of the children as intuitive scientists searching for the principle of things. Their theorizing and fantasizing have a lot in common. The children's fantasy demands

---

<sup>54</sup> Ana-Maria Rizzuto, *The Birth of The Living God*, 186.

<sup>55</sup> Ana-Maria Rizzuto, *The Birth of The Living God*, 194.

the logic, consistency, and causality. A fantasy without that logic is just a mess. When they hear stories or they fantasize something, they also need to come to the logical conclusions.<sup>56</sup> The logic they learn in their stories and fantasies helps them search for truth in their daily experiences of life. They apply the same logic in their search for truth when asking parents about their origins and origins of other people, God.

One of the functions of the fantasizing by children is creating their own imaginary companion between ages two and two and a half. The imaginary companion is at the same age as the child. The imaginary companion frequently plays a specific positive role in the development of the child, and once the role is fulfilled it tends to disappear. The function served by the imaginary companion depends upon the special needs of the child. The imaginary companion takes the role of a scapegoat for the child's misbehavior. If the child is scolded or punished for his misbehavior, the child blames the imaginary companion for it. The imaginary companion gives the child a sense of approval or control to do something. The child communicates with his companion to get permission for something. It is a period of submissive behavior of the child when the imaginary friend acts as auxiliary *superego*<sup>57</sup> which controls and gives orders.

The imaginary figure provides company to the lonely, neglected, or rejected child and in the time of crisis provides compensation for painful reality. The specific functions of the imaginary companion may overlap and one role may be more dominant than the other. The sense of the companion's existence is so real to the child that he treats his companion as a real

---

<sup>56</sup> "Slate The Real Reason Children love Fantasy," last modified December 20, 2005, <http://www.slate.com/id/2132725/>.

<sup>57</sup> Carroll E. Izard, *The Psychology of Emotions* (New York and London: Plenum Press, 1991), 370. (Freud suggests that our personality consists of three functional units: *id*, *ego* and *superego*. "The superego develops as children internalize or accept as their own a sense of proper conduct (rules of right and wrong behavior), either identical with or sufficiently similar to their parents. The superego develops primarily as a mechanism of incorporating of someone else's pattern of behavior, rules and values as one's own." The superego develops as child identifies himself with its role model or influential person.)

person which has its needs.<sup>58</sup> Later, when the child will have his basic God representation shaped, the representation will adapt specific functions of the fantasized imaginary companion. The child will feel his God representation as real, present and with its superb qualities.<sup>59</sup>

### **Speculations about the ultimate mover**

When the child is three and more years old he discovers that things are made by people. He begins to understand the principle of cause and sequence in things made by people, nature, or people around him. He realizes that something follows something else or something precedes something else with regularity. He applies this principle to things as well as to people. The child also acknowledges that his parents have certain responsibilities, follow rules and are in charge of his little world. The child indiscriminately idealizes his parents and views their qualities as unrealistically excellent. To the child, the idealized image of his parents perfectly fits into his God representation. The child projects aggrandized qualities of parents to his God representation. The child thinks that if his parents can be in control of so many things why could not be God in control of everything. This is an important stage of mental development when God finds his place among the child's friends, pets, toys, monsters and imaginary friend, and the child starts to speculate about God.<sup>60</sup> "When he continues to ask, like a little Aristotle, he finds that nobody made God. This certainly conveys the feeling that God is no ordinary being."<sup>61</sup> This questioning the origins of his life and the final purpose of life may continue until the age of six.

---

<sup>58</sup> Ana-Maria Rizzuto, *The Birth of The Living God*, 191.

<sup>59</sup> Ana-Maria Rizzuto, *The Birth of The Living God*, 193-195.

<sup>60</sup> Ana-Maria Rizzuto, *The Birth of The Living God*, 195.

<sup>61</sup> Ana-Maria Rizzuto, *The Birth of The Living God*, 195.

## Oedipal crises

At age three to five, the resolution of the Oedipal “struggle” comes to its peak. Freud states that the resolution of the oedipal crisis is substantial in the dynamics of personality growth. One such dynamic is the social identity development of the child, the appearance of the superego in the psyche and the basic “personality” of God representation. Freud also states that when the oedipal crisis culminates, the superego emerges in the psyche. According to him, the superego functions as “a voice behind” which controls the ego.

A struggle for a social identity starts with a certain competition between the child and his parent opponent. The child feels physical attraction to the opposite sex parent and there is a certain tension between him and the parent opponent. Concerned about self-worth, the child wants to gain the attention and love of his opposite sex parent. The struggle comes to its normal conclusion when the child is taught his proper social role and accepts his identity. If this stage follows a healthy pattern then the sublimation of sexual wishes and exaltation of the parental representation transform into the divine representation.<sup>62</sup>

The image of God is not elaborated now, at the peak of the resolution of the oedipal crisis, as Freud thought. This is because the evolution of the God representation has travelled a long distance since the baby was born. We can safely say that the basic image of God is formed by the resolution of the oedipal crisis and it is mostly formed by the significant parental representations.<sup>63</sup> The image of God is at this age very basic and it is dominated by the child’s superego. Though the child has an unformed images of God at this stage it is appropriate to his age. On one hand the child perhaps views God as his friend, somebody who can be close to him, but on the other hand God also reminds him of his parents, especially their parenting and

---

<sup>62</sup> Ana-Maria Rizzuto, *The Birth of The Living God*, 195-196.

<sup>63</sup> Ana-Maria Rizzuto, *The Birth of The Living God*, 195.

controlling characteristics. The superego marks the child's image of God. To the child, this God is not a partner or a friend yet, but it is rather powerful or terrifying being, seeing everything and controlling "father" who knows all about his thoughts. The child's image of God is marked by qualities of his primary objects which can be good and bad as well.

### **God has a face at last**

In the post oedipal period (7-12) the child is capable of relating to his God representation. The child has a cognitive ability to elaborate a concept of God who transcends the world and is the ultimate being. It is not only the child's fascination with God's creative power, but it is also his need for a relationship. The child relates to God as if God was a human being, real and present. Little religious practices play an important role in his relationship to God. He feels confident that God will hear his prayers. "From experience the child knows only two people who have all those characteristics: his mother and his father. Of necessity, his God representation utilizes the representation of the most significant parent available at the moment."<sup>64</sup> If the God representation reflects positive parental characteristics, the child feels confident in his relationship with God. His image of God comprises mostly his parents' positive characteristics. If the God representation, on the other hand, reflects negative parental characteristics, the child might experience the same negative characteristic of his parents or formative people with his God representation. He might fear God or feel ignored by him for instance. However, sometimes the child develops positive image of God in spite of his negative experiences with his environment. It means that there must be somebody in the child's environment who has positive, healthy influence on the child's elaboration of his God representation. The child, at this stage, can already understand the morality of his deeds and he also acknowledges what "pleases or

---

<sup>64</sup> Ana-Maria Rizzuto, *The Birth of The Living God*, 194.

saddens” God. The child’s superego functions as a director and protector of morality. The superego evokes emotions of guilt after the child has done something morally wrong. The child has already learned to reward and punish behavior, and he adopts the same pattern of behavior in his relationship with God.

The post oedipal period is characterized by the child’s realistic appraisal. “In fact, the oedipal resolution consolidates the child’s realistic knowledge of being small and permits him to accept that in years to come he can be like his father or mother and marry someone like his mother and father.”<sup>65</sup> The child gradually drops the idealistic view of his parents and begins to realize their true character. He might experience ambivalent feelings of love and hate, admiration and disappointment about his parents. The superego is like a parental voice controlling the child’s behavior. He creates new imaginary parents who fulfill the wishes that were denied by his real parents and redirects his denied wishes and desires toward his God representation. The child seems to enjoy the thought that God is “there” for him and provides him a safety hub; and in need God can become a powerful ally.<sup>66</sup> He has, of course, some expectations of God for intervention on his behalf. The child likes to experiment if God would intervene when he is asked. Often, children ask God for help in serious matters and they do turn to God as someone they trust and hope for help. The children might get disappointed when God does not respond like they expected. Sometimes, the children let go of God because “he is no use.” However some children reflect or speculate why God does not intervene when he is asked. This is an important moment in their development of faith because they are actually shaping their image of God. Maybe they do not come to a satisfactory answer, but it shows how they cope with their actual situation and their image of God. “The God representation has also acquired its “basic

---

<sup>65</sup> Ana-Maria Rizzuto, *The Birth of The Living God*, 196.

<sup>66</sup> Ana-Maria Rizzuto, *The Birth of The Living God*, 199.

personality,” profoundly enmeshed, with each developmental stage of childhood.”<sup>67</sup> The God representation may be marked by a more dominant and appealing parent personality and self-representation and consequently the representation has multi layered characteristics. If the child has arrived at this developmental point with either a very negative self or parent representation, the God offered by official religion can be more than the child is able to tolerate.<sup>68</sup>

However, each stage of the epigenetic schedule<sup>69</sup> (school age, adolescence, young, middle, and late adulthood) will provide him chance to reconsider his basic God representation formed through early childhood (infancy, early childhood, play age). It is a struggle for equilibrium that will help him to escape the conflict between his present objects and self representations, ideals and his past and primal objects. Present crises like illness, death, wars or falling in love, birth of children will give him the chance to reevaluate his representations. The individual may leave his God representation untouched for the rest of his life or he can thoroughly examine his images of God and reevaluate them and decide which promote or hinder his relationship with God. As Freud stated, our early God representations will form the core reservoir of experiences and memories the individual will resort to in the course of his life.<sup>70</sup> If a person’s God representation is not reflected with the person’s changes of self representation through the subsequent developmental stages, life crises and milestones such as graduation, marriage, promotion, parenthood, illness, or death, then the person’s God representation becomes experienced as ridiculous, contrary, or unimportant. In other words, the person’s God representation does not correspond to his expectations, views, and hopes of God in his actual life

---

<sup>67</sup> Ana-Maria Rizzuto, *The Birth of The Living God*, 198.

<sup>68</sup> Ana-Maria Rizzuto, *The Birth of The Living God*, 199.

<sup>69</sup> James W. Fowler, *Becoming Adult, Becoming Christian*, 15. (“Erikson sees the ages and phases of the life cycle in terms of what he calls an epigenetic schedule of emerging capacities and challenges. The maturation of the body on schedule correlates with challenges to mental and emotional development.”)

<sup>70</sup> Ana-Maria Rizzuto, *The Birth of The Living God*, 199.

situation. God might be for this person somebody distant, cold, uninterested, or dangerous. If, however, God is reflected with the person's changes of self representation through his life span, then God might become his absolute meaning, joy, source of life and intimate friend through good and bad life situations.

One objection may be raised against Rizzuto's prospect of reassessing our God representations. Rizzuto is optimistic in her view of reassessing our God representations. The process is not as automatic and smooth as it seems. She does not take in account weaknesses for instance. A person might be capable of an adult faith, but his addictions, for instance, might hinder the process of reassessing his God representations.

## **Summary**

In this chapter, I introduce Rizzuto's theory of the genesis of elaborating the God image through our childhood. "It is a central thesis of this book that no child in the Western world brought up in ordinary circumstances completes the oedipal cycle without forming at least a rudimentary God representation, which he may use for belief or not."<sup>71</sup> Her theory suggests that we are fundamentally religious, however the image of God we form in early childhood is rudimentary. In order to become fully integrated human beings and use our potential we need to reexamine or in some cases, heal our images of God. "If the God representation is not revised to keep pace with changes in self-representation, it soon becomes asynchronous and is experienced as ridiculous or irrelevant or, on the contrary, threatening or dangerous."<sup>72</sup> "It may also become so incompatible with psychic balance that it cannot function naturally as a transitional object;

---

<sup>71</sup> Ana-Maria Rizzuto, *The Birth of The Living God*, 200.

<sup>72</sup> *Ibid.*



along with aspects of oneself that have become consciously unbearable, it may have to be repressed.”<sup>73</sup> In other words, such a person may have distorted, unhealthy, false, or inadequate images of God which do not reflect the real God. And if the person’s image of God is distorted, as such, he cannot live his faith. His faith can easily become formal and not supportive in his life. The problem is that our distorted images of God alienate us from God and block our relationship with him. And it is nothing unusual when our distorted images of God negatively affect our human relationships too. Our distorted images hinder our personal growth and self integration. This is the reason why the individual needs to reshape his image of God. The Spiritual Exercises may bring back to our memory some once highly relevant or feared images of God. Through meditative prayers, pondering over relevant biblical passages, spiritual direction, we can allow ourselves the necessary space to reevaluate these early images. In this First Week of the Exercises, the exercitant undergoes a transformation of his false images of self and God. This is his first step toward his living faith.

In my next chapter, I want to examine the process of transformation or conversion from psychological and theological perspectives. Any change we want to do toward living faith requires our conversion. The Gospel and the church, for instance, call for conversion and I now want to discuss different understandings of conversion and name those which are relevant to the conversion experience within the Spiritual Exercises. Now, I am going to briefly introduce the Spiritual Exercises.

---

<sup>73</sup> Ana-Maria Rizzuto, *The Birth of The Living God*, 202.

## **Brief presentation of the Spiritual Exercises**

Based on the experience of his own “spiritual exercises” and his conversion in Manresa, Ignatius wrote down notes, and he continued to expand them which eventually became the book of The Spiritual Exercises. In this book one finds directions for helping people to engage in various forms of prayer and meditation and contemplation. The Exercises are divided in four “weeks” and each week refers to a specific dynamic. The dynamic of the first week deals with exercitant’s discovering and experiencing God’s love for him as the sinner. The meditations and prayers of the first week help the exercitant to examine and reconstruct his faith and reveal his images of God. The Exercises propose specific ways one can reveal his images of God and get over those images that impede or hinder his true image of God. The second week is devoted to the following of Christ, getting to know him better in order to follow him and love him more closely. In the third week the exercitant desires to share with Jesus the suffering of his passion and death. In the fourth week, the exercitant desires to share Jesus’ joy in his resurrection.

This is what the Spiritual Exercises can provide: a profound religious experience of God’s love for us that has power to transform ourselves and our faith. What is most important is that experience of the Spiritual Exercises provides a space for deepening our relationship to God. God not only desires a personal relationship with us, but he also acts in the world and in our life to bring about such a personal relationship. The Exercises provide a method of encountering God’s actions and love for us. Ignatius believed that God is communicating to us in every moment of our life and in many ways within the daily events, our own desires, emotions or other people. The Exercises are way of helping us to become more aware of his communication. The problem is that we are not always open to this communication. Our attention is attracted by many things that rather drag away our attention from God and we become more focused on ourselves.

The Exercises provide ways that we can encounter our true self and overcome those tendencies that stand in our way to the closer relationship with God. The exercitant questions himself: "What does hinder me to become more attuned to God's will and follow his will? What do I do for Christ and what do I want to do for him?" The power of grace received through the Exercises enables us to receive a profound religious experience of God. At the same time, the psychological component is significant too because the Exercises can be seen as a way of religious conversion that is also a conversion of the self. Grace as a divine element of the Exercises also brings inner freedom which helps us to experience community with God, and the ability to respond to his call.

## Chapter Two: A Psychology of Conversion

In the next two chapters I want to analyze the dynamics of conversion from the psychological and theological perspectives. When we talk about religious experience, conversion is usually the turning point for many people and one of the most powerful experiences. The Catechism of the Catholic Church understands conversion as an interior repentance. “Interior repentance is a radical reorientation of our whole life, a return, a conversion to God with all our heart, an end of sin, a turning away from evil, with repugnance toward the evil actions we have committed. At the same time it entails the desire and resolution to change one’s life, with hope in God’s mercy and trust in the help of his grace.”<sup>74</sup> Fowler, a professor of theology and human development at Emory University, understands conversion as “a significant recentering of one’s previous conscious or unconscious images of value and power, and the conscious adoption of a new set of master stories in the commitment to reshape one’s life in a new community of interpretation and action.”<sup>75</sup> A number of people (Abraham Gen 15:6, Samaritan woman Jn 4:41, the apostles, a centurion Matt 8:5-13, the blind man Jn 9: 35-38, the Jews who believed in Him Jn 8: 31) have been called by God through the Bible and the conversion changed their lives. The Bible for instance has been an inspiration for many people to religious conversion and the source of the most profound spiritual experiences. The history of the Church is a witness to many religious conversions and it has affected lives of many people. Many people have acquired a new quality of life through their conversion. Some conversions though, have not been understood or accepted by the secular world or even within the church. On the other hand, not everybody has the same profound religious experience. Conversion is for some people a momentary experience,

---

<sup>74</sup> Catechism of the Catholic Church, 5th ed., 1431.

<sup>75</sup> James W. Fowler, *Stages of Faith*, 281-282.

a flash of a light only and they return to their former way of life. They turn back to their old beliefs and idols, and the momentary transition does not change their lives. The question is whether they really experience religious conversion. It means that the conversion is a significant spiritual experience for some people, but for others is little or none. We should make a clear distinction of what conversion is because people have, of course, different understandings and experiences with conversion. Some people pursue in conversion a new meaning of life. Some search for answers to their existential problems. Some feel spiritual “hunger.” Some need support from a religious community. Some feel called by God for mission. Some seek refuge in a religious community from their crisis, illness or the death of a love one. Finding an intellectual haven there some are attracted by the truth of a particular religion. And we should not forget that there are different depths of conversion from very superficial to very profound. But some conversions have been so impressive that they have activated and motivated other people to conversion. We should notice that the religious conversion occurs on two basic levels. One deals with the transformation of the self: “Conversion is not so much a negation of our human development as it is a transformation and fulfillment of it.”<sup>76</sup> The other deals with the transformation of the self in relation to God: “It is not so much a denial of our adulthood as it is the liberation and empowerment of our adulthood toward entering into partnership with God.”<sup>77</sup> The question is what motive is behind the religious conversion, both from the psychological and theological perspective. Is conversion intellectual or moral transformation only or is there something else too? What is the connection between conversion and our images of God? If we understand the Spiritual Exercises as a chance to deepen our faith and reevaluate our images of God then the transformation of our images of God may also be understood as our conversion.

---

<sup>76</sup> James W. Fowler, *Becoming Adult, Becoming Christian*, 115.

<sup>77</sup> James W. Fowler, *Becoming Adult, Becoming Christian*, 115.

We presume that transformation of our images of God through the Exercises transforms our relationship to God and our lives too. The Exercises provide a chance to grow in the faith, become free for the service to God and to maturity as a person. Our long term goal is to understand the process of conversion through the experience of the Spiritual Exercises. Our immediate goal is to examine the conversion from the psychological and theological perspectives. For our purpose, we need to know what is going on with the person through the experience of conversion. We also want to know what the convert is turning from and turning to. Our discussion is based on the views of respected theologians and psychologists. The conclusion of this discussion should include a comparison of the theological and psychological perspectives of conversion and how a conversion affects our faith and our view of God.

### **William James on conversion**

William James (1842 – 1910) was a pioneering American psychologist philosopher and poet who proposed his theory of religious conversion. He begins his theory with assertion that humans are born with two basic temperaments which condition their processes of religious conversion. William James states that humans are born either as healthy minded<sup>78</sup> or as sick souls.<sup>79</sup> James looks at how people may be affected by awareness of sin in themselves and of evil in the world and how they respond to evil. This is the reason why he discriminates two inborn temperaments of people: healthy and sick souls. People who are born as healthy minded are

---

<sup>78</sup> William James, *The Varieties of Religious Experience*, 96. (“Healthy-minded temperament – the temperament which has a constitutional incapacity for prolonged suffering, and in which the tendency to see things optimistically is like a water of crystallization in which individual’s character is set.”)

<sup>79</sup> William James, *The Varieties of Religious Experience*, 126. (“The psychological basis of the twice-born or sick souls character seems to be a certain discordancy or heterogeneity in the native temperament of the subject, an incompletely unified moral and intellectual constitution.” )

basically OK while sick souls need to be “born” again in order to be happy.<sup>80</sup> The healthy minded need to be born once and the sick souls need to be born twice. James understands being born again as the conversion. Each of these two types has its own character and each has different conceptions of the universe. The conception of the world of the healthy minded is optimistic and their life on earth is living in paradise. They live in happiness and religious peace. If they are also religious, they do not acknowledge any conflicts between God of the Bible and their own conception of God.<sup>81</sup> They view God and life in a positive way only. Conversion of people of the healthy minded character consists in self-surrender, the personal will must be given up.<sup>82</sup> "The mind-curiers ... have demonstrated<sup>82</sup> that a form of regeneration by relaxing, letting go, psychologically indistinguishable from the Lutheran justification by faith and the Wesleyan acceptance of free grace, is within the reach of persons who have no conviction of sin and care nothing for Lutheran theology. It is but giving your little private convulsive self a rest, and finding that a greater Self is there."<sup>83</sup> Their conversion is usually triggered by something unexpected when their beliefs are shattered and they have to reevaluate their faith. It is for instance crisis or trauma, serious illness, accident or the death of a close person. The second type of personality, the ones William James calls sick souls, view the world as an unhappy place and natural goods will never make them happy. According to James, this type of personality has an incomplete moral and intellectual self. "The psychological basis of the twice –born character seems to be a certain discordance or heterogeneity in the native temperament of the subject, an incompletely unified moral and intellectual constitution."<sup>84</sup> This type of personality needs in

---

<sup>80</sup> William James, *The Varieties of Religious Experience*, 125.

<sup>81</sup> William James, *The Varieties of Religious Experience*, 102.

<sup>82</sup> William James, *The Varieties of Religious Experience*, 156.

<sup>83</sup> William James, *The Varieties of Religious Experience*, 84.

<sup>84</sup> E. Walter Conn, *Conversion: Perspectives on Personal and Social Transformation* (New York: Alba House, 1978), 122.

some sense redemption, a transformation of their personality which best characterizes a religious conversion. “But to find religion is only one out of many ways of reaching unity; and the process of remedying inner incompleteness and reducing inner discord is a general psychological process, which may take place with any sort of mental material, and need not necessarily assume the religious form.”<sup>85</sup>

Although the first type is born healthy minded, both types have to work at shaping their personality. They both need to work at straightening and unifying the self. In order to be happy one has to control personal feelings, drives and impulses to give them right order and form within a stable system. This is a stage of inner incompleteness and discordance. Forming some stable system within is an unhappy time, but it is also a work toward being more happy. “In all these instances we have precisely the same psychological form of event, - a firmness, stability, and equilibrium succeeding a period of storm and stress and inconsistency.”<sup>86</sup> But before the sick souls can become more happy and complete, they need to undergo a general psychological process of transformation. Religious conversion is one out of many ways how these people can reach their inner unity. The sick souls have two motivations for conversion. “To begin with, there are two things in the mind of the candidate for conversion: first, the present incompleteness or wrongness, the ‘sin’ which he is eager to escape from; and the second, the positive ideal which he longs to encompass.”<sup>87</sup>

By religious conversion William James understands a transformation in which person’s religious ideas are at first peripheral and they do not play a great role in his life. However, they become suddenly or gradually central and stable in the life of this person. “To say that a man is

---

<sup>85</sup> William James, *The Varieties of Religious Experience*, 132.

<sup>86</sup> Ibid.

<sup>87</sup> William James, *The Varieties of Religious Experience*, 156.



‘converted’ means, in these terms, that religious ideas, previously peripheral in his consciousness, now take a central place, and that religious aims form the habitual centre of his energy.”<sup>88</sup> James does not mean by the conversion a change of religious beliefs. He presupposes that the person has already some religious ideas, but these ideas are not in the aim or in the centre of this person’s life. In conversion these ideas, previously peripheral, become at certain moments central. Certain emotions which come in explosive ways enhance the conversion process too. “Emotional occasions, especially violent ones, are extremely potent in precipitating mental rearrangement. Hope, happiness, security, resolve, emotions characteristic of conversion, can be equally explosive.”<sup>89</sup> Some people are, according to James, incapable of conversion: “Some person, for instance, never are, and possibly never under any circumstances could be, converted.”<sup>90</sup> He names two reasons why these people do not become converted: “They are either incapable of imagining the invisible; or else, in the language of devotion, they are life-long subjects of ‘bareness’ and ‘dryness.’”<sup>91</sup>

James distinguishes between two types of conversion, the volitional and the self-surrender types: “There is thus a conscious and voluntary way and an involuntary and unconscious way in which mental results may get accomplished; and we find both ways exemplified in the history of conversion, giving us two types, which Starbuck calls the volitional type and the type of self-surrender respectively.”<sup>92</sup> James considers the volitional type as the regenerative change. It is usually gradual, and consists in the building up, piece by piece, of a new set of moral and spiritual habits.<sup>93</sup> James is interested in the self-surrender type. He asserts

---

<sup>88</sup> William James, *The Varieties of Religious Experience*, 147.

<sup>89</sup> William James, *The Varieties of Religious Experience*, 148-149.

<sup>90</sup> William James, *The Varieties of Religious Experience*, 153.

<sup>91</sup> Ibid.

<sup>92</sup> William James, *The Varieties of Religious Experience*, 154.

<sup>93</sup> William James, *The Varieties of Religious Experience*, 154.

that if conversion was effective one must submit himself to his subconscious forces. “Yet all the while the forces of mere organic ripening within him are going on towards their own prefigured result, and his conscious straining are letting loose subconscious allies behind the scenes, which in their way work toward rearrangement; and the rearrangement towards which all these deeper forces tend is pretty surely definite, and definitely different from what he consciously conceives and determines.”<sup>94</sup> James indicates that the self-surrender to our own subconscious forces is the decisive moment of the conversion. "But since, in any terms, the crisis described is the throwing of our conscious selves upon the mercy of powers which, whatever they may be, are more ideal than we are actually, and make for our redemption, you see why self-surrender has always been and must be regarded as the vital turning-point of the religious life, so far as the religious life is spiritual and no affair of outer works and ritual and sacraments."<sup>95</sup>

### **A perception that “something is there”**

“Both psychology and religion, James observes, agree that a person can be transformed by forces apparently beyond their normal consciousness. But while psychology defines these forces as 'unconscious' i.e. within the self, in religion redemption comes from outside the person, is a gift from God.”<sup>96</sup>

It is our nature to think in abstract ideas. We create abstract ideas from our sensory impressions. However, in our mental process, we do not rely on these impressions alone. In our

---

<sup>94</sup> William James, *The Varieties of Religious Experience*, 157.

<sup>95</sup> Ibid.

<sup>96</sup> Tom Butler-Bowdon, “William James: The Varieties of Religious Experience (1902),” 50 Spiritual Classics, <http://www.butler-bowdon.com/the-varieties-of-religious-experience>.

reasoning we also use the memory of our experiences. So, we can generate new mental objects from our sensory impressions and from images stored in our memory as well. “The memory of an experience can generate far more emotion than the experience itself.”<sup>97</sup> For instance, the memory of an insult may make us angrier than the insult did when we received it. Memory of these ideas (our attitudes, moral, practical, or emotional, as well as religious, are due to the ‘objects’ of our consciousnesses) may bring more excitement than the actual experience of sensual things. James believes that religion's abstract ideas seem more real to people than everyday realities.<sup>98</sup>

“It is as if there were in the human consciousness a sense of reality, a feeling of objective presence, a perception of what we may call 'something there,' more deep and more general than any of the special and particular 'senses' by which current psychology supposes existent realities to be originally revealed.”<sup>99</sup> William James suggests that our consciousness has a special ability that can create the supernatural world. And it is this sense that creates an objective religious reality as if it were some quasi sensible world. James calls this additional sense “an undifferentiated sense of reality”<sup>100</sup> and accounts for hallucinations in terms of it.<sup>101</sup>

Consequently, we may conclude that for James the reality of God or of higher order is rather a product of our consciousness. But it is also true about James that he never denies the reality of a personal and transcendent God. James acknowledges that religion must have its own reality different from the materialistic world. “Religion, in her fullest exercise of function, is not a mere illumination of facts already elsewhere given, not a mere passion, like love, which views

---

<sup>97</sup> John C. Durham, “William James: The Varieties of Religious Experience (1902),” *Understanding the Sacred*, <http://www.bytreant.demon.co.uk/james/james03.html>

<sup>98</sup> William James, *The Varieties of Religious Experience*, 41.

<sup>99</sup> William James, *The Varieties of Religious Experience*, 44.

<sup>100</sup> William James, *The Varieties of Religious Experience*, 45.

<sup>101</sup> William James, *The Varieties of Religious Experience*, 55.

things in a rosier light. But it is something more, namely, a postulates of new facts as well. The world interpreted religiously is not the materialistic world over again, with an altered expression; it must have, over and above the altered expression, a natural constitution different at some point from that which a materialistic world would have.”<sup>102</sup> Additionally, he respects her value in this world. “If religion is true, its fruits are good fruits, even though in this world they should prove uniformly ill adapted and full of naught but pathos.”<sup>103</sup>

If we want to characterize William James’ theory of religious conversion it may be said in short: In order to be fully human, one needs to be “born again.” This can happen through the experience of his religious conversion. By religious conversion William James understands a transformation of the self in which a person’s religious ideas are peripheral and they do not play a great role in his life but become, abruptly or in a gradual process, central and stable in the life of this person. Conversion tends to occur through a strong emotional experience, spontaneous religious awakening, or mystical experience. According to James, one step is essential in the conversion process: the self-surrender to our subconscious forces. The genuine religious conversion can happen only if one surrenders himself to the powers of his unconsciousness. We may find his insight into man’s psyche as plausible, especially the idea that man has a sense for something supernatural and that he can consciously experience this supernatural. This suggests that humans are in the core of the self somehow religious.

---

<sup>102</sup> William James, *The Varieties of Religious Experience*, 383.

<sup>103</sup> William James, *The Varieties of Religious Experience*, 280.

## Other aspects involving the conversion

Curt John Ducasse (1881 - 1969) a philosopher at the University of Washington, puts the same importance on the psychic conflict as James in regard to conversion, but he also emphasizes other factors as, for instance, the pressure for commitment, guilt and fear. Some individuals experience an inner conviction of sinfulness, failure and a sense of incapacity to live up to the demands made by religious and ethical commitments. The people may feel intensive anxiety and fear of punishment when breaking some religious or ethical codes. In order to avoid their anxiety or guilty feelings, they try to live up to the demands of religious and ethical commitments whenever they fail.<sup>104</sup> Therefore, their conversion consists in a permanent effort to live according to their commitments.

George Albert Coe (1862-1951), "the father of the religious education movement" states that conversion effects transformation of the self too. Conversion does not change the person's beliefs only, but it also transforms the person himself. "Conversion is a step in the creation of a self – the actual coming-to-be of a self. The language of the parable of the Prodigal son, 'he came to himself,' is scientifically accurate. In conversion the pronoun 'my' acquires meaning that it did not have before; mere drifting, mere impulse, are checked; my conduct and attitudes attach to me more consciously."<sup>105</sup> The person feels that his basic sense of himself has been profoundly changed. He feels a different person, "reborn." In the conversion process, he is not the active element, but he is rather the passive element and the conversion has somehow been worked upon him. In Coe's view, the conversion is a step in the creation of a self or becoming self. Coe also postulates a connection between conversion of the adolescents and the sexual in

---

<sup>104</sup> W. W. Meissner, *The Psychology of a Saint: Ignatius of Loyola*, 49-50.

<sup>105</sup> George Albert Coe, *The psychology of religion*, 171.

instinct.”The physiological change has an indirect effect because the general state of restlessness or excitement induced by the intrusion of a new set of organic sensation makes it easy for youth to acquire new interests of almost any kind. The sexual instinct plays a direct part also in that it increases attention to persons and in that it extends and deepens tender emotions. Thus the instinct of sex joins with that of parenthood in establishing in conversion a more social attitude.”<sup>106</sup>

Erikson asserts that religious conversion is a phenomenon of youth which involves the need for ideological commitment. “Young people need something to believe in. In the search for identity, they experiment with ideas, actions and devotions.”<sup>107</sup> “Ideologies offer to the members of this age group overly simplified and yet determined answers to exactly those vague inner states and those urgent questions which arise in consequence of identity conflict.”<sup>108</sup> Erikson understands the first function of religion in one’s life as a reaffirmation of basic trust. “According to Erikson, however, religion is fundamentally linked with the first stage, in which the issue of basic trust is crucial and the mother plays the dominant role.”<sup>109</sup> The second function of religion, he understands as the need for guidance in one’s life.”It is now father who plays a dominant role, in stimulating the child to become autonomous and to take initiative, and in offering guidelines and rules for life.”<sup>110</sup> Erikson understands “Mother” and “Father” as not necessarily the literal mother and father, but rather indicators of interactional patterns.

Carl W. Christensen, an instructor of Psychiatry at Northwestern University, defines the religious conversion experience itself as a period during which the individual is caught up in

---

<sup>106</sup> George Albert Coe, *The psychology of religion*, 171.

<sup>107</sup> Richard Stevens, *Erik Erikson*, 64.

<sup>108</sup> W. W. Meissner, *The Psychology of a Saint: Ignatius of Loyola*, 50.

<sup>109</sup> Hetty Zock, *A Psychology of Ultimate Concern*, 83.

<sup>110</sup> Hetty Zock, *A Psychology of Ultimate Concern*, 88.

both conscious and unconscious conflict. The conflict resolves in giving-up phenomenon. Christensen notes that this giving-up is related to earlier behavior patterns in which the child was forced to conform to parental demands, especially to those of the mother. The giving-up phenomenon tends to occur immediately before, or concurrently with, the sense of divine presence. For Christensen, experience of divine presence is related to the individual's defensive projection of the mental representation of his mother. Therefore, a conversion experience means the person's submission to God's will. The surrender and submission to the will of God is the person's projection of his submission to the demands of his mother. Christensen states that the conversion results in feelings of change in the individual's sense of self. The change is experienced passively, as happening to the person and it is associated with a sense of divine presence.<sup>111</sup>

Psychology understands conversion as an outcome of the intra psychic crisis and yields to the person's inner balance, composure, self – possession or integration. From the psychological perspective, God and religion are the means of the individual's growth as a personality rather than the goal of his existential destiny. If the person transforms his or her images of God through the experience of conversion it only helps him or her to the extent that it makes him or her a more mature and integrated person.

## **Summary**

If we take summary of psychological perspectives, conversion of our unhealthy, inadequate or false images of God entails several aspects. We tend to cling to one sided views of

---

<sup>111</sup> Carl W. Christensen , "Religious conversion in adolescence," *Journal of Pastoral Psychology*, Vol.16 (6), 17-28.

God and sometimes we have inadequate or false images of God. Conversion would mean letting go or giving up such images of God in favor of positive or healthy ones. Transformation of our unhealthy images of God would also mean remedying our incomplete and inadequate images. Conversion of unhealthy images of God would lead us to reducing our inner discord, unifying ourselves, becoming more self, more complete and more comfortable with ourselves. Many unhealthy images of God (God as a harsh judge, taskmaster, accountant, God of death, or God of punishment, ) evoke feelings of fear, sadness, insecurity, guilt and convictions of sin. Therefore, the conversion of false images of God would mean escaping from these anxious feelings. Conversion of such images would lead us to feelings of security, trust, joy, and comfort in God's presence. Conversion of negative images would also mean escaping from the influence of the Super-ego. When we transform our images of God, our ego becomes more dominant and independent from the Super-ego. It becomes less submissive and vulnerable to the influence of the Super-ego. Some people, who experienced such conversion, account that they finally found the God they have been always looking for. It is a God that is not distant, punishing, judgmental, snooping, or retaliating. Conversion of unhealthy images of God helps us to discover a more friendly, close and loving side of God. God becomes more close and intimate than prior to the conversion. Our healthy images of God may include images such as: God of mercy and love, God of life, God as a good shepherd, God of fruitfulness and generosity.



## Chapter three: A Theology of Conversion

### Sin in the work of Josef Fuchs

Josef Fuchs, S.J. (1912-2005), a German Jesuit priest, was one of the most important Roman Catholic theologians of the 20th century. He taught at the Gregorian University in Rome. In this chapter, I introduce his theological view on conversion. When we talk about the nature of conversion from the theological perspective, then it is the special moment of our life when God the creator mystically approaches and touches his creatures— humans. It is something that goes beyond our reasoning. While attracting man to himself, God wants to save him from evil and bring him to salvation. It is God who is rather active here. According to Fuchs conversion concerns the human’s turning back to God as his source and the destiny of life. We are like “pilgrims” in this world who once came from God and are heading back to God. We have to start our analysis of conversion with the analyses of sin first. “Sin, morally considered, is a violation of a supposed material moral order. As human beings we are obliged to bring order onto our lives and through such activity to bring order into human society and the entire world.”<sup>112</sup> One can convert to God only if he is turned away from God; he can return to God only if he has gone away from God. It is because the sin created a gap, a distance and alienation between God and people. “He is not without relationship to his God, for without that he does not exist.”<sup>113</sup> In other words, sin interfered with relationship between man and God. God, nevertheless, decided to cross this gap by salvation of man and the renewal of intimate friendship. Theology views the world as a place created by God for man. God ordered man to govern the world and use its fruits. However, with the corruption of human nature sin and death became reality of the man’s life. We

---

<sup>112</sup> Josef Fuchs, “Sin and Conversion,” in *Conversion*, ed. Walter E. Conn., 247.

<sup>113</sup> Josef Fuchs, “Sin and Conversion,” in *Conversion*, ed. Walter E. Conn., 248.

read in the Bible that evil had already been present when God created man and it was the evil that corrupted the human nature. Man rebelled against God and chose death rather than life (Gen 2:16-17). The Bible treats evil as a being causing damage through the forces of nature, inflicting people with illnesses or death and additionally, it acts as an impersonal force perverting the human heart. Evil is portrayed in the Bible as the force in opposition to God, causing chaos in the world and deluding people from God to death. The Old Testament for instance understands sin as a violation of the commandments and covenant offered by God. The New Testament understands sin as a rejection of God's Son and his salvation. The evil affects all areas of life by creating conflict in the world. Nothing can escape perversion of the evil, all social structures, every individual and even nature. It creates hostility among people, breaking friendships, marriages, engagements. Destructive force of sin has many faces in the world such as injustice, violence, deception, lie, wars, pain, or death.

On the moral level, sin corrupts man's inner integrity and affects his moral judgment. For instance, the more we sin, the less we become capable of right moral discernment. Sin "blinds" man and he frequently confuses evil for good. Consequently, he follows blindly this "false good." Because of corrupted human nature, people incline to the evil rather than to the good. It disintegrates us as person; turns upside down our values; and weakens our will to choose and do moral good. Sin is not a violence to the particular law or precept given by God only, but it is rather a person's disposition in his totality against God. "A sin is not so much an individual act about particular object. It is much more a disposition of myself as a person, not merely one single act."<sup>114</sup> In this disposition, the person permanently refuses to give himself to God. Sin is therefore a man's fundamental orientation toward evil. In every human act, we choose to either confirm or reject our total orientation. However, one solitary act does not alter our fundamental

---

<sup>114</sup> Joseph Fuchs, "Sin and Conversion," in *Conversion*, ed. Walter E. Conn., 248.

orientation. But series of actions opposite to our fundamental orientation may gradually change it. Man becomes gradually good or bad.<sup>115</sup>

Sin causes the alienation of man from God. Not only does the sinner reject God's love, but he also refuses to answer God's love. Sin is a self-oriented declaration of autonomy. "First of all, sin is a personal self-realization apart from and against God."<sup>116</sup> The sinner is offered salvation by God and the sinner consciously rejects this offer. Following his own will, the sinner blindly pursues his "false good" anywhere but in God and finds disappointment and despair only. Our daily experience is that a person wants to be a redeemer for himself and in total control of his life. Sin is a radical saying "no" to God. "I am refusing to love God, closing off my whole being from God." The sinner loses his Christian liberty, the freedom which enables him to freely reply to God's love. It seems that there is no escape for man from his miserable condition. Christian theology suggests that no human power can overcome his sinful state, only God's redemptive action and his abundant grace. God is our hope. God is a hope even for people who do not acknowledge his existence. They consciously desire endless happiness and wellbeing, life without evil and, unconsciously, long for God. From our description of sin, conversion will be turning away from sin, forsaking a sinful way of life and refusing evil.<sup>117</sup>

Sin spoils our image of God too. Our heart is deluded by false images of God. We read about the Israelites in the Old Testament, how sin damaged their image of God. When they violated the covenant they degraded themselves to worship idols, they served false gods, created social injustice, oppressed poor and consequently fell into slavery. The image of God of Jesus' contemporaries was also deteriorated that some did not recognize Him as God's Son. However, it was not necessarily a consequence of their sins. Many had different expectations of the divine

---

<sup>115</sup> Joseph Fuchs, "Sin and Conversion," in *Conversion*, ed. Walter E. Conn., 249.

<sup>116</sup> Joseph Fuchs, "Sin and Conversion," in *Conversion*, ed. Walter E. Conn, 251.

<sup>117</sup> Josef Fuchs, "Sin and Conversion," in *Conversion*, ed. Walter E. Conn, 247-262.

redeemer than Jesus presented. When we sin, we sometimes wonder whether God would forgive us our sins. Our image of God is likely enmeshed with fears. “In the presence of God of so much goodness and love we feel ashamed, guilt-ridden, unworthy. We wonder whether we will see compassion and forgiveness in the eyes of Jesus when we realize how often we fail to live up to his standards.”<sup>118</sup> We focus on the anger Jesus showed toward the Pharisees. We expect to hear those terrible words Jesus addressed at Peter, “*Get behind me, Satan*” (Mk 8:33). In other words, when we sin we recoil from God, expecting his wrath and punishment. “We interpret our experience (fear, guilt, unworthiness of God) as a reaction to God’s or Jesus’ changed attitude toward us.”<sup>119</sup> Our image of God may be unhealthy not only because of our problematic upbringing, but it also may be a consequence of our sins. Feelings of guilt when we failed to meet our religious commitments create our fear of God. Often, we fear his punishment or abandonment and we tend to emphasize this part of his character.

### **Forsaking the sin - Josef Fuchs**

Fuchs offers his understanding of conversion. Conversion is not a single act of repentance for sin. And it is not either a sum of several good acts. “Conversion is the total person changing himself. It means recapitulation and transforming the basic orientation of a person who has been so against God that he cannot come back to God by himself”<sup>120</sup> The sinner “comes” back to God like the Prodigal son in Luke 15:11-32. Conversion takes place in the depth of the personality with a commitment to devote self to God, to his will, calls, plans or vocation. The transformation does not happen in one solitary act, just as man does not become sinner by one act of sin. The

---

<sup>118</sup> William A. Barry, *Paying Attention to God*, 73-74.

<sup>119</sup> William A. Barry, *Paying Attention to God*, 73-74.

<sup>120</sup> Joseph Fuchs, “Sin and Conversion,” in *Conversion*, ed. Walter E. Conn, 256.

decision to convert or the experience of sudden religious awakening may come in one powerful moment, but it takes a process and time to change the fundamental orientation with morally good acts. The sinner makes the decision to change the whole course of his life, his values, views, feelings, will, thoughts, goals. Conversion also consists of our remorse and regret over sin.<sup>121</sup> The convert commits his total person to God and submits his will to the will of God. The degree of dedication is individual, but this is what is going on in conversion. Conversion may also be characterized as a movement from darkness to light, death to life, and sin to God.<sup>122</sup> The Christian chooses to say “yes” to God in all his actions. In the moment of conversion the convert experiences in the depth of his heart love, liberation, acceptance, and joy as reality of his “return” to God. God is not an enemy for him anymore, but he is like the father of the Prodigal son and welcomes the sinner with outstretched arms. The father makes no judgment on his prodigal son, but, on the contrary, God restores the dignity of his son. “Conversion takes place on the deep personal level where man is able to dispose of himself as a whole.”<sup>123</sup>

At the bottom line, God is behind every conversion and moves the heart of the sinner by his grace to conversion. The conversion, though, does not come automatically in spite of God’s grace. God’s grace accompanies the sinner through sometimes a lengthy process until the soul reaches the moment of disposition. Recall the lengthy struggle of St Augustine (*Confessions*) until he finally reached the point of his conversion. Before his conversion, he had undergone an agonizing time of questioning, doubts, hesitation to submit his will to God. Though he had acknowledged the truth, he still wanted back his former life.<sup>124</sup>

---

<sup>121</sup> Kittel and Friedrich, *Theological Dictionary of the New Testament*, 639.

<sup>122</sup> In this sense we can also understand conversion of our images of God, from unhealthy and destructive to a more life-giving, healthy God images. It is a shift from our distorted images of God to a more real image of God. In other words, a person changes or transforms his view, conception, and understanding of God.

<sup>123</sup> Joseph Fuchs, “Sin and Conversion,” in *Conversion*, ed. Walter E. Conn, 256.

<sup>124</sup> Joseph Fuchs, “Sin and Conversion,” in *Conversion*, ed. Walter E. Conn, 256.

Still, in spite of the person's conversion, his total orientation to God and his effort to confirm his orientation, he still preserves his tendencies against God. "It is possible precisely because the justified man, while loving God with his whole person has not yet integrated into his love the whole reality of his long life."<sup>125</sup> It is because our will was affected by the original sin. We have to see ourselves in the saying of St. Paul: "For I do not do what I want, but I do what I hate" (Rom 7: 15). Our will has ambivalent tendencies and we always struggle to stay oriented to God. Some forms of Christian spirituality suggest that holiness requires one to submit his will to God. We find archetypes of submitting one's will to God in Abraham's sacrifice of Isaac, Mary's fiat at the annunciation and in Jesus' sacrifice.

The Conversion requires continuous growth, deepening intensity of one's own option for God. It may be called a conversion from venial sin. Venial sin is a sin that does not alter our fundamental orientation to God, but it rather weakens our disposition, will, determination, and love. The Christian, pursuing a deep spiritual life, intensive friendship with God, readiness to fulfill God's will, is continuously making the effort to minimize his venial sins.<sup>126</sup> The decision to minimize even the venial sins requires another conversion. This happens at a higher level of the spiritual life and it is different from the first conversion of the basic orientation. Theology understands this constant effort as one of the ways to become holy. God is the source of holiness and calls people to renew divine life in themselves. Conversion is therefore a struggle for holiness. "A convert is, by the grace of Christ, a spiritual man."<sup>127</sup> St. Thomas defines holiness as the virtue by which a man's mind applies itself and all its acts to God. It is act as well as habit. Its concrete manifestation is the keeping of the Commandments. However, to keep the Commandments faithfully involves our healthy detachment from created things, as it also

---

<sup>125</sup> Joseph Fuchs, "Sin and Conversion," in *Conversion*, ed. Walter E. Conn, 259.

<sup>126</sup> Catechism of the Catholic Church, 5th ed., 2013.

<sup>127</sup> Joseph Fuchs, "Sin and Conversion," in *Conversion*, 261.

demands a great strength of character or stability in the service of God.<sup>128</sup> It is the work of God's grace when the Christian becomes a "spiritual man." St. Paul states that man is either "spiritual man" or "carnal man."<sup>129</sup>

### **Responding to the "call" - Karl Rahner**

Rahner states that conversion is man's free turning to God as a response to his call. "From the biblical and dogmatic point of view, man's free turning to God has always to be seen as a response, made possible by God's grace, to a call from God."<sup>130</sup> This call comes from both Jesus and his Spirit. Jesus Christ personifies the Kingdom of God and the Spirit provides the sinner freedom and forgiveness. With the coming of the kingdom of God in Christ comes victory over evil and death.

When the sinner converts, God liberates him from his enslaving "idols." The conversion gives him a "taste" for his final liberation and a hope for his "possession" of God in his final future.<sup>131</sup> "The call therefore summons us from mere finitude (since grace is participation in the divine life itself) and from sinfulness, in which man in mistrust and despair makes an idol of himself and of certain dimensions of his life."<sup>132</sup> Conversion is turning from one's past to the new life when the past was locked in the sin. "Conversion is the religiously and morally good fundamental decision in regard to God, a basic choice intended to commit the whole life to God

---

<sup>128</sup> "New Advent St. Thomas Aquinas-*Holiness*," last accessed May 14, 2011, <http://www.slate.com/id/2132725/>.

<sup>129</sup> Joseph Fuchs, "Sin and Conversion," in *Conversion*, 247-262.

<sup>130</sup> Karl Rahner, "Conversion," 292.

<sup>131</sup> Karl Rahner, "Conversion," 292.

<sup>132</sup> Karl Rahner, "Conversion," 292.

inasmuch as this takes place with some definite, if only relatively higher, degree of reflection and consequently can be located at a more or less definite point in a lifetime.”<sup>133</sup>

Conversion is an experience of God’s grace and his powerful intervention in man’s life. Man is called to leave his sins because they make the sinner an idol to himself. In other words, if the sinner rejects God’s call as his highest good, then he makes the lesser goods center of his worship. When the sinner responds to the call and denounces his mortal “idols,” then he accepts God’s invitation to his kingdom. It is a call for radical change to leave past life. Jesus announces the arrival of the kingdom of God in his person. The Kingdom of God represents God’s saving action in man, order in his life, and justice in the world on both the personal and the social level. The Kingdom of God brings God’s dominion into the human heart corrupted by sin and invites man to take part in establishing his kingdom on earth. “Ultimately the intention is the same, whether Jesus calls for conversion to the *basileia* (The Kingdom of God) present here and now in himself and confronting the whole man with its radical demands, whether Paul calls us to faith in God who justifies without works through the Cross of Christ, or John admonishes us to pass from the darkness to light in faith in the Son who appeared in flesh.”<sup>134</sup>

The call to conversion is an invitation to become holy and imitate God’s holiness. The Christian is called to follow Christ and his precept of loving God above all and the neighbor as himself. The call can also be understood as an appeal to suppress his narcissistic tendencies for the sake and love of the “neighbor.” Jesus gives the paradigm for the Christian of being unselfish, broadminded and loving people unselfishly. The Christian is called to be happy in his faith because of the immense gift and hope he was given. The gift itself ensures him that God is

---

<sup>133</sup> Karl Rahner, “Conversion,” 291.

<sup>134</sup> Karl Rahner, “Conversion,” 292.



on his side. He accepts himself as he is, happy with his own existence.<sup>135</sup> The convert learns to trust God and trusts his life into God's hands because he knows that the Spirit leads him on the right path. He lets God determine the course of his life. "Conversion is hope as trusting oneself to the unexpected, uncharted way into the open and incalculable future in which God comes."<sup>136</sup>

We can see that Rahner characterizes several levels of conversion. In the most genuine sense of conversion, the Christian does not turn away from his past sins only, but he rather imitates Christ and incorporates his precepts into his life. Christ speaks to each person in his life circumstances and one can reflect Christ from his own perspective in his own life circumstances. For Rahner, conversion is a process of unification with the Church where the Spirit is present, central and essential concern of the Christianity.<sup>137</sup> Rahner suggests that conversion is also possible in non-Catholic religions. "Conversion in non-Christian religions (and even the secular analogies in psycho-therapeutic practice) has to be judged by the same criteria as are used to interpret theologically non-Christians religions and perhaps even 'implicit' Christianity."<sup>138</sup>

### **The final integration - Thomas Merton**

Merton is aware that "the idea of 'rebirth' or 'new man in Christ and in the Spirit,' of a "risen life" in the mystery of Christ or in the kingdom of God, is fundamental to Christian theology and practice – it is after all, the whole meaning of baptism."<sup>139</sup> Based on the notion from other religions, he understands "rebirth" as human's fulfilling certain urgent potentialities in

---

<sup>135</sup> Karl Rahner, "Conversion," 292-293.

<sup>136</sup> Karl Rahner, "Conversion," 292.

<sup>137</sup> Karl Rahner, "Conversion," in *Perspectives on Personal and Social Transformation: Conversion*, ed. Walter E. Conn, 206.

<sup>138</sup> Karl Rahner, "Conversion," 293.

<sup>139</sup> Thomas Merton, "Final Integration," in *Conversion*, ed. Walter E. Conn, 266.

the ground of one's being, to become someone that one is meant to be.<sup>140</sup> He also realizes that if the person wants to reach "beyond self" (transcendent), he must undergo different levels of conversions. "The highest form of life is the spiritual life in which the infinitely "fontal" (source like) creativity of our being in Being is somehow attained, and becomes in its turn a source of action and creativity in the world around us."<sup>141</sup> One level of the conversion is, for instance, when the infant must overcome his own self-centeredness in order to become a responsible member of society. But once the child grows up, it must undergo another conversion – a conversion of "transcultural identity."<sup>142</sup> Merton acknowledges the importance of society's role, but the final maturing of the human psyche must be completed on a transcultural level. He asserts that social atmosphere favors the very active and productive way of life, but in reality it stifles true growth, leaves people lost, alienated, frustrated and bored without any way of knowing what is wrong with them. He, therefore, calls for psychic rebirth into a new transcultural identity.<sup>143</sup> "This new being is entirely personal, original, creative, unique, and it transcends the limits imposed by social convention and imperative."<sup>144</sup> Merton understands it as our final integration. In this final conversion, the Christian acquires a deep, inner freedom to accept himself as he is, regardless of his circumstances. He is unselfishly happy with himself. It is a freedom of being open for truth. This person has a different understanding of life and he does not concentrate on his particular needs only, but he also orientates to the needs of others. He becomes "universal man." "He accepts not only his own community, his own society, his own friend, his own culture, but all mankind. He is fully 'Catholic' in the best sense of the word."<sup>145</sup>

---

<sup>140</sup> Thomas Merton, "Final Integration," in *Conversion*, ed. Walter E. Conn, 266.

<sup>141</sup> Thomas Merton, "Final Integration," in *Conversion*, ed. Walter E. Conn. (New York: Alba House, 1978), 266.

<sup>142</sup> Thomas Merton, "Final Integration," in *Conversion*, ed. Walter E. Conn. (New York: Alba House, 1978), 267.

<sup>143</sup> Ibid.

<sup>144</sup> Ibid.

<sup>145</sup> Ibid.

The final moment of integration is a process in which the Christian disintegrates himself (a loss of self), a real spiritual death. “The process of disintegration and reintegration is one that involves a terrible solitude and an ‘existential moratorium,’ a crisis and an anguish which cannot be analyzed or intellectualized.”<sup>146</sup> It is a stage of insight where one is ready to give up self and his earthly needs for the higher values. One is open and unified with the one truth visible in many various manifestations.<sup>147</sup> *“Truly, truly, I say to you, unless a grain of wheat falls into the earth and dies, it remains alone; but if it dies, it bears much fruit”* (Jn 12:24). He discovers his new identity in being for other people. He “mourns” with others and “joys” with others. He becomes the New Testament “all things to all men.” The fully integrated Christian becomes capable of being transcultural, beyond one’s own culture. In Merton’s view the final transcultural integration is “the rebirth of man and of society into the transformed and redeemed time, the time of the Kingdom, the time of the Spirit, the time of ‘the end.’”<sup>148</sup> Disintegration would therefore mean turning away from social and cultural self, the product of human history and the final integration would mean reintegration of the self in Christ, in the Pentecostal “new creation.” The one who is fully integrated is not tied up to his own culture, but he acknowledges and lives the presence of the Kingdom of God. He actually “embraces” all. It means that this person suppresses his narcissistic needs and opens himself for the needs of others. One is not attached to one person or place only, but he is free to go anywhere God wills him to go. This person experiences inner freedom to follow God’s will. It is not that this person does not make any mistakes or sins, but he is totally confident and saturated with following God’s will. It is the freedom bestowed by the Spirit we read about in the New Testament and in the life of St. Francis, John of the Cross, or Theresa of Avila for instance. It is the rebirth of man to which we

---

<sup>146</sup> Thomas Merton, “Final Integration,” in *Conversion*, ed. Walter E. Conn. (New York: Alba House, 1978), 269.

<sup>147</sup> Ibid.

<sup>148</sup> Ibid.

are all called. Integration of the self in Christ, it is a new Pentecostal “new creation.” “*And the disciples were continually filled with joy and with the Holy Spirit*” (Acts 13:52). The characteristics of the fully integrated Christian correspond with the seven gifts of the Spirit: wisdom, understanding, counsel, fortitude, knowledge, piety and fear of the Lord.<sup>149</sup> The final integration requires though, a great fidelity to the truth and to God’s commandments. The fully integrated Christian reflects in his life Christ, the Gospel wisdom, and the joy of being integrated with God.

## **Summary**

If we take summary of some theological perspectives, conversion would mean crossing the gap created by sin between human beings and God. Conversion means God’s redemptive action in the person’s life. It also means escaping the perversion of evil and the transformation of the person’s fundamental orientation. The power of God’s love carries the person away from his miserable state. Conversion means escaping the state of slavery and entering the state of freedom. Some theological perspectives speak of division of our heart which means that our heart has inclination to both good and evil. Conversion would therefore mean transformation of one’s heart and the person’s participation in divine life. Conversion means accepting the invitation to take part in the Kingdom of God with its order of love, good and salvation. Conversion is understood as the sinner’s response to the Creator’s call, turning away from his sin and changing his fundamental orientation to God. Conversion means man’s final integration. He becomes a universal man for other people in the image of Christ. Conversion is also joy over the good news of coming home to God from a long journey. Conversion also changes the

---

<sup>149</sup> Catechism of the Catholic Church, 5th ed., 1831.

individual's view of God. When man turns away from his sins, God is rather for him a loving parent, friend, partner or lover who embraces his friend who wandered away. God is like a shepherd who guides and protects his flock. In conversion, God leads the man through the desert to the Promised Land, protects him from the storm, shares with him bread, heals his wounds, and finally dies for him on the cross. In God's forgiveness, the sinner finds God's true "face."

This chapter discusses the essence of conversion from the perspective of Theology. The reason we discuss conversion is because it is the major aspect or dynamic of the Spiritual Exercises. In the end, the transformation of the person's faith is the purpose of the Exercises. The first chapter discusses the concept of elaborating images of God. It is a necessary framework before we start talking about conversion of these images which are often incomplete and distorted if they are not confronted. Our images of God mediate our relationship with God and in certain sense they represent our faith. They show us the characteristics of God we believe in. The Exercises actually help us to analyze and reconstruct our distorted images of God and find more realistic images of God. We may also understand this reconstruction or reevaluation of past as our conversion. Ignatius believed that the experience of the Exercises can help us to reform our life and our faith. He believed that the Exercises can help us to live a living and nurturing faith. He who discovered a true, living God cannot refuse his love and desires intensive relationship with him. *"The kingdom of heaven is like a treasure hidden in the field, which a man found and hid again; and from joy over it he goes and sells all that he has and buys that field"* (Matt 13:44).

In my next chapter I want to discuss conversion of our distorted images of God through the experience of the Spiritual Exercises. Some of our images of God block our relationship with God and weaken our faith. In the first week of the Exercises, the exercitant meditates on God's

creation plan of the world and on the destructive power of sin. But he also meditates on God's immense love for the world, human beings and especially for every individual. I want to examine how this experience of God's love shapes the person's view of God and himself. One of the goals of the Exercises is the awareness of God's presence in one's life. How can this notion help the person to live his faith happily and with more confidence? Will he find the transformation of his faith more helpful for himself?

### **Summary of the perspectives**

Both perspectives, that of Psychology and Theology, have also something in common. They both present very similar circumstances of conversion. God can use man's crises, positive motivation or even sin to attract man to himself. Theology and Psychology look at the converted man's existential change. They both view conversion as transformation of the person and his self, his human qualities, wellbeing, relationships or images of God. They both view conversion as a change for better toward man's good. The conversion from both perspectives does not simply change our faith or image of God only, but it also transforms ourselves, our relationships, our life and our status as God's creatures. This is not only about quality of living, but this is rather about quality and destiny of the being. And agreeably, they both view God as the center of the man's conversion.

Conversion that speaks to me the most is the conversion of the apostles after the Pentecost. We can see the apostles in the Gospel before the Christ's crucifixion as frightened and with a little faith. They had known Christ as powerful, healing the blind, lame, lepers and even raising the dead and suddenly they found him weak, non resisting to his seizure. They were afraid of being acknowledged with Jesus who was proclaimed rebel against Roman power and

breaking the Jewish most sacred laws. But the apostles dramatically changed after the resurrection of Christ and after they had been filled with the Holy Spirit (Acts 2:1-11). After Pentecost, the apostles were able to do things that they had not been able to do before. Apostles' transformation can be seen in their audacity of being publicly recognized with the Crucified. Their transformation can also be recognized in the way they lived their faith, apostolate, signs and proclaiming the Good news. I understand that the dramatic transformation of the apostles occurred because of several decisive factors. They experienced resurrected Christ; they experienced his forgiveness and love for them; Christ transformed them and their faith by his Spirit.

## **Chapter Four: Healing our images of God through the experience of the Spiritual Exercises**

### **In core we have something divine**

When we ask children to draw a picture of God and we rely on their creativity, we get surprisingly inspirational images of God. It is interesting to see how well children can handle this difficult task, especially when we do not have direct, sensory experience of God. What is also intriguing for our study is the fact that children illustrate or frame God in their familiar environment. For instance, Ignatius (1491 – 1556) viewed Christ according to the theology and culture of his time. In the meditation of the call of an earthly king in the first week, Ignatius suggests the exercitant to view Christ as an earthly king before whom is assembled the whole world. “It is my will to conquer the whole world and all my enemies, and thus to enter into the glory of my father.”<sup>150</sup> We can generally say that we generate our image of God from the information we gather from our environment, other people, the tradition and teaching of the church, and mainly from imprints on us by our formative people. But there is also something else that helps us to elaborate our image of God. It is the core of our being. We were created in God’s image. This means that the core of our being reflects something good and divine. However, this good and divine core of our being is often over-shadowed by negative images and inputs from other people and from ourselves. For instance, in the core of our being we unconsciously long for God, but this desire is frequently silenced by religious apathy, problematic upbringing, harsh social environment or extreme religious practice. But it also means that in the core of our being we can search for a true image of God, although this image of God is often overlaid by our

---

<sup>150</sup> Ignatius of Loyola, *The Spiritual Exercises of St. Ignatius*, 44.



negative or unhealthy images of him. The problem is that we do not search for the true image of God ourselves. We are often comfortable with the images of God we have and we do not realize that they distort our true image of God. In the next section I will provide concrete factors which shape or deform our images of God. The Exercises provide necessary space to uncover our positive images of God embedded in the core of our being. They help us to free ourselves from our disordered tendencies to better serve God and to grow in faith. Why should we examine our deepest self? How can this change our life? Ignatius proposes this reason: “*Man was created to praise, reverence, and serve God our Lord, and by this means to save his soul.*”<sup>151</sup> In reality, our incomplete images of God block our true friendship with God, but some people make the effort to transform these images and liberate themselves in order to enhance their friendship and love for God. Many of our negative images come from our unconsciousness and in this chapter we will name some techniques of the Exercises which will help us to analyze and abandon our distorted images.

In my first chapter I suggested how limited our language and conception of God may be and how our religious experience may be something many people consider real and enriching. One place of our religious encounter is in our images of God. K. Frielingsdorf in his book: *Seek the face of God*, cites Auer’s description of an image of God as the “spiritual medium in which and through which the vital encounter between a religious human being and his or her God takes place.”<sup>152</sup> In this chapter I want to analyze our images of God, name obstacles to healthy images, and depict aspects which might change our ordinary ways of viewing God. The image of God which we generate can be a source of power, meaning and enhanced inspiration for us, but it can also be a burden or an obstruction. A healthy image of God is not about having a positive view or

---

<sup>151</sup> Ignatius of Loyola, *The Spiritual Exercises of St. Ignatius*, 12.

<sup>152</sup> Karl Frielingsdorf, *Seek the face of God*, 19.

conception of God only. The image actually defines the relationship because our “felt” experience of God is our response to the image. Truly, it does matter what kind of image of God we have. It tells us a lot about the level of our faith and relationship with God, others and ourselves. Christian theology has taught that the only basis for enduring and authentic hope is in relationship to God who is the creator, life-giver, savior, and redeemer.<sup>153</sup> But some people look at hope negatively. “The typical neurotic pattern of depression is built around a false image of ultimate authority which has failed to validate, mirror, affirm, and confirm a person’s unique worth.”<sup>154</sup> “People become vulnerable to depression and despair when their hopes have been placed on false absolutes and when their own abilities and resources to save and atone for themselves are breaking down and are not producing desired results.”<sup>155</sup> We may consciously formulate concepts and ideas about God, but this might be something contrary to what we have imprinted in our subconscious. Our unconscious images work sometimes against us. For instance, Christian theology presents God as a loving father and I believe and I reason that God is a loving father, but something inside is telling me not to trust God. “He will not listen to your prayers or there are people who need his help more than you.” What does it tell me? In my depth, I do not trust God and I probably rely on my own power. In my unconsciousness resides some negative image of God that blocks me from trusting him. Sometimes people are handed unhealthy images of God. Where did this unhealthy image come from? Maybe I was not given enough appreciation and proper care from my caregivers when I was a child. Maybe I was ignored or abused. This might have created my distrust in people and fostered in me an attitude of independence and self-reliance. So why would I trust God, if the people most important to my formation did not care for me when I needed them most? Another problem is that people put

---

<sup>153</sup> Jordan, *Taking on the gods*, 88.

<sup>154</sup> Jordan, *Taking on the gods*, 89.

<sup>155</sup> *Ibid.*

their trust in the false image of God and experience disappointment if their hopes are not met. One of such causes is people's idolatrous misperceptions. "If one has taken one's definition of identity and self from a false god, then one is extremely vulnerable to depression."<sup>156</sup> In the Ignatian retreat the exercitant examines his image of God through similar questions during the first week. The specific questions may differ. What is important is one's examination of the quality of his faith.

### **Factors which shape our faith**

In my first chapter I mentioned a process of elaborating an image of God in our psyche and how important is the input of our caregivers in this process. "They form the basic patterns of our feelings, our thoughts, and our conduct, whether they are close to reality or far removed from it, whether they function as obstacles to growth or as forces enhancing it."<sup>157</sup> Our caregivers, however important, are not the only influence on the shaping of our faith. Another factor shaping the child's faith is how other people live their ordinary lives in his social and religious environment or how they deal with everyday struggles or joys, illnesses or births, engagements or divorces, stress or challenges, achievements or losses. It affects our faith and world view how people around us take their life in general. For some people life is a place of paradise. For others it is an endless struggle. Some people find each day as a great gift of God and have great expectations for each day. Other people cannot wait for the day they will die. Some people love life's challenges, while others seek ways of avoiding all obstacles. The way people around the child live their lives, principles, values and how they live their "credo" plays an integral role in

---

<sup>156</sup> Jordan, *Taking on the gods*, 92.

<sup>157</sup> Karl Frielingsdorf, *Seek the face of God*, 19.

the child's religious formation. The way religion is practiced within the family may take many forms. Some families emphasize religious practice, but other families do not practice their faith at all. Sometimes the parents have significantly different approaches to the religious practice and this aspect affects the child's faith. In some families each parent affiliates with different religious congregations and differ in their beliefs and views. Occasionally this creates tensions between family members and sometimes the whole family ends up in religious apathy. The ideal is for parents to support each other and their children in their faith. Another problem affecting the child's faith arises when parents divorce. Some parents do not find support after the divorce in their families and sometimes they abandon their religious practice. Sometimes religious community may punish or abandon them due to divorce. But others strengthen their faith through and after their parents' divorce. Similar problem occurs in the families with different forms of abuse. The religious values children learn are effective only to the extent that they see their parent's love and respect each other and practice what they believe. "Religious values are particularly effective if they are practiced by people that children both love and respect."<sup>158</sup>

The religious practice may take sometimes extreme or fundamentalist forms and we can see how these extreme forms can be dangerous in today's world. In today's world we should not overlook the influence of media. The cyber world has become a place where people communicate their religious beliefs and experiences. Maybe it is a strong expression when I say that through the media people experience another dimension of religious life. It is not only the traditional sacramental space where people experience their faith, but some people find inspirations for their faith through the internet. There are abundant uploaded spiritual material and images which may bring a lot of good, but there is also a lot of disinformation and

---

<sup>158</sup> Karl Frielingsdorf, *Seek the face of God*, 29.

distraction from God. We can of course question how God is present in all this. The degree to which the child faces the social atmosphere, the environment, and the overall ambience also shapes the child's faith. "In the age of media saturation, even television programs are important in the religious formation of children, particularly with regard to the developments of images of God."<sup>159</sup> A couple examples may give us a better picture. A child who lives in the country imagines God embedded in her environment, "living" or "being" somewhere above the farm land, houses and trees. Another child who lives in the city pictures God embedded in his place somewhere between the big buildings, in the attic, or in the basement of his house. Our environment shapes our beliefs and images of God. Of course, we cannot put all responsibility for our images of God on others, environment, culture or religion. "The varied images of God that were learned in early childhood are fundamentally important. They form the basic patterns of our feelings, our thoughts, and our conduct, whether they are close to the reality or far removed from it, whether they function as obstacles to growth or as forces enhancing it."<sup>160</sup> The Catholic theology teaches about God from the revelation of God in the history of salvation, from the revelation of his Son, Jesus Christ and from the tradition of the Church. The teaching might be true and safe, but the problem is that the theological teaching is rather a human concept of God. Every person has to shape his own image and relationship with God. The teaching gives us concepts which can help us elaborate our image of God, but it cannot substitute for the experience that grounds our relationship with God. "Relationship develops through mutual self-revelation."<sup>161</sup> This brings differences in our views of God and our images of God may differ from the theological perspective. It is also because not everybody pays the same attention to the mutual self-revelation with God. And however theological concepts of God might be true, it can

---

<sup>159</sup> Karl Frielingsdorf, *Seek the face of God*, 30.

<sup>160</sup> Karl Frielingsdorf, *Seek the face of God*, 19.

<sup>161</sup> William A. Barry, *Paying Attention to God*, 16.

never capture reality of the living God. God of theological teaching might be far from our desires, expectations and needs. Our images also depend on our own religious approach and our own view of life. When we invest our energies in secular matters only, pursuing a career, for example, we can easily change our values and principles and alienate ourselves from God.

Discovering life-giving images of God requires us to be continually developing. In our essence we are “programmed” to strive to reach the fullness of our being and to transcend ourselves in our union with God. The Scriptures illustrate life-giving images of God who is merciful and loving, generous and compassionate. He is like a good shepherd who tends and cares for his sheep. He is like a king who protects his kingdom from his enemies. He is like a mother who is endlessly patient with her children. He is like a lover who passionately loves his bride. He is like a solid rock foundation that supports a house. He is like a spring which gives life. Discovering God’s true face is therefore vital for living faith. However, not everyone follows his desire for self integration and lively faith. Those of us who want to live a living faith need to frequently examine our images of God, because we can easily fall into disillusionment from our negative or unhealthy images. These images can become manipulative and obstruct our relationship with God. Sometimes our unhealthy images prevail over our positive ones because our desire to grow in the faith is too weak.

Exploring our images of God presents two problems. One problem is that it is always difficult to articulate our religious experiences. We may try to formulate our religious experiences through the spoken or written words, or symbols, but our expressions always fall short. The other problem is posed by our incapacity for direct sensual or cognitive experience of God. God’s existence and wholeness cannot be expressed by words or conceptualized in thoughts. We always rely on mediators and symbols. The created world is the mediator through

which God communicates with us. On the other hand, God revealed himself through such mediator, in the incarnation of his Son. Our incapacity creates a tension between our need to know God and the partial images or conceptions we have. “What matters throughout this process is that the child comes to realization that his or her image of God will always need to be expanded, ultimately remaining open-ended because the true God will always be greater than any image representing him.”<sup>162</sup> Because of our incapacity to grasp the wholeness of God, we fall into the trap of grasping only one or other particular aspect or characteristic of God. Frequently, we emphasize and generalize that one aspect of God in such a way that we prevent ourselves from seeing other important characteristics of God. Often, our one sided view of God prevails over the other. We sometimes generalize God’s character from one negative experience and we often do not let him do something more for us. If the person does not overcome his one sided view of God, he usually gets locked in his fettered images, fears and prejudices of God. “Unhealthy idols or demonic images of God originate when an image of God is one-sided, when a partial aspect of God is rendered absolute and viewed as if it were complete.”<sup>163</sup> Another problem arises when our authority figures do not live according to what they present and represent. It concerns all kinds of our authorities in daycare facilities and preschools, relatives, clergy, catechists or Sunday school teachers. As a result of our limitations and formative objects, the tension remains between our odd conscious and unconscious images of God.<sup>164</sup>

---

<sup>162</sup> Karl Frielingsdorf, *Seek the face of God*, 26-27.

<sup>163</sup> Karl Frielingsdorf, *Seek the face of God*, 21.

<sup>164</sup> Karl Frielingsdorf, *Seek the face of God*, 19.

## Obstacles in searching the true God

Frielingsdorf names obstacles that hinder us from growing in faith and block us from seeking the true image of God.

1. Our suppressed aggression is the first obstacle which blocks our positive God representations. “All forms of aggression, regardless of whether they are directed against God or fellow human beings, hold energies that point specific direction.”<sup>165</sup>

If we keep our aggression suppressed and we do not deal with it properly, we become the target of its’ destructive energy. It is always good to have in control our aggressive tendencies, but only to the point where the body begins to react with bodily and psychic illnesses. It is necessary to find healthy ways to let out our aggressive emotions. One way to do it is to speak to the spiritual director during colloquiums in the Exercises. The director expects the exercitant to speak about his negative feelings and images discovered in the prayer. The director is there to help the exercitant to deal with his traumas in healthy way. Aggression, for example, can be understood as a positive force and it may even serve us as a positive step toward friendship with God. “In this way, we can use our feelings of aggression to approach God and replace our negative images of him with the positive ones offered in the Bible.”<sup>166</sup> We can use our negative energy for our advantage. In addressing our anger toward God, we can uncover our hidden negative energy and we can voice our reaction to God and see such speaking as valid prayer.

Some people who are locked in their aggressive emotions are often in depression and sometimes mask their anger behind a forced smile. We can see this kind of behavior in

---

<sup>165</sup> Karl Frielingsdorf, *Seek the face of God*, 38.

<sup>166</sup> Karl Frielingsdorf, *Seek the face of God*, 38.



religious communities where proper behavior is required and aggressive behavior is not tolerated. Some people make a lot of effort to stay flawless and consciously suppress their aggressions which might be potentially harmful to them and others. “The destructive power of suppressed aggression manifests itself whenever suppressed anger is directed uncontrollably and negatively against innocent people.”<sup>167</sup> We are frequently convinced that God cannot deal with our aggressions and cannot take our critique. God is capable of coping with our anger and scripture passages prove it. We should not take it wrong that God can become target of our anger at any time. The healthy way to do it is when we express our anger toward God in prayer. We search for truth in hope and trust. Jacob wrestling with God, Job arguing with God, Jesus and Martha, the brother of the Prodigal son suggest that it is possible to argue with God and stay “alive.” The passages show that God does not condemn people, but he rather discloses the truth we do not know. We can consider these questions for prayer: Is there some area of my past life and faith that needs healing? Have I ever expressed my anger against Go? Do I repress my anger against God or do I blame Him for everything without any discernment? How does God seem to react to your anger?

2. Some people face another obstacle which blocks their positive approach to God. These people regard God as a substitute for their missing parent or a characteristic of the missing loved one such as physical closeness, protection, or love. This image of God is common with people who lose their parent or parents in early childhood. “Because of the absence of their fathers, these children often cling to God as a powerful and protective

---

<sup>167</sup> Karl Frielingsdorf, *Seek the face of God*, 39.

figure who lends stability and gives meaning to their lives.”<sup>168</sup> In order to avoid pain from the loss they blame themselves for the missing parent, concluding they are worthless. To overcome this sense of worthlessness they suppress their pain from the loss. The problem is that this image of God represents their wishful desires rather than their own experience of God. Living in this world means for them searching for something they lost and they have right to have it. Often they view this world as good and bad. When they cannot cope with the difficulties of the real world, they retreat to their own world of a good God. These people often idealize God or their missing parent. God is in fact the substitute for the missing parent. They cling to God as a protective, loving figure. God meets their unfulfilled wishes. What the real world cannot provide for them, they find with God. “In order to avoid the pain caused by the loss of their father, children project guilt onto themselves, concluding that they are worthless.”<sup>169</sup> When they are asked to visualize God, they imagine themselves hugging or holding God. This characterizes their need to possess God, hold him for themselves. However, they must understand that true love and friendship does not possess or manipulate the other person.

One way these people can deal with their unrealistic image of God is to confront their images of idealized parent and God. “The disappointment that inevitably results will reveal that beneath this seemingly positive image of God is really a negative god who instills fear in us and who threatens us.”<sup>170</sup> In this way they can elaborate more realistic images. In order to abandon this image of God they need to learn how to let go of their clinging tendencies. It is because somewhere underneath there lies a disturbing image of

---

<sup>168</sup> Karl Frielingsdorf, *Seek the face of God*, 41.

<sup>169</sup> Karl Frielingsdorf, *Seek the face of God*, 41.

<sup>170</sup> Karl Frielingsdorf, *Seek the face of God*, 42-43.

God who constantly threatens to abandon this person, if he does not meet requirements of his unhealthy image. Truly, the person needs to learn how to let go of his clinging tendencies and fear of God. Otherwise it will be difficult for him to find support and confidence in God. Though people often stay hurt from life traumas for their whole life, they can still heal their images and cope better with their personal tragedies. Faith has the power to help these people heal their past images and help them grow into adult, integrated, and more mature Christians.

3. And the third obstacle which blocks our closer encounter with God is when we transfer conflicts with other people into our relationship with God. “We encounter additional difficulties during our encounter with God when we transfer to God our conflict-ridden relationship with our parents.”<sup>171</sup> In some cases it means that we use God as a threat to make other people do our will. Sometimes parents make themselves victims of the conflict and take advantage of the situation: “I have done so much for you and you are now turning your back on me,” or “Do you call yourself a Christian?” Occasionally, parents threaten their children with a God who will punish them for their misbehavior: “God can see in secret and he will punish every lie.” The point is that such innocent looking remark does shape the child’s view of God. It makes God look like a monster who waits for our mistake. When the family conflict takes on a more serious course, then the children tend to leave the church or purposely avoid baptizing their children. It is a kind of revenge on their parents. The same scenario happens when the religious superiors

---

<sup>171</sup> Karl Frielingsdorf, *Seek the face of God*, 45.

use God as an excuse to enforce their power. This creates a very bad image of God who cannot be easily satisfied.<sup>172</sup>

### **Viewing our faith through the magnifying glass**

In my first chapter I suggested that our past object representations affect our present object representations, views, decisions, relationships, reasoning, affections or images of God. In this sense it is true that our past is always with us. When we do not overcome our distorted past images or object representations, we might run into the risk that our past images would deform our present images. Consequently, we often run into the same pattern of behavior or we make the same mistakes. The same old patterns obstruct, rather than promote, our ability to fully live in the present moment. Usually, we are not aware of the images rising from the subconscious which modulate and guide our religious life too. We cling to our unhealthy images which obstruct us in living our faith more freely and happily. Our still forming faith becomes a habit if it is not confronted with the present reality or with each developmental stage. The main characteristic of the still forming or adolcescing faith is that it is dominated by the Super-ego God. “The voice of the Superego God is a voice that plays in the thoughts of the adolcescing self.”<sup>173</sup> It is a parental like voice and this voice often confines the adolcescing self in a sense of unworthiness, or guilt, or shame. This voice controls and manipulates the self. It condemns, approves or disapproves what the self intends to do. This voice can be critical, threatening or punishing. It is a voice of external authority that limits freedom of the self. The Super-ego God can be expiated only through praise or self-punishment. It is a God of contradiction. It can be

---

<sup>172</sup>Karl Frielingsdorf, *Seek the face of God*, 38-46.

<sup>173</sup> John J. Shea, *Finding God again*, 34.

rational as well as irrational in his orders. One with his adolcescing faith never dares to argue against or openly criticize God.<sup>174</sup> The adolcescing religion “shows clearly the nature of the contradiction and the conflict that may arise between the adolcescing self and the Superego God.”<sup>175</sup> The adolcescing religion is what formed religion is commonly understood to be.<sup>176</sup> The adolcescing faith frequently leads to a formal faith and sometimes to our alienation from God or the church. It is because the unhealthy images of God cannot compete with the reality and challenges of the adult world. Adolcescing faith fits and serves its purpose for a certain age, but an inadequate or distorted image of God, coupled with an adolcescing faith is not helpful to the person who suffers his or her partner’s infidelity or abusive behavior, for instance. This level of faith is not supportive to the caregiver who is laid off from his job. It is not supportive when a child has terminal diseases and the parents feel helpless. An inadequate image of God would be for these people distant and cold, incapable of comprehending their situation. In such situations adolcescing images of God are obstacles rather than a real help or support.

Some people who come to the Exercises and desire to live an intensive spiritual life have been traumatized by life or improper religious teaching, and find themselves in an uneasy situation because of their past negative experiences. They come to the Exercises because they want to know God more intimately. The problem is that their distorted images of God often obstruct their goal of an intimate relationship with God. The Exercises provide space and direction for a constructive scrutinizing of both our positive and negative, past and present images of God. In the Exercises we are invited to analyze God’s presence in the history of our faith. The Exercises allow us to view God from different perspectives than we are used to. They

---

<sup>174</sup> John J. Shea, *Finding God again*, 34.

<sup>175</sup> John J. Shea, *Finding God again*, 35.

<sup>176</sup> John J. Shea, *Finding God again*, 36.

help us to unmask our unhealthy images of God, of which we are often unaware. The Exercises provide tools to uncover our real motivations in our faith, relationships and vocations as well. They help us to disclose our selfish and immature motivations, and of course, our highly positive motivations too. When, for instance, religious reflect on the beginning of their vocation they often discover the real motivations for their vocation. Some enter religious communities or a seminary without realizing their subconscious motivations, which at times, differ from what they believe is their real motivation. Some people enter the seminary or religious community to find closeness with other people, security and prestige. Others have fear of relationships or fear of sexuality or fear of abandonment in their old age. Some follow their vocation to fulfill and expiate their parents' wishes and guilty feelings. The Spiritual Exercises provide many ways of living a very intensive relationship with God. Even our effort to transform our unhealthy images of God can be considered a fundamental part of the Spiritual Exercises. It is a movement toward an active engagement with God.

Frielingdorf in his book: *Seek the Face of God* suggests five steps of examining our faith through the first week of the Spiritual Exercises which is a crucial aspect in the transformation of our unhealthy schemata of God into healthy, life-giving images of God. He recounts the process of conversion of our unhealthy images of God. These five steps can be taken in one or preferably more meditations during the first week of the Exercises. There are two dangers involved in this process. One danger is when we reside in and scrutinize over and over our past sins, faults and hurts. It is a vicious circle leading us to depression and self pitying. We have tendencies to continually repress our painful images to avoid more pain, but it results in coming back like a boomerang. The other danger is when we hasten to go through this process.<sup>177</sup> The healing

---

<sup>177</sup> Karl Frielingdorf, *Seek the Face of God*, 38-46.

process of our memories and unhealthy images takes time and the mourning cannot be simply passed over. One must take time to mourn in order to overcome his past. Prior to our meditation, we remind ourselves of the goal of the first week: Recognize and affectively experience God's love in creating this universe so that all men and women might live in harmony with the Trinity and in community with one another.<sup>178</sup> We may pray in similar words before we take the five steps: "I ask God to reveal to me how he sees me and my world."

1. "The first step in discovering our individual subconscious views of God is to examine consciously the faith that our parents impressed upon us, along with its accompanying images of God."<sup>179</sup> In this meditation we examine images of God we have elaborated since our childhood through our parents and formative people. We can bring up memories of our parents how they practiced faith in the joyful moments and in the stressful situations. We can examine how our parents expressed thanks for God's gifts or how they interpreted mischief in their lives. Frequently, we automatically adopt many images upon which we do not reflect and some of these do not enhance our personal relationship with God and some impede or obstruct our deeper relationship with God. Many details from their religious practice help us to define our own faith. Many Christians keep the same images of God whole their lives. For instance, an adult man confessed from his sins that he had disobeyed his parents and made God sad. We have also many fixed patterns of behavior learned from our parents which affect our everyday life decisions and interactions with other people. We usually do not realize how often we repeat these patterns and how often we use the same expressions in interacting with other people.

---

<sup>178</sup> William A. Barry, *Letting God come close*, 9.

<sup>179</sup> Karl Frielingsdorf, *Seek the face of God*, 34.

2. “This is followed by examining one’s own image of God, which has developed from the images of God advocated by one’s parents and by other primary caregivers, or from their religious values and actions.”<sup>180</sup> The second step of this meditation is to examine our own history of faith. This is a challenge for some people because the process might bring painful and unpleasant memories. For other people reflecting on their faith may bring positive memories in which God touched their souls. We can ask ourselves the following questions: What religious values and attitudes have I adopted from my parents? Which characteristics and attitudes have I transferred from my parents to God? What is the most memorable memory of my formative figure and how does this memory relate to my faith? Which images have I formed as a consequence of my own negative behavior or weak religious practice? Which strategies have I used to expiate “God’s anger” or deserve his attention? Do I see any connection between my faith and the faith of my formative figures? What have been the real goals of my faith? In this second step we may also examine images of God we have and we have adopted from our formative figures. We can sort out images of God which are life-giving, healthy and positive from those which are negative, unhealthy, fettered. We can analyze our images of God and find out which images of God bring us more sense of freedom, creativity, security, happiness and which images of God bring us rather fear, insecurity, anxiety, self-denial. God wants us to be free without strains of inferiority and mistrust toward him. When we are locked in our fears against God, we quickly find him guilty for the mischief we meet. People who were subject of abuse and neglect in their childhood may maintain fears and wishes of God being the kind of “sweet Lord” who would substitute for the absence of parental

---

<sup>180</sup> Karl Frielingsdorf, *Seek the face of God*, 48.



love or they may also reject Him from their life. We can ask ourselves the following questions: Why do I fear and what is my concrete fear of God?

We may conclude our examination by deciding which images of God represent the real characteristics of God. We may also make a firm resolution to keep those images of God which will help us to live in our faith with joy and freedom. We have to find enough courage in ourselves to abandon those unhealthy images of God. We need to pray for inner freedom to do it and we also need to pray for grace to find the truth. We sometimes need another person to realize the truth about ourselves. The spiritual director can be very helpful to help us discern and analyze our faith, our true motivations.

3. The third step is maybe the most agonizing, but it is also the most essential and liberating. “One should write down all those things God has been expected to do since early childhood.”<sup>181</sup> We name those moments when we expected God’s help, protection, negative things that caused misery and suffering. We need to uncover our wounds which we have been hiding from ourselves and let ourselves see them as they are. It might cause a burst of anger and pain over all those well hidden memories. If we will not find in enough courage to unmask our wounds, it can keep us frozen in our painful memories and adolescent faith. Counseling or spiritual direction can help us to avoid unnecessary pain and find a safe way out. To help ourselves undergo this uneasy process safely, we may use those Scriptural passages which deal with human anger against God. “*Why have you forsaken me?*” (Lament 1: 1-11) We can ask God these questions in prayer: “Where were you when I needed you the most? How could you have done this to me? Why did you turn your back on me? Why didn’t you do something? It is good to write an angry

---

<sup>181</sup> Karl Frielingsdorf, *Seek the face of God*, 49.

letter in which we address to God all accusations. It is essential that we name in this letter our hurts, accusations and even our feelings. The director should emphasize that God can handle our anger. The whole purpose of this exercise is to reach and release those well suppressed feelings against God. They were created in highly stressful or traumatic circumstances and it is not enough that we just reason about them, we also need to feel them. Psalm 139 may serve us as the guideline to write down this angry letter.

4. The fourth step is the phase of inner liberation. After the period of mourning in the third step follows a period of alleviation. This phase is also connected with the feelings of emptiness and yearning. It is not unusual when disappointment from our past suddenly appears. We reflect what has been lost and we let ourselves get involved in the process of grieving over the losses that come from our childhood traumas such as: lost of a parent or a family member, unwanted or abused childhood, lost home, divorce of parents, serious illness or death, accident, conflict-ridden relationship with parents, addiction or life hardship. “What matters now is that, in light of the disappointments, one lets go of these images so that one’s relationship with God can progress and grow.”<sup>182</sup> A healthy process follows when we are ready to abandon our distorted images and we adapt and identify ourselves with new, more healthy images of God and self. It is the time of conversion when we find relief and joy in leaving behind our unhealthy or inadequate images of God and gladly embrace the new images. A farewell letter may help us to terminate one period of our life and start anew.

The process of examination of our faith is often accompanied by the encouragement of the good Spirit and by the deceits and seduction of the evil spirit. Theology associates the

---

<sup>182</sup> Karl Frielingsdorf, *Seek the face of God*, 49.

good spirit with the Holy Spirit and the evil spirit with Satan.<sup>183</sup> The evil spirit tries to delude us from our good intention and blurs the whole process of discernment: “You cannot do it.” The evil spirit exaggerates our sense of guilt and fear. He aggrandizes our failures and sins and faults and portrays God as offended and saddened by our sins. The good Spirit, “on the other hand, gives hope and encourages us to opt for life.”<sup>184</sup> It brings consolation from the good decision to adhere to God. It is important to discern the spirits and acknowledge which direction the spirits lead us. The good spirit helps to free ourselves and search for the true image of God. We may experience ups and downs, consolation and desolation during the discernment. And it is beneficial that we share thoughts and feelings from this prayer with our spiritual director. At the end of prayer we can read the farewell letter to all our unhealthy images of God. Following this we can formulate and write a new letter of our healthy images of God whom we want to believe.

5. In this final step we may write the last letter in which we put ourselves in God’s shoes and see the painful or troubling events of our life from his perspective. “Following the dismissal of the demonic god and reconciliation with the true God, it is appropriate to remind ourselves of and write down our personal story of salvation.”<sup>185</sup> We may finish this exercise in reconciliation with God. In our reconciliation with God it is essential to reflect on the moments of our life when we had positive experiences in our encounter with God in various past life events. This is especially beneficial to our healing and liberating process through the Exercises. This exercise does not attempt to solve all the traumas and hurts that we have experienced from our childhood. Some traumas need a long time to heal; more time than the Exercises can provide. The ambition of this exercise

---

<sup>183</sup> Anthony Wilhelm, *Christ among us*, 338.

<sup>184</sup> Karl Frielingsdorf, *Seek the face of God*, 49.

<sup>185</sup> Karl Frielingsdorf, *Seek the face of God*, 58.

is rather to analyze our own history of salvation and acknowledge those positive images of God that have been in the shade of our negative human experiences. The point of this exercise is to become aware of God's presence and companionship even in the most painful and traumatic events of our life.<sup>186</sup>

The grace of this meditation during the first week of the Exercises allows us to become increasingly aware of the mystical presence of God in our life and his unfathomable love for us. In order to experience a real passionate love for God, we need to be attracted to God, we need to love God. However, some unhealthy images of God block our awareness of God's presence in our life. This is the reason why Ignatius wants us to discover God's real character and to abandon our unhealthy images of God. In the meditation over our faith, we are invited to discover God's presence in our everyday life and his faithful companionship in our life journey. We are also invited to open ourselves from our one sided view of God to more real and healthy images of Him. Ignatius advises the exercitant to ask for grace and joy to discover a more realistic image of God. The enjoyment of God is the supreme goal of the first week of the Exercises.<sup>187</sup>

### **Healthy and unhealthy images of God**

St. Ignatius was convinced that God is present in all things and urges the exercitant to search for God in all things. Theology characterizes God as present (not ontologically) in all things, but especially present in us. We were created in his image and it means that the core of our being is good and it somehow reflects God. When God created man, God breathed his

---

<sup>186</sup> Karl Frielingsdorf, *Seek the face of God*, 48-58.

<sup>187</sup> Karl Frielingsdorf, *Seek the face of God*, 34-37.

“*ruah*” – breath” into man. The creation story portrays the failure of the first people and how man’s image of God was distorted. When hearing God’s voice, Adam and Eve went into hiding. Sin made the two of them fear God. Humans lost their ability to “see” God properly. This sin changed man’s view of God and man became afraid of God. We read in this passage (Gn 3: 1-24) that God decided to punish man, but in fact it was the man who punished himself when he alienated himself from God. The sin changed man’s image of God and consequently, every human struggles to repair his image of God. The fear of God became the denominator of all our distorted images of God. The biblical passages rightly illustrate man’s effort to find God’s face again. Moses asked the Lord: “What is your name?” *God replied, "I am who am."* (Ex 3:14). The biblical stories often resemble our own salvation stories. The Exercises invite us to ponder, meditate and pay attention to these passages and realize God’s saving actions in our lives. The Scriptures, nature, community of believers, our heart is the place where God reveals his “face” and communicates with us through the images.

In this part, we will analyze some positive and negative, life giving and taking images of God that we commonly experience. We will use Old and New Testament passages to demonstrate God’s true image and these passages will help us to unmask our negative or demonic images of God. St. Ignatius used in his book of Spiritual Exercises the biblical images that help the exercitant to realize God’s presence in his life and respond to his call more eagerly. The majority of our images reside in our subconscious and meditations over scripture passages provide us with an effective tool to bring up these subconscious images. “The conscious confrontation of our own unconscious images of God may help us to discern the spirits and to

achieve a living and personal relationship with the true God who champions life for us and the world.”<sup>188</sup>

The Old and New Testaments illustrate God as the one who establishes an intimate relationship with his people and invites all people into life giving intimate relationship with Him. The Scriptures reveal God’s redemption of man from evil and death and bestowing upon him life. This is one of the most important and healthy images of God. God saves, loves, longs for, guides and saves his people. But God is also portrayed in the Bible as jealous and punishing his people when they turn to the false gods for help and instead they find death. On one hand God bestows upon his people privileges and blessings, but on the other hand God holds them responsible for the misuse of their privileged position. We can recognize that same action of God in our own lives and his specific and delicate approach to every individual. In our essence we have a need to discover, know, and unite ourselves with God. Not everybody follows his need, but in the core of our being we unconsciously long for God even though we frequently cannot specify or formulate our desire for God. Therefore, in the core of our being we search for God and his true face or image. In our essence we cannot accept a demonic or deformed image of God. The Spiritual Exercises invite us to discover and encounter the true God and not his idols. How can discovering and internalizing healthy images of God affect our faith and our lives?

First,<sup>189</sup> it restores our relationship with God. Sin alienates us from the source and definite destiny of our life, his graces, friendship and blessings. It destroys his image in us. When we sin, we have tendency to fear God and regard him as distant. The scriptures and the Church reveal the most visible image of God, his Son. Jesus Christ is the perfect and life-giving image of

---

<sup>188</sup> Karl Frielingsdorf, *Seek the face of God*, 61.

<sup>189</sup> All three points are my interpretation

God. Jesus reveals the true, but still mysterious face of God who kindly watches every individual. When we meditate on his face or image we receive the same appreciation and love as the baby who is fascinated with his mother's face. In his face we find reflected our true self.

Second, in restoring God's image, we become more integrated people, more ourselves, more formed as Christians. In restoring God's image, we touch the core of our being and it transforms our whole being. In this way we become more Christian, human, and social beings.

Third, our image of God affects our human relationships. If we have a proper image of God, we can also view other people as God's friends or children. The Gospels proclaim this truth. People who entered into dialogue with Jesus, like Nicodemus, were able to understand his words, signs and actions. People who entered into dialogue with Jesus could make right judgment of Jesus. The Pharisees were not able to enter into dialogue with Jesus and that is the reason they made wrong judgments about him. The same is true about our relationships. When we enter into dialogue with God or when get to know his true face, we become capable of making right judgments of other people.

In this section, I present four very common images of God that some exercitants bring to the Exercises. It is necessary to note that these images are not only images they come with. Our images of God variously differ. In many cases it depends on our age or level of faith for instance. Elaborating image of God is individual matter.

### **1. God as a harsh judge**

God as a harsh judge is underneath many unhealthy images of God. This is very common image of God and some "people unconsciously believe that God is not behaving

differently from the way their parents did during their childhood.”<sup>190</sup> This is the reason behind the image of God as a harsh judge. It is a God who deliberately watches people to see whether they observe his laws. If not he punishes without asking any questions or without consideration of the person’s intentions. It is a tyrant who knows no mercy or kindness. The sinner thinks that he must bring sacrifices to expiate his despotic God. This God has a judge like character who is distant from the human heart, ignorant to his needs, silent when asked for help. “Often this God is seen to have a contradiction at its very core. It is variously caring and not caring, affirming and not affirming, protecting and not protecting, helpful and not helpful. This contradiction tends to elicit ambivalent feelings and certain amount of conflict in the mind of adolescent self.”<sup>191</sup> The individual has ambivalent feelings toward God. On one hand he wishes to love God and obey his laws, but on the other hand he fears his punishment and anger. Sometimes this person searches for ways to punish himself to make atonement to God. Usually, it is because he wants to diminish his sense of guilt, fear and scruples. Maybe somewhere here we could find the roots of ancient forms of Christian spirituality. “Remember that God is watching you from heaven at every moment, and that wherever you are your actions can be seen by divine Being and are being reported by the angels at all times” (Benedict).<sup>192</sup> The experiences show that this ambivalent feeling toward God is in many cases the main problem in the process toward adult faith. If we take a closer look at this image of God as a harsh judge it rather manifests more negative power than a loving image of God. “One variation on the image of God as punitive judge is the strict and omnipotent father-god

---

<sup>190</sup> Karl Frielingsdorf, *Seek the face of God*, 66.

<sup>191</sup> John J. Shea, *Finding God again*, 24.

<sup>192</sup> *The Rule of St. Benedict*, trans. Carolinne White, 23.



who rules over his children.”<sup>193</sup> This father-god image is evolved mostly after the strong paternal figure experienced during childhood. The person pays a high price for his inadequate image of God which diminishes the progress of his faith and personal growth. The individual’s relationship to his harsh judge image of God is slavish and confines the man’s freedom. In some cases, this fettered relationship may take on a great intensity and the relationship may become obsessive and harmful. In the first week of the Spiritual Exercises Ignatius proposes meditations on sin. Some people feel anxious and uncomfortable if they have to confront their sins. The problem is rooted in their false image of God. They think that God would punish them if he found out about their sins. As a result, they often become hesitant to disclose truth about themselves. Such fear of God becomes a problem in the Exercises because it blocks our spiritual progress. The effect of the Exercises might be diminished due to our fear of God. Very appealing is the Protestant understanding of the sinner. When God the Father sees the sinner, God’s Son is always between the Father and the sinner. Therefore, the Father sees first his Son before he sees the sinner. Ignatius wants the exercitant to realize God’s love for the sinner rather than seeing the sinner submerged in guilt over his sins. It is God’s love for man rather than his punishment that changes man’s orientation toward God. Preferable, Ignatius wants the exercitant to realize the destructive power of sin in God’s plan of creation. In the first week of the Exercises, Ignatius directs the exercitant to acknowledge God’s manifestation of his love in the creation, in the salvation history of man and in the personal history of every individual. To escape the inadequate images of God, Ignatius suggests that the exercitant desire and ask for a deep experience of God’s love before he enters the second week of the Exercises. The more the exercitant realizes the positive

---

<sup>193</sup> Karl Frielingsdorf, *Seek the face of God*, 65.

images of God the more he becomes free from his false images of God. In the first week of the Exercises the person meditates on scripture passages that portray positive images of God. During the first week, these passages might help the exercitants to face God and Jesus as the sinners they are. Examples are the woman caught in adultery (Jn 8:1-11), the Israelites in exile because of their sins (Isaiah 43: 1-7), the washing of the feet (Jn 13:1-11), or Peter's triple profession of love (Jn 21:15-19).<sup>194</sup> Ignatius advises the exercitant to repeat these meditations because he wants the exercitant to get emotionally involved with them and experience the positive image of God. He does not want the person to reason about these positive images of God only, but he also wants the person to be deeply emotionally involved with them. The exercitant experiences God's love for him through the biblical images. They elicit his positive feelings toward God and move the person's attitude. The person is attracted to the good inspired by the biblical images and this resonates with his the core of his being.

The person cannot enter into the deep friendship with God while he still subconsciously clings to his negative images of God. One way he can abandon his demonic image of God is by keeping distant from it.<sup>195</sup> The reason for it is to free self from the slavish and destructive images. One should come to realize his one sided view of God and open himself to more realistic views. "Ultimately, the destructive vicious circle of self-punishment and denial of one's life can be broken only to the extent that the one-sided pseudo-image of God as a cruel and relentless judge is unmasked as demonic and replaced or augmented by positive images from the scriptures."<sup>196</sup> The director can lead the person: "Let God show you his true character; explore it and meditate over it." It

---

<sup>194</sup> William A. Barry, *Letting God come close*, 11-12.

<sup>195</sup> Karl Frielingsdorf, *Seek the face of God*, 64-68.

<sup>196</sup> Karl Frielingsdorf, *Seek the face of God*, 68.

is also good when we ask others about their experience of God, about their images of God. We are a community of believers and God speaks to and through this community. It means that people have different religious experiences because God speaks to every individual in his circumstances. Everybody has his unique experience of God and it is worth sharing our images within the religious community and confronting them with our own. We may realize that when two people look at the same thing they see it or interpret it differently. We can enrich each other with our spiritual experiences. The first week of the exercises is the week of conversion of our images of God. Our conversion is based on our will to abandon or give up our fettered images of God and it is also a prerequisite to progress in our religious growth. The problem is that we are not always capable of giving up our unhealthy images. It is often not possible to surrender one image without having another image to substitute it.<sup>197</sup> Sometimes we do not realize the truth about them because they appear positive, but in reality they are destructive forces. It is like in the Gospel when the young rich man could not give up all possessions in order to follow Jesus more authentically. He was attached to his possessions and his attachments blocked him from progressing in his faith.

## **2. God of endless mercy**

The image of punitive God is juxtaposed by the image of loving God. It is the image of God that represents the best qualities of our formative caregivers or parents. It is the image of God which echoes the protective role of the father and loving care of the mother. The parable of the Prodigal son is one of the most appealing illustrations of the merciful God's image (Lk 15: 11-32). There are many interpretations of this parable, but

---

<sup>197</sup> Melissa M. Kelley – thesis director

the strong message of merciful father is common in most interpretations. Father of the parable represents God who manifests bottomless love. Jesus in this parable discloses God's true face which claims no control over the human free will. The father of the parable lets his sons make their own decisions and he takes the risk of losing his younger son. The parable shows what it means for man to live detached or cut off from God. In a sense both sons make the decision to leave their father. One physically, leaves his home and the other one mentally, leaves the father and makes his own plans on how to run the family business. The father of the parable represents God full of hope for his sons. He never condemned his younger son for his decision to leave his home and for asking for his portion of the inheritance. He never condemned his older son for accusing him of being unjust. When the younger son realizes his mistakes and poor conditions, he humbly comes back to the father and, surprisingly, the father makes no judgment and condemnation over his son. The father seems to pay no attention to his son's apologies; he welcomes back his son with outstretched arms. No accusations, no hard feelings, the past is forgotten. The only thing that matters to the father is the presence of his sons. When the father welcomes back his younger son and prepares a feast, the older son refuses to take part. The father shows again his compassion for his older son. He pleads, he talks and again he does not control or abuse his power to make his older son do his will. The father seems to understand the older son's hurt feelings and he goes out and meets his older son. What seems to be a legitimate accusation of the father by his older son at first sight turns out to be the older son's jealousy of his younger brother. The father is fair although the older brother thinks contrary. While the sons are with the father they are privileged to use all his possessions. Both brothers made wrong decisions and it

brought only misery and disorder to their lives. The parable presents God in the person of the father as the one who restores life which was damaged by sin. We can name a lot of characteristics of the father and the parable has more than one interpretation, but one of the important messages of the parable is that every individual is called into personal relationship with God. “God is a mystical reality that seems to invite us into relationship.”<sup>198</sup> The sons of the parable want to be autonomous, but they seem to be helpless without father in their own misery. One loses his dignity and suffers hunger in a foreign land and the other is lonely, submerged in his anger and bitterness. The parable shows how the human heart can be deluded by having interest in earthly or material things only. “In various kinds of actualizing, we find ourselves in a mutual indwelling with a God as Thou or a Spiritual Reality, and in this mutual indwelling, we experience a synergy or shared interactive energy, an empowerment in God that makes us more our own integral process.”<sup>199</sup> Only in connection with father, the sons have their dignity. Deeply connected with God we become what we are supposed to be as human beings, fully integrated and realize fully our potential. When we are close to the Father we put order in our hearts and we worship God with our lives. The closer or more intimate in friendship we get with God, the more we abandon our sinful tendencies. In this meditation, the exercitant may put himself in the shoes of each character and ask self these question: “How does this character speak to me; How does character of the father challenge my image of God? How can I let God find me? How can I let God recognize me? How can I let myself be loved by God?”

---

<sup>198</sup> John J. Shea, *Finding God again*, 89.

<sup>199</sup> John J. Shea, *Finding God again*, 89.

In this meditation, the goal of the exercitant is to establish his trust and confidence in God. The message of the parable reveals God's great love for the sinner and enhances the exercitant to embrace God while he meets us with his outstretched arms. For Ignatius the experience of God's love for the sinner is decisive. The intellectual notion of God cannot be matched with the intensive experience of God's love. Ignatius knew that if the exercitant discovers God's love for him and savors it, it is already a great achievement. Ignatius believed that it is ultimately God's love that moves the sinner to make right decisions. He knew, however, that not everybody is capable of reaching this goal. Some people are not capable of leaving their sinful or disordered tendencies though they had the experience of the Exercises.<sup>200</sup>

### **3. God of death**

God of death is another destructive image of God. The viciousness of this image is that it plays with our illusions, prejudices and lies and sometimes we confuse it for the good spirit. The foundation of this spirit lies in the prenatal age, before our birth. The research shows that the parents' attitude toward their child before his birth has lifelong marks. "The maternal depression risk factor is a well-documented variable associated with behavior problems in young children. Very likely depressed mothers because of their own pathology find the task of parenting to be overwhelming and fail to evidence effective parenting skills while serving as poor models for their children."<sup>201</sup> Basically, there are two pre-natal factors associated with child's behavior disorders: mother's

---

<sup>200</sup> Karl Frielingsdorf, *Seek the face of God*, 69-73.

<sup>201</sup> J.R. Nelson, S. Stage, "Risk Factors Predictive of the Problem Behavior of Children: At Risk for Emotional and Behavioral Disorders." *Council for Exceptional Children*, 73(3), (2007): 377

emotional distress and medical problems. If the child is unwanted by his mother during her pregnancy, it might result in life-long traumas to the child. The child may unconsciously believe that God does not want him to be as much as his parents did during his prenatal age and early childhood. This is the reason behind the image of God of death. It happens that the child feels unworthy, lives in self-denial or it has suicidal thoughts. In bad scenario, the parents tell the child that he or she was not wanted. This can have devastating consequences to the child such as life time depressions. “According to cognitive therapists Aaron T. Beck and David D. Burns, a depressed person has a negative conceptual triad: (1) a negative evaluation of self, with overwhelming self-blame, (2) a negative evaluation and expectation of the environment, making the person helpless, and (3) a negative assessment of the future, leading to hopelessness.”<sup>202</sup> The image of God of such child doubts the meaning of his own existence. This image of God plays with the child’s mind. Sometimes it seems friendly and at other times it unleashes his threats. This person is always in tension with his image of God, he never feels secure and comfortable with his God. The individual is always in fear whether the authorities, family and God would accept him as he is and what he does. He is always anxious whether he can meet desires and requirements of environment. The roots of his insecure feelings originate in rejection by his parents. This person forms his image of God from his formative figures and believes that he is never good enough for God or his primal caregivers.

Therefore, this person may develop a defensive behavior of perfectionism as a way to deal with his rejection. This person works hard to be perfect and not to fail. He wants to prove that he deserves to be loved. The same type of behavior applies in his

---

<sup>202</sup> Merle R. Jordan, *Taking on the gods*, 90-91.

relationship with God. When the person realizes that he cannot be perfect, he frequently falls into depressions. This person lives in the sense that he is “doomed.” There is lot of fear involved in relationship with God. The evil of this image manipulates this person and the person often feels inner darkness. This person needs to understand that he cannot buy other people’s love by his perfectionism. He also needs to understand that God has never forsaken him.

How can this person fight his negative image of God? The first step he has to take is to consciously make decision to condemn his negative image of God of death. The person may use for instance Psalm 139 to reflect the history of his life and he may rewrite this psalm with events from his life. *“You formed my inmost being; you knit me in my mother's womb.” (Psalm 139: 13)* If there was somebody who did not want you alive, God was the first who had wanted you to exist. The aim of this meditation is to experience God’s will and longing for every individual to exist. In order to abandon his negative image of God the person must take these steps:

- a. In his will to fight his negative image of God this person must be determined to denounce his image of God of death and opt and wish for God of life.
- b. He must be ready to denounce those life-denying messages of his parents.
- c. One should formulate his own resolution for life, opt for life in all his circumstances, in his thoughts, in his values and denounce anything that would lead him back to his dark thoughts.
- d. It is good when this person reflects life affirming events of his past day.



e. The last step is to remind one's self each day that Christ won the battle against death and he is the ultimate winner over evil, darkness and the redeemer of the man. God wants him alive and wants him to enjoy life.<sup>203</sup>

#### **4. The God of life**

In order to overcome his demonic image of God of death, the person needs to let go his one sided view of God in favor of life affirming images of God. Once the person opens himself for this type of image of God, he forsakes the burden of fear and darkness. In the baptism the parents vow to renounce the evil spirit for their child. We often do not realize how powerful are the gifts that are incorporated in us through baptism. We are given powerful tools to fight the evil and when we fail, God “hastens” to help us back on our feet. The baptized is not of course protected from every evil, but the person is privileged in being renewed from his state of sin. The person or the baby's parents choose life over death. In our baptism “Christ unites us with himself in a new, deeper way, to live more truly and fully with him. We begin journeying with him to the Father.”<sup>204</sup> In our baptism we entered into intimate relationship with God and we were invited to renounce every shadow of our life and live free as God's friends. “The Persons of God are within us, transforming us, giving a new meaning and power to everything we do. Within us, surrounding us, filling us, guiding and loving us, the Trinity draws us into their own life.”<sup>205</sup> We are called to identify with Life as the opposite to sin, evil, darkness, and shadow. God gives Christians his Spirit to lead us away from sin and death and inspire us to live a holy life. The Spirit encourages the sinner to choose life and good and inspires him to hold on to hope and trust in God. Like any personal love relationship

---

<sup>203</sup> Karl Frielingsdorf, *Seek the face of God*, 73-81.

<sup>204</sup> Anthony Wilhelm, *Christ among us*, 214.

<sup>205</sup> Anthony Wilhelm, *Christ among us*, 217.

that fulfills, elevates, and transforms, the Spirit guides us to be more like God. It is guidance from within.<sup>206</sup> It is essential to recall our own baptism in the Spiritual Exercises; the gifts we receive in this sacrament and our vow to renounce the evil. Our baptism is also our first conversion.

In the Old and New Testaments God is portrayed as the giver and protector of life. God protects life in every form, from his creation of the world to the life endangered by social and personal injustice. The New Testament names specific titles of Jesus and these titles help us to understand better his character. Jesus is the Light of the World. *“I am the light of the world: he who follows me shall not walk in darkness, but shall have the light of life”* (John 8: 12). Jesus claims to possess life just as the Father does and provide it to those who follow him. Jesus is the Bread of life: *“I am the bread of life: he who comes to me shall not hunger”*(John 6:35). Jesus is the Way of life. *“Jesus told him, “I am the way, the truth, and the life. No one can come to the Father except through me”* (John 14:6). His incarnation originates in God and he could not be killed by death. It means that Jesus bestowed upon us his life.<sup>207</sup> Jesus is the source of our earthly life and beyond this life in eternity. Jesus is the perfect image of life and he conquered death and he bestowed upon us his life so we would never “live” in the darkness.

## Summary

This chapter is an introduction to my last chapter where I want to discuss the last step of conversion through the experience of The Spiritual Exercises and that is the conversion of ourselves as God created images. We usually come to the Exercises with expectations to find

---

<sup>206</sup> Anthony Wilhelm, *Christ among us*, 217.

<sup>207</sup> Karl Frielingsdorf, *Seek the face of God*, 81-85.

peace, pray, reform our life, grow in faith or experience something spiritual. These are all good intentions and desires and the Exercises can meet our desires. But we also come to the Exercises with traumas by life and perhaps by false or inaccurate teaching about God. Frequently, we do not realize that there might be something wrong with our image of God. The problem is that images of God we have learned from our formative figures and other people do not frequently correspond with the real characteristic of God. On one hand we have desire to know God more intimately, but at the same time we want to keep ourselves distant from him. Maybe our image of God is such that God has not been present in our life, maybe we feel nothing when we hear about God or we feel anxious whenever we hear about God. We have many prejudices, fears or anxieties about God and these do not help us to live fully our faith. As a consequence of our distorted images of God, we are trapped in one sided view of him. We sometimes view God as a harsh lawmaker, punisher, snooper, powerful being, ignorant of our needs, and these images often over shadow the real, positive and healthy images of God. Because of our false images of God we do not use the potential of our faith and we impoverish ourselves from more intensive relationship with God. But something has to happen to us before we enter the full process of the Spiritual Exercises. Since the Spiritual Exercises include many ways of relating to God, however, even such preliminary attempt to get over the effect of our life traumatic events on our image of God are spiritual exercises. The transformation of our unhealthy or inadequate images of God can be also viewed as religious conversion because it does change us, our life orientation, values, principles and the quality of our relationship with God. In this chapter I presented factors which hinder and block our religious growth. I also presented five steps which can help us reform our faith and our distorted images of God. Transformation of our images of God is an important step in our religious growth. Without conversion of our images of God we keep frozen

in our adolescent faith. And adolescent faith cannot cope with our everyday issues and problems and in fact it is rather a burden in our life. Conversion of our unhealthy images of God is therefore prerequisite of the main goal of the Exercises and that is making the decision, free from our sinful tendencies, to reorient our whole person to love, imitate and follow Christ. It is a conversion toward true life in Christ which unites us more with God and brings us true inner freedom. In the next chapter I want to analyze factors which can help us to unite ourselves more with God and to grow into healthier faith.

## **Chapter Five: Conversion through the Spiritual Exercises**

From the first chapter we have discussed several aspects of a developing adult faith. The first chapter described the process of elaborating an image of God through our developmental stages. We wanted to know the mechanism by which we actually elaborate the image of God and how we relate to this being. The first chapter set a framework for the next chapters. The second and third chapters described the process of conversion from psychological and theological perspectives. It was important because these perspectives help us to understand the process of conversion into living faith through the experience of the Spiritual Exercises. The fourth chapter discussed our images of God and how these images modulate our faith and our being. In this last chapter we will discuss our conversion into living faith through the experience of the Spiritual Exercises. The Exercises provide space to reform our life and faith. But most importantly, they help us make a radical change in our life, from conversion into life-giving faith.

In the first week of the Exercises, the individual moved by God's grace makes a fundamental shift in his orientation toward God. We may denote this shift as one's transformation or conversion of images of God. In the first week of the Exercises the focus has been on us and our conversion, abandoning the unhealthy images of God and opening ourselves for healthier images of God. In order to praise, reverence, and serve God we need first to experience the power of God's love and grace which is the major aspect in the person's transformation. It would be impossible for us to submit our will, thoughts, powers, freedom and whole being to God, if we feared God or we were reserved toward him. We would not be willing to submit our will to God if we had false images of God and we feared to express our most honest and secret thoughts, desires or critiques. The first week of the Exercises help us to know more about our own faith

history, our hurts, brokenness, sinfulness, and finally about our image of God. We acknowledge our unhealthy images, sins and sinful tendencies which impoverish our religious experience. It is a necessary prerequisite before we can make a shift in transformation of our faith. In order that this shift may happen, we need to experience the real side of God's personality, the positive, nurturing, defending and advocating for the sinners. Ignatius hopes for the exercitant to experience this God's sensitive and respectful side which is necessary before he can engage with God wholeheartedly, without fear, anxiety, and coldness. Ignatius proposes several healing images of God based on the Scriptures in the first week of the Exercises to help the exercitant experience God's real character. These should help the exercitant to realize God's caring presence in his life wherever he is, in all his struggles, successes and failures. The exercitant can experience God's particular and sensitive approach to Him through the retrospective view of his life, the history of his faith or biblical images. He can track and acknowledge a certain similarity between God's saving actions in his life and the history of God's chosen people, the Israelites. In the first week of the Exercises the exercitant examines his faith and realizes healthy or unhealthy aspects of his faith. When the exercitant finally realizes this and how often he has rejected God's calls and invitations, this notion prompts him to multiple radical changes in his life. It is the exercitant's deep experience of God's love and desire for him as a sinner which ultimately changes the exercitant.

### **The second week of the exercises**

When the exercitant enters the second week of the Exercises, Ignatius does not want him to get comfortable with his first, though important, stage of conversion. The exercitant experiences a transformation of his images of God and reformation of his faith in the first week

of the Exercises. He discovers more appealing, realistic characteristics of God and the experience of God's love for him converts him. The second week of the Exercises sets the purpose of the whole Exercises. Ignatius reminds the exercitant of this goal before each meditation of this week: "Here it will be to ask for an interior knowledge of our Lord, who became human for me, that I may love him more intensively and follow him more closely."<sup>208</sup> Ignatius does not want the exercitant to get settled in the undisturbed life of an average Christian. Ignatius wants the exercitant to transfer his new vision and love for God into his faith and ordinary life. The exercitant is called to transfer his experience of conversion and God's love for him into his daily life situations, relationships, views, opinions, beliefs and schemata. In other words, Ignatius wants the exercitant to take a step forward in his religious development. He understands that the exercitant's conversion is not finished and he needs continuous transformation of himself and his faith. After first conversion (transformation of our images of God), the exercitant still keeps his sinful tendencies, addictions, idols and it takes him a continuous effort to get rid of them to live his faith more intensively. Ignatius suggests a way in the second week of his Exercises to make progress in conversion toward living faith.

In the first week of the Exercises we are like the blind Bartimaeus (Mark 10:46-52) who happens to be where Jesus passes by and cries out loud to Jesus for help. We cannot "see" God's face like Bartimaeus. We need him to open our inner sight to see right God's image. In the second week of the Exercises we are like Bartimaeus again who was healed from his blindness and follows Jesus: "*Immediately he received his sight and followed him on the way* (Mk 10:52)." The story of the healing of Bartimaeus already suggests the challenge and goals of the second week of the Exercises. The goal of the first week is the reformation of our faith and the

---

<sup>208</sup> *The Spiritual Exercises of St. Ignatius*, tran. Luis J. Puhl, 49.

conversion of our unhealthy images of God through the experience of God's love. The goal of the second week is the conversion of our own image. We can understand the second week of the Exercises as an invitation for the exercitant to take a radical step toward spiritual growth. This religious conversion entails a transformation of the person's identity. Meissner in his book, *To the Greater Glory* understands this conversion as the person's internal reorganization in the image of Christ. "The process of identity formation at this level is effected by a gradual approximation to the exemplar of spiritual identity contained in the person of Christ. The basic mechanism, therefore, which Ignatius calls on to implement spiritual growth, is identification with the person of Christ."<sup>209</sup>

The question is why do we have to transform ourselves into the image of Christ? Why does Ignatius suggest this transformation? We need to search for the answer in our imperfect or corrupted being. We were created in God's image and this image was distorted by the original sin. Not only our schemata or images of God were distorted, but we also as the images of God were distorted or corrupted by sin. The effect of Christ's saving work is also renewing us as distorted images of God. "Disfigured by sin and death, man remains in the image of God, in the image of the Son, but is deprived of glory of God, of his likeness. The promise made to Abraham inaugurates the economy of salvation, at the culmination of which the Son himself will assume that image and restore it in the Father's likeness by giving it again its Glory, the Spirit who is the giver of life."<sup>210</sup> Christ is the perfect image of God we can hope to imitate in order to become what we were meant to be according to God's plan of creation. The Exercises offer Scripture passages like Jn 1:1-14 to help the exercitant meditate or contemplate about ourselves as

---

<sup>209</sup> W. W. Meissner, *To the Greater Glory*, 84.

<sup>210</sup> *Catechism of Catholic Church*, 705.



creatures created in Christ image. The goal of the second week of the exercises is therefore conversion of our identity into Christ's image.

### **Conversion of identity - Radical discipleship**

Christ is the ideal and transforming power for those who want to live a wholly integrated life. Ignatius suggests the exercitants make a radical decision to change their life and imitate the Lord. The exercitant, however, will have to face the same fate as Christ did. One who walks in the steps of the Lord, must be ready to be a servant, poor and humble. This means, for instance, that he should respect divine order in created things as if they were not his, without disordered attachments. He does not regard created things as bad, but he uses them as long as they help him meet God's will, serve and revere him. His true possession is the consciousness that he is a loved sinner. He refuses to pursue honors and seeks to be free to meet God's will. Like his ideal, he is a person for all. Just like his master he puts others first. This involves total self-giving and self emptiness for others. Christ's disciples face the same fate as their teacher even to the point of suffering and persecution. "We want to know his heart so that we might be so much in love with him that nothing, not even our fear of suffering and death, will get in the way of our following him."<sup>211</sup>

The radical decision to adapt the characteristics of Christ might be contrary in the understanding of modern culture. We like to be in control of our lives, independent, self-reliant and we fear losing this control. Following Christ means allowing him to guide us and putting our trust in him in all circumstances of life. We should not confuse submitting ourselves to Christ with submitting ourselves to the Super-ego God. Christ is true liberator of our human divided heart, who respects our freedom, and who does not violate it.

---

<sup>211</sup> W. A. Barry, *Letting God Come Close*, 81-82.

However, the transformation of us into the ideal of Christ requires an honest and often painful process.<sup>212</sup> If we want to transform ourselves into the image of Christ and experience a more enriching relationship with God, we need to continue in the reformation of our life, values, or principles and give them proper order because sometimes we give importance to the values and goods which rather impede or impoverish our experience with God. The problem is not with the created goods, but it is rather in our disordered attachments, addictions, fears, insecurities, or dependencies which impede our religious transformation. These disordered attachments keep our will paralyzed from living those values and goods which enhance a more close relationship with God.

### **Humility according to Ignatius**

Ignatius suggests that the exercitant adapt an inner attitude which helps him in the transformation of self into Christ image and become free to follow his mission. He wants the exercitant to imitate Christ in a perfect kind of humility: “In order to imitate and be in reality more like Christ our Lord, I desire and choose poverty with Christ poor, rather than riches; insults with Christ loaded with them, rather than honors; I desire to be accounted as worthless and a fool for Christ, rather than to be esteemed as wise and prudent in this world.”<sup>213</sup> Before each meditation of the second week, the exercitant should arouse a strong desire in the prayer to attain such humility; he should ask for internal knowledge of Christ and his values. He should also ask for the grace to serve God freely.<sup>214</sup> In a colloquy addressed to our Lady, the exercitant asks for a special grace to follow Christ in his mission and share the same fate: “..., asking her to obtain for me from her Son and Lord the grace to be received under His standard, first in the

---

<sup>212</sup> Barry, *Letting God Come Close*, 138-139.

<sup>213</sup> Ignatius, *The Spiritual Exercise of St. Ignatius*, 69.

<sup>214</sup> W. A. Barry, *Letting God Come Close*, 77-78.

highest spiritual poverty, and should the divine Majesty be pleased thereby; secondly, in bearing insults and wrongs, thereby to imitate Him better.”<sup>215</sup> St. Benedict states that when we reach a certain level of humility similar to Christ’s we lose our fear and we become totally confident in God. This is a stage of faith when a Christian is motivated to follow God’s will not out of fear of punishment, but out of love for Christ. “When the monk has climbed up all these steps of humility, he will reach ‘the perfect love of God which casts out all fear. As a result, all things he did out of fear he will begin to perform without effort, out of habit and naturally, no longer out of the fear of hell but as a good habit out of the love of Christ and delight in virtue.”<sup>216</sup> Benedict’s statement is based on 1 Jn 4:18 : “*There is no fear in love, but perfect love drives out fear because fear has to do with punishment, and so one who fears is not yet perfect in love.*”

Ignatius was clear that this kind of humility is not suitable to every person and not everybody has the capacities for the radical change and reorganization of his life. Most people get comfortable in their level of faith and do not desire a deeper relationship with God. This is something that goes beyond the capacities of many Christians and even religious people or priests. Ignatius realized that when some people reach the goal of the first week, it is already a great achievement for them. The second week, however, requires a strong determination and God’s grace to imitate Christ to the point where one is willing to “die” for him. *“Truly, truly, I say to you, unless a grain of wheat falls into the earth and dies, it remains alone; but if it dies, it bears much fruit”* (Jn 12:24). Dying for Christ has rather a figurative meaning in this context. It means one’s ability to free himself from his disordered attachments which stand in the way of his close friendship with God.

---

<sup>215</sup> Ignatius, *The Spiritual Exercise of St. Ignatius*, 62.

<sup>216</sup> Benedict, *The rule of Benedict*, 26.

## **Hurdles on the way**

In transformation we will meet obstacles and we might find ourselves resistant to follow Christ thoroughly. It is not easy and many times it is a struggle. In our inner transformation into the image of God we frequently face resistance from our human nature and we have to make a conscious effort to control it. The problem is that our natural drives and needs are disordered as a consequence of the original sin. We experience how hard it is to control drives or selfish tendencies, for instance. Anybody who desires to follow Christ more authentically will feel the resistance of his body and his will. We often experience the contrast between our mind and body. When we come to the Exercises, we usually desire to live the highest Christian values. But when it actually comes to living them in daily life it is not easy. We can also realize a contrast between our reasoning and our will. Sometimes we do things we do not really want to do or we do things which are in contradiction with our deepest beliefs. We acknowledge that all parts of our being are somehow connected and they affect one another. Our mind and body, for instance, influence our reasoning, memory and freedom, and vice versa. It seems very easy and obvious to use freedom, but frequently we abuse our freedom. This may bring chaos into our relationships for instance. It might be also an obstacle to our greater spiritual growth. But the Exercises help us to master the skill of using freedom properly. The real freedom is rooted in reason and will, to act or not to act, with respect for divinely created order.<sup>217</sup> “The Christian and theological notion of freedom, therefore, is not an expression of unconditioned autonomy, but an acceptance of an existential and divinely revealed order of things.”<sup>218</sup> We often confuse our self – determination or autonomy with the real spiritual freedom granted by God. And, we can see in our own history and the history of the Israelites that we are often resistant to the real spiritual freedom in which

---

<sup>217</sup> Catechism of the Catholic Church, 5th ed., 1731.

<sup>218</sup> W. W. Meissner, *To the Greater Glory*, 67.

our free will responds to God's will. When we trace the history of the biblical people we can realize how resistant they were to the freedom offered by God. We can read about the Israelites in the desert, tired and complaining about the long journey from Egypt to the Promised Land. Under hardship of the journey, they look back to Egypt, the place of slavery as a better place. They are resistant to the freedom of the Promised Land. This same resistance to freedom we experience in ourselves on a daily basis.

Another obstacle we have to face on our way of conversion comes from our environment. We grow up in an environment overwhelmed by cultural norms and values and sometimes these norms and values stand in our way to live Christian values and faith more deeply. We understand that cultural values and norms sometimes help cultures advance, but we must be careful not to get carried away by them. Our cultural values give us freedom to be creative and productive, but we may find ourselves under pressure by these values. The Western cultures highly prize values such as independence, self-reliance, competition or individual liberty, but these values, good in themselves, might be contrary to the Gospel values, particularly the beatitudes (Matt 5: 1-12). For instance, competition is highly prized by the Western societies. Though it is a great potential of energy and creativity, it tends to isolate people from each other.<sup>219</sup> In fact, some cultural norms do not help us become free to make good choices, but they rather put pressure on us to go with the general "flow". For example, the contemporary culture emphasizes a standard of perfect body image. Many young people feel under pressure by these standards and in order to be accepted by their age group they do things they would not normally do.

---

<sup>219</sup> J.M. Sparough and co., *What is Your decision?*, 18-19.

## **Problem of our heart**

In our effort to transform ourselves into the image of Christ, our “heart”<sup>220</sup> seems to be the biggest problem. In fact, the transformation into his image concerns our heart the most. The cultural norms are not the only problem which we have to overcome on our way to conversion. The bigger and more serious problem we face is in the core of our being. It is our divided heart. Theology claims that we were created in God’s image and it means that the core of our being must reflect something divine, good. But the truth is that this good is frequently influenced by the negative forces. Theology speaks about this division of heart as struggle between good and evil, or light and shadow, life and death. The character of our heart is often marked by division and contradiction. Our heart struggles between faith and doubt. A part of us wants to live in unity and peace with God and the other part is suspicious of anything that comes from God. Our bad part wants to rebel against God. On the one hand, we hope for God’s help and intervention, but on the other hand we doubt his help. A part of us desires to know God better and live the values we discover in Christ, but the other part is not interested in him. Something in us is stubbornly resistant to God. Our heart is sometimes like a swing wanting one thing one moment and wanting something else in the other. Most often, we want all. Sometimes we have a hard time making the right discernment and we confuse bad things for good. Worse yet, we have a hard time doing the right things because of our divided heart. One big problem within our hearts is our unhealthy attachments. St. John of the Cross states that the created things are good in themselves, but the problem is rather our disordered desires or cravings for them which cause our dependency. “It is not the things of this world that either occupy the soul or cause it harm, since

---

<sup>220</sup> Xavier Leon-Dufour, *Dictionary of the Biblical Theology*, 228. (*Heart* – “The core of man’s being, the place where he enters into dialogue with himself (Gn 17, 17; Dt 7,17). Accepts his responsibilities and opens himself or closes himself to God.”)

they enter it not, but rather the will and desire for them. This will and desire, this clinging and grasping, is attachment.”<sup>221</sup> On one hand we want to be free to do all things, but on the other hand our heart can be sometimes enslaved by our attachments and inclinations.

### **Our will vs. addictions**

To become more like Jesus, Ignatius encourages exercitant to imitate Christ in his humility and obedience to God’s will. We already know that our heart is divided by a battle between good and evil. Our heart is often burdened with the attachments and addictions which impede our true freedom to imitate Christ. “Addiction is the most powerful psychic enemy of humanity’s desire for God.”<sup>222</sup> Our addictions hinder us from our deepest human desire to love and revere God and these forces keep us from becoming integral, virtuous Christians. Some of these forces are addictions, dependencies, social and cultural constraints, or prejudices of what others may think of us. Our addictions are experienced as slavery and in spite of our great effort to fight them, we often find ourselves locked in an unwanted, vicious circle. “It is in the very nature of addiction to feed on our attempts to master it.”<sup>223</sup> Frequently, we cannot help ourselves to get rid of them by our own will. Our addictions confine our freedom, weaken our will and make us do things we do not really want to do. Many people prove by experience that repression of their addictions does not work. “While repression stifles desire, addiction attaches desire, bonds and enslaves the energy of desire to certain specific behaviors, things, or people.”<sup>224</sup> “If we are suffering from one or more of the addictions, we are continually trying to “fix” ourselves by using mind-altering and mood substances, activities, possessions, other

---

<sup>221</sup> Gerald G. May, *Addiction & Grace*, 18.

<sup>222</sup> Gerald G. May, *Addiction & Grace*, 3.

<sup>223</sup> Gerald G. May, *Addiction & Grace*, 4.

<sup>224</sup> Gerald G. May, *Addiction & Grace*, 3.

persons, or even religious convictions and practices to avoid what we are actually feeling.”<sup>225</sup>

The frequent mistake of people with addictions is that they fight their addictions alone without help of other people. Some people enter different rehab centers. Some work and some do not. But when the mental health techniques and rehab programs turn out ineffective most people relapse to old bad habits. Often, the last hope for some people is religious conversion. Our addictions are the absolute enemy of human freedom and the antipathy of love. St. Augustine states that grace empowers will. “Freedom from compulsion by evil habits is nonetheless not sufficient to lead us to the good. Our restored power of choice (insufficient of itself) must be joined with grace and it is grace that makes it possible for us to do the good we desire.”<sup>226</sup> “Yet, in still another paradox, our addictions can lead us to a deep appreciation of grace. They can bring us to our knees.”<sup>227</sup> However improbable it may seem, our addictions, confusions, contradictions and fears can become the inspiration for intensive relationship with God. “We are afflicted with divided hearts that cause us to be burdened by angst, uncertainty, and fear when making important decisions. But this very confusion of thoughts and feelings is the place where we find God’s footprints.”<sup>228</sup> Ignatius knew from his own experience of conversion how hard it was for him to get rid of his scruples. His compulsive behavior drove him to the point when he endangered his life by suicidal thoughts. Only the moment of deeper religious conversion put an end to his dangerous addiction to scruples.<sup>229</sup> Giving up our disordered attachments hurts, but we

---

<sup>225</sup> John, J. Shea, *Finding God again*, 133.

<sup>226</sup> “Wikipedia augustine\_and\_pelagius\_on\_freedom\_and\_grace,” accessed May 7, 2011, <http://www.didymus.org/augustine-and-pelagius-on-freedom-and-grace.html>.

<sup>227</sup> Gerald G. May, *Addiction & Grace*, 4.

<sup>228</sup> J.M. Sparough and co., *What is Your decision?*, 27.

<sup>229</sup> J.M. Sparough and co., *What is Your decision?*, 145. “Ignatius, we can speculate, realized that the image of God with which he had operated thus far in Manresa was a product of the demon and not an image of the true God. Ignatius accounts: ‘Now that he had some experience with different spirits-through the lessons that God had given him-he began to think about the way that spirit had come to him. Thus he decided , and with great clarity of mind, never to confess his past sins again and from that day forward he was free of his scruples, and he held it for certain that Our Lord had desired to set him free because of his mercy.’”



have to remember that when God asks us to give up something it is for our benefit. God always respects human freedom and his grace works united with human effort only.

### **Grace is the invisible advocate of our freedom**

In the second week of the Exercises, Ignatius raises provoking questions: How free are we to give up things which confine our freedom in order to become more like Christ? How free are we to give up our disordered attachments in order to let God transform us? One of the things that Ignatius emphasizes in the Spiritual Exercises is that he wanted the exercitant gradually to free himself from his attachments and never become comfortable with his addictions and unhealthy attachments. Something in us wants to be in control our life and we often fear losing this control. This fear ties our “hands” and cripples our abilities to use a greater freedom. We fear that we will suffer or feel pain when we give up things we are attached to. Loss is painful. “Behavioral studies show that most human beings feel a loss more keenly than a gain.”<sup>230</sup> Out of fear of loss we can make unwise decisions and opt for something that confines our freedom and drags us away from God. Our fear of loss makes us less able to love God wholeheartedly; we are hesitant to lose things which impede us to answer his love unconditionally. Sometimes our relationship with God can be like a bargain when we agree to give up something in return for something else. Our unhealthy attachments and addictions make us also more self-centered and less capable of loving other people. If the exercitant desires to serve and love God and transform himself into his image, he cannot fear to confront addictions.<sup>231</sup> Ignatius wants the exercitant to lose his fears and put his confidence in God. In this way he can let God intervene and let him transform himself into a new person. Ignatius was aware of our human state, that we have our

---

<sup>230</sup> J.M. Sparough and co., *What is Your decision?*, 26.

<sup>231</sup> J.M. Sparough and co., *What is Your decision?*, 26.

dependencies and attachments, and how hard it is for us to be free from them. “It should be noted that when we feel an attachment opposed to actual poverty or a repugnance to it, when we are not indifferent to poverty and riches, it will be very helpful in order to overcome the inordinate attachment, even though corrupt nature rebel against it, to beg our Lord in the colloquies to choose us to serve Him in actual poverty.”<sup>232</sup>

In spite of the division of our heart and our addictions, we can cultivate our heart with God’s grace and minimize the negative forces in it. “Grace is our only hope for dealing with addiction, the only power that can truly vanquish its destructiveness. Grace is the invincible advocate of freedom and the absolute expression of perfect love.”<sup>233</sup> Religious conversion is for some addicts the last hope when rehab programs fail. Unable to find peace or joy in their lives, they (people with addictions) seek to fill the emptiness with the illusory pleasures of the world, only to find themselves steeped in an intense interior isolation. Some Christian rehab centers like “Comunita Cenacolo America”<sup>234</sup> offer programs that help these people find meaning of life again and live simple life without substances or any form of addiction. These programs try to help these people to live an ordinary life, something they have forgotten or they have never been given. Living and practicing faith on a daily basis is usually the core of these programs, and some people find the meaning of their life in faith.

In the transformation of our identity into Christ’s image we become more like him through the power of the grace, sacraments, continuous conversion, and adoption of his values, views, or precepts. Similarly, the transformation of our images of God happens through

---

<sup>232</sup> Ignatius, *The Spiritual Exercise of St. Ignatius*, 65.

<sup>233</sup> Gerald G. May, *Addiction & Grace*, 16.

<sup>234</sup> “Comunita Cenacolo America,” accessed May 7, 2011. <http://www.comunitacenacolo.org/>, Comunita Cenacolo America proposes: a simple, disciplined, family style of life, based on the rediscovery of the essential gifts of prayer and work (‘ora et labora’), true friendship, sacrifice, and faith in Jesus. Currently the Community houses are in the U.S. (Florida and Alabama), Italy, England, Ireland, Austria, Spain, France, Poland, Bosnia-Herzegovina, Croatia, Slovenia, Slovakia, Peru, Mexico, Argentina, and Brazil.

reflection on our self, views, beliefs, faith or religious experience like the Exercises. “Each sacrament, then, makes us more like Christ, assimilates us to him so that his thoughts and words and actions become ours – or rather, ours become his. The more we share in his sacramental life, the more we are transformed, drawn to him.”<sup>235</sup> “The sacraments intensify our faith and our love for God and our fellow human beings as well as help make our suffering bearable and meaningful.”<sup>236</sup> Ignatius mentions in two places about the power and importance of grace and the sacraments in his Spiritual Exercises. In the *Rules for Discernment of Movements in the Soul*, he advises the exercitants to use the power of grace to resist temptation and delusion of the evil spirit: “On the contrary, let him who is in desolation think that he can do much with the grace sufficient to resist all his enemies, taking strength in his Creator and Lord.”<sup>237</sup> The second place where Ignatius deals with the power of the grace is the rule to have true sentiment with the Church. Ignatius advises the exercitant to use the power of the sacraments of Reconciliation and the Eucharist: “To praise confession to a Priest, and the reception of the most Holy Sacrament of the Altar once in the year, and much more each month, and much better from week to week, with the conditions required and due.”<sup>238</sup> Though the power of the sacraments is great, they are not magic in our transformation if we reject their healing and renewing power. If we decide to ignore them and continue to live our way of life prior to the conversion, their power becomes less effective. They only work with our conscious effort. “The more we consciously try to get strength from the sacraments, the more they help us to use countless other daily opportunities to grow in grace.”<sup>239</sup>

---

<sup>235</sup> A. Wilhem, *Christ among us*, 206.

<sup>236</sup> A. Wilhem, *Christ among us*, 206.

<sup>237</sup> Ignatius, *The Spiritual Exercise of St. Ignatius*, 79.

<sup>238</sup> Ignatius, *The Spiritual Exercise of St. Ignatius*, 82.

<sup>239</sup> A. Wilhem, *Christ among us*, 209.

For Ignatius, freedom from disordered attachments is part of the process of conversion toward living fully Christian faith. Free from his attachments, the Christian is more likely to submit himself to God's Spirit which guides him on his spiritual journey. The Christian is more open to live the gospel values and witness to God's presence in his life. True freedom is a sign of living faith.

### **To will or not will as God inspires us**

In our transformation to the image of Christ, we need to learn skills to “seek only to will and not to will as God our Lord inspires us, and as seems better for the service and praise of the Divine Majesty. Meanwhile, they will strive to conduct themselves as if every attachment to it had been broken.”<sup>240</sup> In following God's will we become like his Son who was obedient even to death on the cross.

*“Who, though he was in the form of God, did not regard equality with God something to be grasped. Rather, he emptied himself, taking the form of a slave, coming in human likeness; and found human in appearance, he humbled himself, becoming obedient to death, even death on a cross” (Phil 2: 6-11)*

Ignatius states that behind our disordered inclinations, desires, attachments, or wishes resides our pride which puts us in opposition to God. “I said we should apply the memory to the sin of the angels, that is, recalling that they were created in the state of grace, that they did not want to make use of state of grace, that they did not want to use of the freedom God gave them to reverence and obey their Creator and Lord, and so falling into pride, were changed from grace to

---

<sup>240</sup> Ignatius, *The Spiritual Exercise of St. Ignatius*, 65.

hatred of God, and cast out of heaven into hell.”<sup>241</sup> Every time we do not fulfill God’s will we choose something that makes our life unnecessarily painful, unbearable, hopeless or dark. Rejecting God’s will is sin not because we do not obey God’s law, but it is sin because we destroy divine life in us. We can see the first biblical people following their own wills which led them to their miserable state of alienation from God. God’s will guides us to our highest good. If we analyze just one day of our life we can see how much we want to do our own will and how little we align our will with God’s. Ignatius gives reason why one should submit his will to God and why one should be free of his attachments: “As a result, the desire to be better able to serve God our Lord will be the cause of their accepting anything or relinquishing it.”<sup>242</sup> According to Ignatius, for every good and important choice we want to make, we should keep in our mind the purpose of our creation, praise of our Lord and our salvation.<sup>243</sup> The problem with our free will is that we often choose means (created things) as our ultimate goal. “So also others first choose to have benefits, and afterwards to serve God in them. Such persons do not go directly to God, but want God to conform wholly to their inordinate attachments.”<sup>244</sup> The reason we need freedom from our disordered attachments is to serve the Lord and our salvation. Ignatius suggests that we use created things only to the extent they help us reach our ultimate goal.

The more we practice highly spiritual skills like following God’s will the more we become like his Son. It helps us in our transformation into his Image. When we follow God’s will we renew ourselves into the image in which we had been originally created and later was distorted by sin. But God does not require from us slavish obedience. God’s will is not his liberal intention to forbid or manipulate people, but it is rather God’s plan for man which leads him to

---

<sup>241</sup> Ignatius, *The Spiritual Exercise of St. Ignatius*, 26-27.

<sup>242</sup> Ignatius, *The Spiritual Exercise of St. Ignatius*, 65.

<sup>243</sup> Ignatius, *The Spiritual Exercise of St. Ignatius*, 71. “Man is created to praise, reverence, and serve God our Lord, and by this to save his soul.”

<sup>244</sup> Ignatius, *The Spiritual Exercise of St. Ignatius*, 71.

his salvation and the purpose of his creation. “God’s plan was that humankind would develop so that we could have his grace-presence, grow in it, and be with him forever in heaven.”<sup>245</sup>

Obedience to God’s will is our free answer to his plan for us. God’s invitation is always gentle, personal and full of respect.

### **Can we know God’s will?**

If we look how people use expression “God’s will” we easily find that it has many interpretations and even more implementations. It is a strong religious expression which might reflect some experience, but it is also covered by a veil of mystery. The question is how can we talk about something like this at all? How can we know the intentions of this transcendent being, something that is beyond our possible reach? It is interesting that we always run into people who claim they know God’s will. But it should be noted that not everybody who claims knowing God’s will really knows it. It can be a way how some people manipulate others. Some people claim that it is impossible to know God’s will. Others do not care about God’s will at all. And some others want to know God’s will, but they do not know how to know it. Sometimes we think that if we knew God’s will we could easily follow it. And other times we would not follow God’s will even if we knew it. Maybe it is because we fear it would exceed our abilities. Somewhere in us lies the perception that our fulfilling God’s will depends on our human powers only. We forget that it is Christ who sends his apostles and enables them to complete their mission. “*Calling the Twelve to him, he sent them out two by two and gave them authority over evil spirits*” (Mark 6:7). But it is also true that we are often reluctant to know God’s will. Maybe we fear that God would ask us to give up something we are attached to. To follow God’s will is

---

<sup>245</sup>A. Wilhem, *Christ among us*, 33.

not easy and we have to face many obstacles. The notion of God's will and doing God's will are two different things. Our addictions and attachments get in the way of meeting God's will.

“Internal limits on freedom and its exercise come from psychic conflicts, defenses, compromises, needs, desires, and attachments.”<sup>246</sup>

Ignatius believes that we have the ability to know God's will and do God's will. In fact, it is a necessary skill in order to follow Jesus authentically.<sup>247</sup> According to John of the Cross the consent between the human will and God's will exists, but it depends on the soul's capability to reject sin and respond to God's grace. “The supernatural union exists when God's will and the soul's will are in conformity. Therefore the soul rests transformed in God through love. The illumination of the soul and its union with God corresponds to its purity.”<sup>248</sup> We usually hold two perspectives about the nature of God's will. The first common view is that God's will is completely objective – a plan made for us before we were born that exists independently of our desires, feelings, history, choices, and relationships. The second common view is that God's will is subjective – whatever we do fulfills our potential and when we attain happiness this fulfills God's will. The conclusion is that “God's desire is neither totally objective nor entirely subjective. It is a blend of both – God's desire for us manifests to a large degree our own desires and struggles.”<sup>249</sup>

---

<sup>246</sup> W. W. Meissner, *To the Greater Glory*, 69.

<sup>247</sup> Michael J. Sparough et al., *What's Your Decision*, 8.

<sup>248</sup> “Selected quotes from the St. John of the Cross – *Ascent of Mt. Carmel*, accessed May 14, 2011. <http://www.innerexplorations.com/chmystext/stquotes.htm>

<sup>249</sup> Michael J. Sparough et al., *What's Your Decision*, 6 - 7.

## **Our Feelings are Key to Discerning God's Will**

The prerequisite of knowing God's will is in our own right image of God. As we mentioned before, our unhealthy images of God lead us astray from God and from knowing his will. Conversely, our right or healthy image of God can help us to better discern God's will and lead us to experience God more intensively. Our unhealthy images of God can complicate discernment and it is true especially when our heart is distracted by so many things. "Ignatius taught us to set out on the journey of discernment grounded in this image of a generous, loving God."<sup>250</sup>

What God is asking of me can be found in the inner movements of feelings within our hearts. Ignatius believed that God is dealing directly with us through our thoughts and feelings. Ignatius urges the exercitant to reflect on these inner movements of feelings and interpret them. Ignatius refers to emotions as movements. According to Ignatius, reflecting on our feelings is actually seeking God's will. Learning to interpret emotions is one way to discern God's will for our choices in life.<sup>251</sup> This includes our inclinations, desires, likes, dislikes, anxieties, or moods.<sup>252</sup> "But this very confusion of thoughts and feelings is the place where we find God's footprints. It's the raw material to discern God's will."<sup>253</sup> Accordingly, we may also say that God's signs for us are found in the shifting movements of our divided heart which is constantly in tension between good and bad forces. Although the common cultural view is that reason and analysis dominate over our feelings or religious beliefs, Ignatius understood and valued emotions as the

---

<sup>250</sup> Michael J. Sparough et al., *What's Your Decision*, 37.

<sup>251</sup> Michael J. Sparough et al., *What's Your Decision*, 8.

<sup>252</sup> Michael J. Sparough et al., *What's Your Decision*, 8.

<sup>253</sup> Michael J. Sparough et al., *What's Your Decision*, 27.



locus of our authentic self through which God communicates with us. “When I move inward toward the center of myself, I move closer to the person I most truly am before God.”<sup>254</sup>

Our heart can be burdened by anxieties, uncertainties, and fears when we struggle to give God our ‘yes’. Following God’s will is a struggle, yet the Ignatian approach is to embrace this struggle wholeheartedly. Knowing and following God’s will actually depend on this struggle. But winning this struggle ultimately leads us to the satisfaction of our deepest desires and our inner freedom.

### **Meditation over three classes of men**

In the second week of the exercises, Ignatius proposes a meditation over the three classes of men to examine one’s state of freedom and help him make a radical decision to follow Christ in his way of life, humility and obedience. Ignatius illustrates a situation of three men who acquired an equal amount of money. All three men have a good intention to serve God in such way that their fortune would not interfere with their intention to serve God. All three men are drawn to their fortune and they are tempted to surrender to its power. Yet, they are concerned with difficulties of their intention. We may interpret fortune as a synonym for our addictions or unhealthy attachments.

The first man wants to serve God, but he realizes that he cannot resist and control the use of his fortune. He acknowledges that the fortune blocks him from better service to God. He realizes that he is attached to his fortune and he is locked in the vicious circle of repression and desire. Addiction uses up his desire. His addiction ties his hands and he cannot help himself.

---

<sup>254</sup> Margaret Silf, *Inner Compass: An Invitation to Ignatian Spirituality* (Chicago: Loyola Press, 1998), 2.

“Repression has proven ineffective with addictions.”<sup>255</sup> He has desire to serve God, but he is consumed by his fortune; he wants to be free of his addiction, but never takes any radical step to alter his condition. He has a positive attitude toward God, but he rather “worships” the objects of his addictions. “Addiction also makes idolaters of us all, because it forces us to worship these objects of attachment, thereby preventing us from truly, freely loving God and one another.”<sup>256</sup> God is not a priority of his life, but it is rather his addiction. This man has a problem with the priorities of his values.

The second man puts much more effort into his relationship with God. He does all kinds of good deeds, charity, prayers which have a great moral value. He acknowledges that misuse of his fortune impedes his deeper relationship with God. However, this man wants to be free of his addiction, but in depth of his being he desires the fortune. Generally, he is a good man, but he cannot make the radical step and change to his addiction. His heart is divided; one part desires freedom and the other part remains clinging to his fortune. He is negotiating with God and his effort to overcome his addictions proves ineffective. He even tries hard to fight his addictions, but he fails because he fights his addiction with his human powers only. The only way he can overcome his state is that he needs to confront his addiction as honestly as possible, take responsibilities for his actions and turn to God for his grace.<sup>257</sup> He needs to combine God’s grace with his human efforts.

The third man uses the created things only to the extent they help him meet God’s will. He desires “neither to retain nor to relinquish the sum acquired. He seeks only to will and not will as God our Lord inspires him, and as seems better for the service and praise of the Divine

---

<sup>255</sup> Gerald G. May, *Addiction & Grace*, 3.

<sup>256</sup> Gerald G. May, *Addiction & Grace*, 4.

<sup>257</sup> Gerald G. May, *Addiction & Grace*, 140.

Majesty.”<sup>258</sup> The only motivation of this man is the better service for God. He will use or abandon all the means to meet his goal. He is determined to be indifferent to his attachments and following God’s will makes him liberated from his attachments. “Therefore, we must make ourselves indifferent to all created things, as far as we are allowed free choice and are not under any prohibition.”<sup>259</sup> Ignatius means by indifference detachment from our inordinate attachments.

The goal of this exercise is to examine and question our state of freedom from our disordered attachments. Ignatius wants the exercitant to see the three men’s different approaches to their attachments. The problem is that in spite of our faith in God we often do not live our faith fully because of our disordered attachments. Ignatius guides the exercitant to make a decision to follow the third man’s approach to his fortune and seek only to will and not will as God our Lord inspires him. He guides the exercitant to live true life without fears, disordered attachments, hesitations, isolations, self centeredness.

## Summary

Ignatius leads the exercitant in the meditations of the second week to reorient his whole person on Christ. “A profound experience of the forgiveness of God and of the overwhelming realization that Jesus died for me, a sinner, leads to a great sense of freedom, a feeling that a weight has been lifted from one’s soul and heart.”<sup>260</sup> It is a life which stems from Christ and helps the person to live life rooted in a trusting-love relationship with God. The exercitant is invited to shape his character through Christ’s qualities of humility, obedience to God’s will and spiritual poverty. “To imitate Christ, to lead true life, and grow in its qualities, one must be

---

<sup>258</sup> Ignatius, *The Spiritual Exercise of St. Ignatius*, 65.

<sup>259</sup> Ignatius, *The Spiritual Exercise of St. Ignatius*, 12.

<sup>260</sup> W. A. Barry, *Finding God in All Things*, 78.

associated in his mission.”<sup>261</sup> These qualities might seem like an individualistic concept of perfection, but in reality these enable the person to participate in Christ’s mission to establish the Kingdom of God on earth and more importantly, in his heart. For Ignatius true and free living is only in Christ. It stems from Christ and leads to Christ. Ignatius wants the exercitant to live a life free from idolatry and experience an intimate and unique friendship with Christ. This is done by imitating his life, work and total self-giving. This allows us to experience our own vulnerability and powerlessness in our activities, decisions, and situations of our life and rely on God’s help. The meditation on the three classes of men in the second week of the Exercises invites the exercitant to make a radical decision to become a new creature in Christ. Christ’s qualities and his presence in the sacraments also enable us to love others more freely, without manipulating and controlling them. ”Through the sacraments we gradually acquire his love, his sensitivity for others, his zeal and passion for justice, his compassion for the sick and ‘little one,’ his single-mindedness in doing his Father’s will.”<sup>262</sup>

Through the conversion of our images of God and decision to imitate Christ through the experience of the Exercises we take concrete steps toward living a living faith. “Adult religion, made possible as it is by the unfettered imaging of religious experiences, is about the adult self and the Living God together.”<sup>263</sup> The voice of the Living God is nothing like the voice of the Super-ego God. It welcomes and invites the individual into close relationship. It is the voice of God accepting us as we are, without conditions or control. The voice of the Living God invites us into a mutual exchange of love. It is the voice that invites us to know the deep mysteries of God which reason itself cannot grasp. It is a voice of the God of Freedom which respects the

---

<sup>261</sup> Ivens Michael, *Understanding the Spiritual Exercises*, 75-76.

<sup>262</sup> A. Wilhem, *Christ among us*, 206.

<sup>263</sup> J.J. Shea, *Finding God again*, 95.

ways we need to grow. And it is the voice of the Living God which invites us into community with him.<sup>264</sup>

The following prayer of Ignatius characterizes in a nutshell what we want to achieve in self-giving experience through the Spiritual Exercises. Ignatius puts his confidence into God's hands and realizes that at the end all depends on God's grace, our freedom, our availability, our notion of God's will, and our satisfaction.

*“Take Lord, and receive all my liberty, my memory, my understanding, and my entire will, all that I have and possess. Thou hast given all to me. To Thee, O lord, I return it. All is Thine, dispose of it wholly according to Thy will. Give me Thy love and thy grace, for this is sufficient for me.”* Ignatius of Loyola

---

<sup>264</sup> J.J. Shea, *Finding God again*, 95.

## **Final Conclusion**

People who come to the Exercises come with the expectations of finding peace, prayer, reforming their lives, growth in faith or experiencing “something” spiritual. These are right intentions and desires and the Exercises can meet these desires. But people also come to the Exercises with traumas and damages done by life and perhaps by false images or inaccurate teaching about God. For instance, in the core of their being they long to know God more, but their desire is frequently silenced by religious apathy, problematic upbringing, harsh social environment or extreme religious practice. Frequently, we do not realize that we do not live our faith to our potential and we often live impoverished religious experiences because of our rudimentary, unhealthy, limited or inadequate images of God. Our images of God mediate our relationship with God and they help us to communicate with or experience God. In a certain sense, our images represent what we believe. Images we have, disclose our view of the qualities and characteristics of God. On one hand, we rely on our formative figures who actually help us create our images of God, but on the other hand the images of God we learn from our formative figures and other people do not always correspond with the real characteristics of God. As a consequence of our distorted images, we get easily trapped in a one sided view of God. Because of our distorted images, we sometimes view God as a harsh lawmaker, punisher, snooper, powerful being, unfeeling to our needs. We may have many prejudices, fears, guilty feelings or anxieties that shape our image of God. Our images of God also influence our religious practice, our behavior, beliefs, values or world views. The problem is that our false images of God do not help us experience God more closely or intensively, but rather they keep us alienated from God. These unhealthy images often freeze our religious growth. When we realize that our faith does not progress and it does not meet our life’s needs and expectation, it is a sign that we need to

reflect on our faith. To live our faith more fully and to its potential, we need to examine or in some cases heal our images of God. To abandon our unhealthy images requires conversion of our whole being, our values, our principles and our whole orientation. Any change we attempt to make toward living faith requires our total conversion.

In my thesis, I have tried to answer the initial question: “What could help Christians live a living faith, without fears, anxieties or prejudices?” Ignatius believed that the experience of the Spiritual Exercises can help us to reform our life and our faith. He believed that the Exercises can help us to live a living and nurturing faith. I introduced Rizzuto’s theory of the genesis of religious birth and the elaborating of the image of God through our childhood. Her theory suggests that we are fundamentally religious, however the image of God we form in early childhood is rudimentary or incomplete. The individual may leave his God image untouched for the rest of his life or he can reevaluate his images of God which can help him to experience a more intensive relationship with God. He can do it by abandoning those images which hinder this new relationship.

I examined the process of transformation or conversion from a psychological and theological perspective. I discussed different understandings of conversion and named those that are relevant to conversion through the experience of the Spiritual Exercises. I proposed the Spiritual Exercises as the concept which can help people to thoroughly examine their faith and make the decision toward a deeper spiritual life. I have presented factors which hinder and block our religious growth. I have also presented mechanisms which help us transform our distorted images of God. The Spiritual Exercises may bring back to memory some past highly relevant or feared images of God. The Exercises actually help us to reflect on our distorted images of God and find more realistic images of Him. Meditative prayer, pondering over relevant biblical

passages, a recall of the history of our life, spiritual direction and faith offer us the necessary means to reevaluate these early images. These spiritual activities enhance conversion of our images of God from unhealthy and inadequate ones to more healthy, life-giving, positive images of God. The exercitant, meditating and contemplating over biblical passages of God's love for the world, can track and acknowledge a certain similarity between God's saving actions in his life and history of God's chosen people, the Israelites. In prayer, he can discover and affectively experience God's particular love for him, and this notion of God's generosity, care and respect, moves the person to a radical change. Transformation of our images of God is an important step toward religious growth. In addition, Ignatius does not want the exercitant to get settled in the undisturbed life of an average Christian. He wants the exercitant to transfer his new vision and love for God into his faith and ordinary life. The exercitant is called to transfer his experience of conversion and God's love for him into his daily life situations, relationships, views, opinions, beliefs and schemata. After first conversion (reformation of faith and images of God), the exercitant keeps his sinful tendencies, addictions, idols and it takes him a continuous effort to get rid of them in order to become a more integrated person. Conversion of our unhealthy images of God is a prerequisite to the main goal of the Exercises and that is a decision. Free from our sinful tendencies, Ignatius wants us to imitate and follow Christ. It is a decision to reorient our whole person on Christ. It is a conversion toward a true life in Christ which unites us more closely with God and brings us to a true inner freedom. Ignatius suggests in the second week of the Exercises that Christ is the image we can turn ourselves into in order to become what we are meant to be according to God's plan of creation. It is life which stems from Christ and helps the person to live life rooted in a trusting-love relationship with God. The exercitant is invited to shape his character by Christ's qualities of humility, obedience to God's will and spiritual poverty. The



meditations invite the exercitant to make a radical decision to renew himself in Christ. Christ is the image the exercitant desires to imitate and Christ also enables the exercitant's transformation through his sacraments. The exercitant's transformation into Christ's image enables him to live a "living faith."

The Exercises do not end with the Second week, but they proceed to the third and fourth weeks. The first two weeks of the Exercises focus more on the exercitant, but the third and fourth weeks focus on Jesus, his passion and resurrection. The third week invites the exercitant to desire compassion with suffering Christ. We naturally avoid any pain, suffering, and death. It is difficult to face and bear our own suffering, but what is even more difficult is to bear the suffering and death of those we love. The Third week of the Exercises is about our transformation again. Following Christ's passion through the meditative prayer, the exercitant realizes God's love for human beings and the destructive consequences of sin. The experience of suffering God through the meditations transforms the exercitant's heart. Not only does the exercitant learn to be compassionate with Christ in his suffering, but he also learns to be compassionate with other suffering human beings. The Fourth week invites the exercitant to experience joy over Resurrected Christ. It might seem an easy task, but in practice it might be a hard work of self-giving and self-sacrifice through various vocations and charity. "I sacrifice my own life for the life of other people." Perhaps it is hard to comprehend that the only way to save our life is to "lose" it and the only way to enjoy life is to detach from it.

I have tried to show briefly the direction of the Spiritual Exercises. The exercitant and God can deal more directly with each other in an ordered progression of the Exercises. It may be an increasing process of ever-deepening relationship analogous to the development of an

intimate human relationship. Finally, the exercitant must face conversion of himself in order to fully enjoy life itself.

## BIBLIOGRAPHY

- Barry, William A. *Letting God Come Close: An Approach to the Ignatian Spiritual Exercises*. Chicago: Loyola Press, 2001.
- Barry, William A., *Finding God in All Things: A Companion to the Spiritual Exercises of St. Ignatius*. Notre Dame, IN: Ave Maria Press, 1991.
- Barry, William A. *Allowing the Creator to Deal with the Creature: An Approach to the Spiritual Exercises of Ignatius of Loyola*. Mahwah, NJ: Paulist Press, 1994.
- Barry, William A. *Paying Attention to God: Discernment in Prayer*. Notre Dame, IN: Ave Maria Press, 1990.
- Benedict, *The Rule of Benedict*, trans. White, Carolinne, New York, NY: Pinguin Books Ltd., 2008.
- Catechism of the Catholic Church. Libreria Editrice Vaticana. New York, NY: An Image Books Doubleday, USCC, 1997.
- Conn, E. Walter. *Conversion: Perspectives on Personal and Social Transformation*. New York: Alba House, 1978.
- Christensen, Carl W. (1965). Religious conversion in adolescence. *Journal of Pastoral Psychology*, Vol.16 (6), 17-28.
- Coe, George. A. *The Psychology of Religion*, Chicago : University of Chicago Press 1917.
- Da Camara, L. G. (1995). *A pilgrim's Testament: The Memoirs of St. Ignatius of Loyola*. Saint Louis, MO: The Institute of Jesuit Sources.
- Ducasse ,Curt John. *A philosophical Scrutiny of Religion*, New York: Ronald Press Co., 1953.
- Durham , John C., comment on "William James: The Varieties of Religious Experience (1902)," Understanding the Sacred, comment posted 2002, <http://www.bytrent.demon.co.uk/sitemap.html> (accessed March 24, 2010).
- Fowler, J. W. *Stages of Faith: The Psychology of Human Development and the Quest for Meaning*, San Francisco, CA: Harper & Row, 1981.
- Freud, Sigmund. *New Introductory Lectures on Psychoanalysis*. Translated and edited by James Strachey. New York: Norton, 1965.

- Freud, Sigmund. "Some Reflection on Schoolboy Psychology." In *Abstracts of the Standard Edition of the Complete Psychological Works of Sigmund Freud*, edited by Carrie L. Rothgeb. New York : International Universities Press, Inc., 1973.
- Freud, Sigmund. *The Complete Introductory Lectures on Psychoanalysis*, trans. and edited by James Strachey. New York : W.W. Norton Company, Inc., 1966.
- Frielingsdorf, Karl. *Seek the Face of God: Discovering the Power of Your Images of God*. Translated by Albert Wimmer. Notre Dame: Ave Maria Press, Inc., 2006.
- Gerhard Kittel and Gerhard Friedrich, *Theological Dictionary of the New Testament*, trans. Geoffrey W. Bromiley. Grand Rapids: MI, 1985.
- Ignatius. *The Spiritual Exercise of St. Ignatius*, trans. L.J.Puhl. Westminster, MD: The Newman Press, 1962.
- Hebblethwaite, Peter. "Conversion." In *Encyclopedia of Theology: A Concise Sacramentum Mundi*, edited by Karl Rahner; Peter Hebblethwaite. London : Burns and Oates, 1975.
- Howe, Leroy T. *The Image of God*, Nashville, TN: Abingdon Press, 1995
- Izard, Carroll, E. *The Psychology of Emotions*. New York and London: Plenum Press, 1991.
- James, William. *The Varieties of Religious Experience*. New York: Random House
- Jordan, Merle R. *Taking on the Gods: The Task of the Pastoral Counselor*. Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1986.
- Leon-Dufour, Xavier, edit. *Dictionary of Biblical Theology*. New York: The Seabury Press, 1962.
- May, Gerald G. *Addiction & Grace: Love and Spirituality in the Healing of Addiction*. New York, NY: HarperCollins, 1988.
- Meissner, W. W. *A Psychological Study of Ignatian Spirituality: To the Greater Glory*. Milwaukee, WI: Marquette University Press, 1999.
- Meissner, W. W. *Ignatius of Loyola: The Psychology of a Saint*. New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1999.
- Merton, Thomas. *The Seven Storey Mountain: An Autobiography of Faith*. Harcourt, 1998.
- Nelson, J. R.; Stage, S. (2007). Risk Factors Predictive of the Problem Behavior of Children: At Risk for Emotional and Behavioral Disorders. *Council for Exceptional Children*, 73(3), 367-379.
- Rahner, Karl. "Conversion." In *Encyclopedia of theology: A Concise Sacramentum Mundi*, edited by Karl Rahner; Peter Hebblethwaite. London : Burns and Oates, 1975.

Rizzuto, Ana-Maria. *The Birth of the Living God*. Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1979.

Silf, Margaret, *Inner Compass: An Invitation to Ignatian Spirituality*, Chicago: Loyola Press, 1998.

Stevens, Richard, *Erik Erikson*, New York: St. Martin's press, 1983.

Wilhem, A. *Christ Among us*. New York, NY: HarperCollins, 1996.

Zock, Hetty, *Erik H. Erikson's Contribution to the Psychology of Religion: A Psychology of Ultimate Concern*. Amsterdam – Atlanta, GA: Rodopi, 1990.

St. Thomas Aquinas. "Holiness." Accessed May 3, 2011.  
<http://www.newadvent.org/cathen/07386a.htm> Holiness.

Xavier, Francis P. *Guilt Feelings*, Bombay: St. Pauls, 1995.

"Comunita Cenacolo America." Accessed May 14, 2011. <http://www.comunitacenacolo.org/>.

Tom Butler-Bowdon, comment on "William James: The Varieties of Religious Experience (1902)," 50 Spiritual Classics: 50 Great Books of Inner Discovery, Enlightenment and Purpose, comment posted 2005, (accessed March 24, 2010), <http://www.butler-bowdon.com/the-varieties-of-religious-experience>.

Early Christian Spirituality and Spiritual Direction.  
"augustine\_and\_pelagius\_on\_freedom\_and\_grace." accessed May 7, 2011.  
<http://www.didymus.org/augustine-and-pelagius-on-freedom-and-grace.html>

Slate. "The Real Reason Children love Fantasy." Last modified December 20, 2005.  
<http://www.slate.com/id/2132725/>.

Wikipedia. "Id, ego and super-ego." Last modified May 7, 2011.  
[http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Id,\\_ego\\_and\\_super-ego](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Id,_ego_and_super-ego).

Wikipedia. "Sigmud Freud." Last modified March, 2011.  
[http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Id,\\_ego\\_and\\_super-ego](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Id,_ego_and_super-ego).