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Pedagogy and Pedeutology of the *Spiritual Exercises* of Saint Ignatius: Insights from Hans Urs von Balthasar and Adrienne von Speyr

ABSTRACT

This essay seeks to elucidate the pedagogical and pedeutological concepts within the *Spiritual Exercises* of Saint Ignatius, as interpreted by Hans Urs von Balthasar and Adrienne von Speyr. The research deals with the narratives of these two twentieth-century authors regarding the *Spiritual Exercises*, with particular attention to their pedagogical and pedeutological insights. The primary method employed is the analysis of both primary and secondary literature pertinent to this research subject. The argument unfolds in distinct stages. The first section examines the pedeutological aspect, emphasizing the role of the retreat master and his rapport with retreatants. In the second section, the focus shifts to the pedagogy of the *Exercises*, which encompasses three key components. Firstly, it examines the theocentric worldview outlined in the *Foundation and Principle* (SE 23) and the concept of Ignatian indifference implicit within it. The cultivation of this disposition emerges as the fundamental objective of the *Exercises*' pedagogy. Following this, the methods for instilling and reinforcing the disposition of indifference are outlined as a second component. Lastly, the third key component of this pedagogy—the discernment of personal vocation—is discussed. The essay concludes that the pedagogical and pedeutological frameworks of the *Exercises* serve as

KEYWORDS
pedagogy, pedeutology, Ignatius Loyola, *Spiritual Exercises*, Hans Urs von Balthasar, Adrienne von Speyr

SPI Vol. 27, 2024/2
e-ISSN 2450-5366

DOI: 10.12775/SPI.2024.2.001en
Submitted: 12.07.2023
Accepted: 08.02.2024

countervailing forces against contemporary societal challenges, such as secularization, egocentrism, and the fear of lasting commitments. Thus, this pedagogical model maintains both relevance and significance in today's context.

Introduction

This article seeks to reconstruct the pedagogical and pedeutological concepts within the *Spiritual Exercises* of Saint Ignatius (Loyola 2016)[1] as interpreted by Hans Urs von Balthasar and Adrienne von Speyr. Both the *Exercises* themselves and their interpretation by these two twentieth-century authors are strictly theological. Therefore, I analyze their interpretation within the framework of the pedagogy of religion. Following Zbigniew Marek and Anna Walulik (2020: 23), and Bogusław Milerski (2010), I consider the pedagogy of religion as an autonomous discipline, defined as "the object of research of which is the educational potential of various forms of religion and the processes of religious education (teaching and upbringing) and religious socialization in the religious community (Church), family, school, and society" (Milerski 2010: 56). For the pedeutological dimension of this pedagogy, I adopt Joanna Szempruch's (2013: 10) definition of pedeutology as the study of the teacher from a personalistic and relational perspective, which complements the theological context of the pedagogy of religion.

Noteworthy examples of scholarship on pedagogical and pedeutological issues within Ignatian pedagogy include the collective work *Pedagogika ignacjańska: Historia, teoria, praktyka* [*Ignatian Pedagogy: History, Theory, Practice*], edited by Anna Królikowska (2010). This volume features articles by scholars such as Józef Augustyn, Wacław Królikowski, Jacek Poznański, Marek Wójtowicz, Beata Topij-Stempińska, Ludwik Grzebień, Barbara Adamczyk, Anna Królikowska, Jerzy Kochanowicz, Janusz Mółka, Ewa Dybowska, Krzysztof Biel, Andrzej Paweł Bieś, Stanisław Cieślak, and Władysław Kubik. Other significant contributions include Ewa Dybowska's *Wychowawca w pedagogice ignacjańskiej* [*The Teacher in Ignatian*

1 Hereafter, we will use the abbreviation SE (*Spiritual Exercises*) in accordance with the commonly accepted edition principles.

Pedagogy] (2013) and Zbigniew Marek's *Pedagogika towarzyszenia* [*The Pedagogy of Accompaniment*] (2017).

Hans Urs von Balthasar (1905–1988) is widely regarded as one of the foremost theologians of the 20th century, known for his "theology of the saints" and "theology on its knees." His mentor and close friend, Henri de Lubac, once described him as "the greatest erudite of the 20th century." Balthasar's intellectual journey was "rooted in the rich heritage of European culture—philosophy, literature, music, theater, all centered on the personal experience of God" (Piotrowski 2005, note). Initially earning a doctorate in German studies, he later joined the Jesuits. Under the influence of Adrienne von Speyr (1902–1967), a physician, mystic, and convert from Protestantism, he left the Jesuit order (remaining a diocesan priest) to devote himself to leading the lay Community of St. John (Johannes Gemeinschaft) and directing St. John's Publishing House (Johannes Verlag). For his outstanding contributions to theology, he was appointed cardinal by Pope John Paul II on May 28, 1988, though he passed away on June 26 of that year before being formally inducted.

Viewing Speyr's and Balthasar's theological concepts as complementary is warranted by their years of close collaboration and by Balthasar's insistence on the inseparability of their joint theological work (Balthasar 1994: 13; 2004: 17). According to Jonas Wernet, the translator of an anthology of Balthasar's Ignatian texts, "Balthasar's entire theological work is based on the *Spiritual Exercises* of St. Ignatius Loyola (Wernet 2019: XI)." Perhaps the most telling indicator of the *Exercises*' influence on Balthasar is his decision to translate them into German (Loyola 1959), despite the availability of several existing translations by figures such as Rudolf Handmann, Johann Roothaan, Alfred Feder, and Erich Przywara. He aspired to capture the text in such a way "that the bursting fire of the personal 'more' pierces through the word—the common rhythm of Ignatius and John" (Balthasar 2004: 18). Balthasar himself commented on the significance of the *Exercises* with the following words:

> Thus, the *Spiritual Exercises* seem younger and more up-to-date than ever; in the past four hundred years they have too little become the charismatic nucleus of the theology of Revelation—the kind of theology that could give a better answer to all the current problems which frighten Christians. (Balthasar 2004: 18)

Balthasar personally experienced the existential nature of the *Exercises* at key moments in his life. During a 1929 retreat, he sensed a calling to join the Jesuits, and in 1948, another retreat in which he took part affirmed his conviction that God was leading him to leave the Order to devote himself to leading the lay Community of St. John. Additionally, Balthasar often led Ignatian retreats; by 1965, he claimed to have done so nearly 100 times (Balthasar 2004: 38; Servais 2019: XVII). Adrienne von Speyr assisted him in this work on many occasions, providing support for retreatants through prayer, penances, and charismatic guidance for individuals, received during her own prayer (Speyr 1975b: 193). Physical distance did not prevent her engagement: "She was with us in Einsiedeln so intensely," Balthasar recalls, "that she even knew whether the participants were asleep or awake; whether they were disturbed by something during the night" (Speyr 1975b: 72). Johann Roten notes that Speyr's involvement in retreats was often associated with her profound personal suffering (Speyr 1975a: 478; Roten 1991: 74).

Pedeutology of the *Exercises* according to Balthasar and Speyr

A comprehensive Ignatian retreat necessitates the presence of a leader and at least one participant (usually in a group setting). The role of instructor in these retreats is filled by a figure known as the exercise leader, giver, or possibly the exercise director; the term *master* is used less frequently (Jalics 2017). Full-length Ignatian retreats generally take place in Catholic retreat centers run by Jesuits, but they are also hosted by other religious orders or dioceses, with lay leaders occasionally directing them as well.

One responsibility of the director is to present introductions to meditation, or "points" (SE 2). In order to do so, the director must possess both necessary knowledge and communication skills. Balthasar stresses that guiding the *Exercises* demands a thorough understanding of Ignatian literature and the subject to convey its essence (Loyola 1959: 95).

Another important dimension of the retreat is the personal interaction between leader and retreatant. In this context, the leader's practical experience and authority in spiritual discernment (SE 6–10, 313–336) are even more significant. This discernment

involves differentiating between the spirit of Christ—characterized by humility—and the spirit of the antichrist, marked by boundless pride. Balthasar maintains that guidance in this discernment process is essential: the person "who wants to enter into the very heart of the Christian mystery will not be able to find his way among these spirits without the help of the Church" (Servais 2019: 12).

The authority of the *Exercise's* leader, as an educational guide, is to strive for a gradual withdrawal, for becoming more and more transparent or even superfluous; the leader's role is to mediate a direct relationship between God and the retreatant. This aim is articulated in the 15th note of the *Exercises*: "Therefore, the director of the *Exercises*, as a balance at equilibrium, without leaning to one side or the other, should permit the Creator to deal directly with the creature, and the creature directly with his Creator and Lord" (SE 15). Ignatius also explicitly commands: "admonish him not to be inconsiderate or hasty in making any promise or vow" (SE 14). Nevertheless, Balthasar reminds us that each choice ultimately points toward a mission to be fulfilled within the Church (SE 170, 353; Balthasar 1983: 491–492). Thus, the retreat leader is expected to evaluate the retreatant's discernment, guided by the Church's teachings on the discernment of spirits. This guidance transcends human reason illuminated by faith; it is a special gift of discernment granted to the leader by the Spirit and tied to the objective Spirit of the ecclesiastical office (cf. SE 8–10, 14; Balthasar 2005: 353).

Adrienne von Speyr elaborates on her views concerning Ignatian retreats and the role of the leader in her book *The Christian State of Life* (Speyr 1986), which shares the title of a later work by Balthasar. She distinguishes between two ways of conducting retreats. The first type involves retreats without direct contact with the leader, where individuals engage in personal meditation with God. In this case, the emphasis falls on the mystery of self. However, she warns that such isolation also carries the risk of detachment from God. In the second, more complete form, the retreat includes conversations with the exercise leader, in which case the emphasis is on the mystery of the community (Speyr 1986: 23).

According to von Speyr, the leader of the *Exercises* must fulfill three conditions: first, the leader should present the path of discernment as something he has personally experienced; second, he should

recognize that the retreat is an established, objective method used by the Church to help those making their choices; and third, he should develop an understanding of the personal problems faced by the retreatants (Speyr 1986: 25).

The objectivity of the method lies in the leader's role of presenting all retreatants with the options and choices available to them. During personal conversations, the leader should embody these three qualities as well. While drawing on his own subjective experience of discernment, he should be able to combine this with the ecclesial objectivity of the retreat without shirking his responsibility for the subjective situations of the retreatants. Only in this way will he be able to discern what is subjective and what is objective in the retreatant's experience. However, in order for the director to arrive at an objective understanding, the retreatant must first share a personal outline of their own perception of their situation.

Von Speyr observes that objective truth very rarely appears evident from the outset; as a rule, the layers of subjectivity must first be set aside so that both the *Exercise* leader and the participant can recognize the objective nature of the inner reality being revealed. The director of the *Exercises* generally views the process from a different perspective than the retreatant, but they share "an impartial desire for the objective will of God to be fulfilled" (Speyr 1986: 26).

Speyr points to the great responsibility of the leader as a representative of Christ, directing retreatants toward Him (Speyr 1986: 26), while also acknowledging that it is difficult to judge how often and to what extent directors of the *Exercises* conduct them as objectively as they should (Speyr 1986: 32). Thus, she recognizes the possibility of directors making mistakes arising from a lack of objectivity—that is, from their personal biases about the choices made by the participants.

Pedagogy of the *Exercises* as seen by Balthasar and von Speyr

Balthasar summarized the course of the Ignatian retreat in two sentences:

> The Ignatian Exercises are a means of introducing the Christian, through evangelical "penance" (Week One), to the life of personal discipleship

> of Christ and to trying oneself in that life (Week Two to Week Four), and this, essentially, within the Catholic Church. This, in turn, leads to a choice of place (or state of life) within this Church. (Balthasar 2019: 4)

In this outline, Balthasar particularly stressed the choice of one's state of life in service to the Lord, be it through the evangelical counsels, priesthood, or marriage. He considered this decision the very heart and essence of the *Exercises* (Balthasar 2000: 15), as it takes place at the center of man's existence, and marks a turning point in life. This is a fundamentally different approach from that proposed by most medieval textbooks sketching the Christian path to perfection (Balthasar 2019: 6). Let us then turn to a more detailed analysis of the pedagogy underlying the *Exercises*.

Theocentric vision of reality: *Indiferencia*

The vision of reality that Hans Urs von Balthasar presented in his works, was fundamentally theocentric. His famous dictum stated, "He who is not ready to listen to God first has nothing to say to the world" (Balthasar 1968: 78). Having been profoundly formed by the *Ignatian Exercises*, Balthasar was superbly equipped to guide hundreds, perhaps thousands, of young adults in this spirit. The essence of the *Spiritual Exercises* of Saint Ignatius is a theocentric vision of reality, expressed in the Principle and Foundation:

> Man is created to praise, reverence, and serve God our Lord, and by this means to save his soul.
>
> The other things on the face of the earth are created for man to help him attain the end for which he is created.
>
> Hence, man is to make use of them in as far as they help him in the attainment of his end, and he must rid himself of them in as far as they prove a hindrance to him.
>
> Therefore, we must make ourselves indifferent to all created things, as far as we are allowed free choice and are not under any prohibition. Consequently, as far as we are concerned, we should not prefer health to sickness, riches to poverty, honor to dishonor, a long life to a short life. The same holds for all other things.
>
> Our one desire and choice should be what is more conducive to the end for which we are created. (SE 23)

The Foundation of the *Exercises* thus contains a distinct vision of God, humanity, and the world. It contains, on the one hand, an ontological norm—the analogy of being (*analogia entis*)—in which God calls created humanity toward a destiny of grace. On the other hand, it provides an existential norm: *indifferentia* (indifference), which should guide the created person's relationship to all other created things (Servais 1996: 133–134).

The concept of the analogy of being, as referenced in the Second Canon of the Fourth Lateran Council (1215), was further developed in the 20th century by Erich Przywara (2014). Przywara understood the analogy of being as the fundamental structure of reality, defining the relationship between God and the world, between infinite and finite being, involving a dynamic process of man's participation in God's being. *Analogia entis* unites similarity with an even greater difference, and in Catholic philosophy and theology, the ultimate expression of this analogy of being is found in the person of Christ (Zeitz 1982).

From an existential perspective, however, indifference (*indifferentia*) emerges as a key concept. It signifies a person's inner disposition to allow God to direct their life remaining ready to accept any mission from God, whatever it may be. In this way, a person becomes, in Balthasar's words, a "theological person":

> In the area of action opened by Christ, created conscious subjects can become persons of theological significance, co-participants in the theodrama. They cannot enter this area of action of their own accord; still less, once admitted, they can themselves choose their theological role. But, as we have shown, it is an area that, through Christ, creates and maintains freedom in God; and if man freely affirms and accepts the choice, vocation and mission which God in sovereign freedom offers him, he has the greatest possible chance of becoming a person, of grasping his own substance, of grasping that most intimate idea of his own self which would otherwise remain undiscovered. (Balthasar 1978: 241)

Presenting the figure of St. Ignatius elsewhere in his *Trilogy*, Balthasar notes that the Ignatian concept of *indiferencia* is rooted in the broader Christian tradition. This concept draws on the *apatheia* (detachment) of the Church Fathers and the *Gelassenheit* (tranquil submission) of the Rhineland mystics. *Indiferencia* means "to rise above all creation towards a direct experience of God, while the

human being is suspended in the transcendent cloud of ignorance that is neither (of the world) nor (of God)" (Balthasar 2013: 92–93).

Balthasar notes, however, that while Ignatius develops the idea of detachment in its Christian radicalism, he refrains from adopting the metaphysical formula given to it by the Rhineland mystics, especially Master Eckhart. Ignatius rejects the hylemorphic view, in which God would serve as form and creation as matter. Therefore, the practice of indifference, as Ignatius understands it, does not imply the annihilation of human beings or will (as in monotheletism or pantheism). Rather, it involves cooperation, self-sacrifice, service, and, above all, the active choosing of what God has chosen for us (Balthasar 2013: 94–95). Ignatius incorporates the Thomistic metaphysics of secondary causes and the analogy of being "so that an internal synthesis of the two main currents flowing side by side in the Middle Ages—'scholasticism' and 'mysticism'—could succeed" (Balthasar 2013: 96).

Method of the *Exercises*

Balthasar (2019: 23–24) believes that the goal of the *Exercises* is to attain Ignatian indifference at all costs. From a negative perspective, this means overcoming "disordered attachments" that compel people to seek what is attractive and avoid what is unpleasant. These disordered passions originate in natural inclinations: for instance, it is natural to prefer health over illness or a long life over a short one (SE 23). As seen here, Ignatius initially adopts an anthropological criterion, only to then apply a transcendent and theological criterion: "seeking and finding the will of God" (SE 1).

At the beginning of the second week, the vision of God presented in the Foundation of the *Exercises* (SE 23) takes concrete form in the figure of Christ in the Meditation on the Call of an Earthly King (SE 91). This meditation calls us to follow Christ in the state of life that He has chosen for us (SE 135) (Servais 1996: 131). Balthasar's comprehensive book, *The Christian State of Life*, which examines the various states of life within the Church, opens with an emphasis on the importance of this meditation:

> The sole purpose of this book is to present a comprehensive meditation on the foundations and background of St. Ignatius' meditation on the Call of Christ and on the response we must give if we want to "give greater proof of [our] love" (SE 97), and on the choice He clearly demands of us. (Balthasar 1983: 9)

Balthasar's identification of the meditation on the Call of the King (Christ) as the key starting point for the process of the *Exercises* stems from his interpretation of Ignatius' work as a theological "reduction." In Balthasar's view, Ignatius distills faith into a movement of love directed toward the person of Jesus—the retreatant hears the call to follow Him and responds by abandoning everything to do so. This interpretation of the word of God as a personal call to each individual contrasts fundamentally with that found in medieval treatises on perfection (Balthasar 1967: 81). All subsequent meditations on the life of Jesus throughout the retreat are intended to be understood in this same spirit.

The path to indifference—a precondition for making a good choice—leads through learning to manage alternating moods, i.e., states of desolation and consolation. In cases of clear, disordered attachment, the retreatant should pray for the opposite of the attachment (SE 16). Balthasar examines the Ignatian rules for the discernment of spirits in the third volume of *Theo-logic* which is entirely devoted to the person of the Holy Spirit (Balthasar 2005: 351–354). He notes that these rules form the first nucleus of the *Exercises*, born from Ignatius' experiences in Manresa, where he encountered both consolation and a sense of hopelessness. A particularly important experience for Ignatius was his vision of the bright serpent, which, while bringing consolation, also appeared alongside discouraging thoughts about his new lifestyle after his conversion (Loyola 2022: 47–48). Ignatius classified this experience as desolation precisely based on the discouragement it fostered regarding spiritual matters. This classification of desolation aligns with the second rule of the first week, which distinguishes between desolation and consolation (SE 315).

Moreover, the first set of rules provides important guidance from Ignatius on how to behave in times of desolation: one should remain steadfast and act against (*agere contra*) desolation (SE 318–319, 323–324), seek the root cause of the desolation (SE 320, 322), and learn

to identify the tactics of Satan and the means of defense against him (SE 325–327). In turn, the second set of rules alerts us to the subtle ambiguities of consolations, and encourage us to examine the purpose of the consolation (SE 331) and the "course of thought" it inspires (SE 333). For Satan aims at his own ends (SE 332), makes himself known "by his serpentine tail" (SE 334), and is distinguishable from the good spirit by his noisy and unsettling actions (SE 337). Ignatius also acknowledges the existence of consolations that come directly from God, without any prior cause (SE 330), while urging vigilance when God's direct action has ceased so that one is not deceived by some false appearance of good (SE 336) (Balthasar 2005: 352).

Balthasar combines the art of discerning spirits in particular situations with the Meditation on the Two Banners (SE 136–147; Balthasar 1997: 115). He points out that the two opposing forces represented in this meditation—Christ in humility and Lucifer in pride—are a reference to the Augustinian vision of the struggle between the *civitas Dei* (Christ's heavenly kingdom) and the *civitas terrena* (the demonic kingdom of Babylon), although here reduced to the question of inner attitude towards God (Balthasar 2019: 127).

As the moment of choice draws near, the struggle to achieve true indifference becomes even more intense. What may prove helpful at this stage is the Ignatian meditation on The Three Classes of Men (SE 149–157). Balthasar considers the second pair as a key reference point. This pair has acquired a considerable amount of money through less-than-honest means. Now they want to rid themselves of attachment to this money, but in such a way that does not require giving up the money itself, i.e., in a way in which God is to follow their will. The third pair, in turn, also want to free themselves from their ill-gotten wealth, but they wish to do so "in such a way that they desire neither to retain nor to relinquish the sum acquired" (SE 155). Their decision is guided only by a desire to act for the greater glory of God. Recognizing the difficulty of this detachment for human nature, Ignatius advises asking the Lord to strip us of wealth "against the flesh" (SE 157; Balthasar 2019: 143). The call to the boundless love of God is simultaneously an invitation to receive God's love towards the one who is called. Each special vocation comes with its own specific form and grace of response. As Balthasar notes, only from this perspective can one fully understand another

Ignatian meditation on preparing for choice, titled The Three Kinds of Humility (SE 165–168). The first level of humility requires the retreatant to refuse to commit a mortal sin, even to save their own life; the second involves a similar refusal, even regarding venial sin. The third, "the most perfect kind of humility," entails choosing poverty with Christ, who was poor, rather than riches, and choosing insults with Christ, who bore them, rather than honors (SE 167). Balthasar emphasizes that this level of humility is a grace granted in response to a special divine invitation. While sharing in Christ's sufferings is a universal aspect of every Christian to some degree, only a select few receive an understanding of this mystery as a guiding principle for their lives (Balthasar 1983: 429–430).

Choice of the state of life

Modern times are not conducive to making lifelong commitments. Faced with an uncertain future, many people, especially the young, find it difficult to make an irreversible commitment or to invest their entire future in something. The *Spiritual Exercises* provide a counterpoint to this state of indeterminacy that characterizes what sociologist Zygmunt Bauman terms "liquid modernity" (2006). At their very center, Ignatius of Loyola places the act of choice (SE 135).

The theme of choice also necessitates an explanation of the role of different states of life within the Church. In his work *The Theology of History*, Balthasar (1996) introduces an organic metaphor that defines Christ as the divine Head of the Church and Christians as the members of His body. In Christ's Church there are two fundamental states: "the state in Christ" and "the state in the world." These two states are intrinsically connected, like parts of a single body—they work together but remain distinct (Balthasar 1996, 104–106). The aspect of transcendence is emphasized by the "state of being in God" in which existence is subordinated to Christ's presence and is manifested in the act of following Him.

> A disciple should follow in His footsteps. He should remain in time and not rise above time. He should strive to understand the signs of the times and the message they contain, without wishing to titanically impose his own self-invented meaning on time. He/she should accept the content and interpretation of one's life, and even simply one's time, as being at

> all times given by God, without trying to own them in a Promethean manner. He/she must bear in mind that the basic spiritual state in which meaning emerges and becomes real at all is human openness towards God: faith and prayer. (Balthasar 1996: 107)

The most perfect model of this attitude is Mary, whose entire life was marked by devotion and did not equate to passivity, but rather to a continual effort to remain faithful to God's message. Complementing the transcendent dimension of this life is the aspect of immanence, represented by the "state of being in the world," which is responsible for progress in a vertical and horizontal sense (Balthasar 1996: 111–117).

The theology of states of life within the Church is developed by both Speyr and Balthasar. Johan Roten (1991: 76) argues that Balthasar is significantly influenced by Speyr in this regard, a fact Balthasar himself acknowledges on many occasions (Balthasar 1994: 13; 2004: 17). Speyr identifies three states of life to which a choice in retreat can lead: the state of the evangelical counsels, the lay priesthood, and the married state (Speyr 1986: 32–36). According to Speyr, "It is inconceivable that the *Spiritual Exercises* should lead to a decision to adopt an egotistical life plan. If the decision is made in faith, it will unfailingly lead to a life of faith and apostolate" (Speyr 1986: 36). Each of these states is a path to Christian perfection, though the preferred path is that of the evangelical counsels: chastity, poverty, and obedience. Speyr sees the source of the choice of the evangelical counsels in the attitude of Mary, who says "yes" to the Angel, and the Christian origins of the marital state in the obedience of Joseph, who, influenced by the words of the Angel, does not dismiss Mary (Speyr 1986: 83).

A decision made in the right way leads a person to change their relationship with God, with others, and with themselves. Their relationship with God becomes more vibrant, intimate and committed. In terms of relationships with others, the question of mutual responsibility for the development of Christian life becomes more apparent. Finally, in the relationship with oneself, this change involves moving from an ego-centered existence to one of objective service—toward becoming someone who has been called by God (Speyr 1986: 37–38).

Balthasar's exploration of states of life begins with Ignatian meditation on Christ's call and the response we are called to make

(SE 97). At the core of Christian life, Christ's call is a call to love, expressed as a commandment of love (Balthasar 1983: 25). Balthasar identifies three stages in responding to this call: a call to a general state within the Church; a call to a specific state within the Church; and, ultimately, a call to a specific situation within a particular state (Balthasar 1983: 392–393).

Following St. Ignatius, Balthasar notes that during the *Exercises*, there are three moments of choice (SE 175–177)—three spiritual states in which decisions can be made. The first moment represents a clear intervention from God, which leaves no doubt as to the direction of His call. The second moment involves various spiritual stirrings, i.e., such as consolations or desolations, in which case the rules of discernment of spirits become an essential tool. The third moment is a quieter time when the mind relies on its natural faculties. According to Balthasar, a vocation to the priesthood or religious life is mainly linked to the first or second moments of choice, while a general call to the secular state is more related to the third moment (Balthasar 1983: 451–456).

Conclusions

The question of making a definitive and unchangeable choice of one's state of life, which Balthasar and Speyr identify as a key moment in the *Exercises*, seems to remain highly relevant today. The increasing secularization, the rise of egocentric individualism, and the fear of making firm commitments have led to fewer and fewer people choosing a life according to the evangelical counsels, whether in the priesthood or in indissoluble marriage. There is also a growing lack of perseverance in maintaining an "unchangeable" choice, which is reflected in rising divorce rates, withdrawals from religious orders, and departures from the priesthood. The situation of individuals betrayed or abandoned by a spouse is especially problematic.

Meanwhile, a number of studies (Komorowska-Pudło 2017; Zbyrad 2021; Marks, Dollahite 2016; Mahoney 2010) show that higher levels of religiosity correlate positively with both the greater durability of marriages and an increased sense of happiness and satisfaction in married life. Therefore, the pedagogy of the *Spiritual Exercises* is significant in that, through acquiring an attitude of Ignatian

indifference, they help individuals develop a more mature attitude to life. Most importantly, they create a space in which God can act, preparing the retreatant to make a sound, well-informed choice.

Although the *Spiritual Exercises*, as a somewhat exclusive form of Christian education practiced by a relatively small group of laypeople, are obviously not a cure for the aforementioned ills, they remain an important resource. In addition to the pervasive atmosphere of individualistic liberalism, the personal disposition of the retreatant and the competence of the director of the exercises are important. This leads to the conclusion that the demands placed on those leading the *Exercises*—in terms of their knowledge, interpersonal skills, and religious experience—are very high. To reiterate, in the language of St. Ignatius, Balthasar, and Speyr, the ability to discern spirits should be considered a key competence of the leader of the *Exercises*. This skill should also be acquired by the retreatant in order for them to be able to make the right choice.

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