



# Shame, guilt and exclamation of wonder. Integrating psychology, theology and ignatian spirituality

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## 1. Introduction

The starting point for our considerations could be the anthropological turn, which took place in the Church especially during the Second Vatican Council, which is also the focal point of Ignatian spirituality and psychology. Man has become the way of the Church<sup>1</sup>, which means an interest in the interiority of the human being, his psychological conditioning (psychology) or inner movements (Spiritual Exercises). From the whole range of possibilities that the *Spiritual Exercises* of Ignatius of Loyola open up to us, we will choose just one element — an element which is associated with the First Week, namely the issue of spiritual conversion. This point is particularly interesting due to the fact that the processes of human's moral development are a subject of study for both moral theology and the psychology of moral development. For this reason, the issue of spiritual conversion is ideal for integrating psychology, theology and Ignatian spirituality.

St Ignatius places the individual experience of the person making the Spiritual Exercises (the exercitant) at the center of attention — convinced as he is that God speaks to the concrete human being (cf. Annotations) and leads him to discover the most important truths about his life. Even though it is the individual who is at the center of interest, it is also he himself who discovers God, by whom he was created and to whom he is heading in a natural way once all the obstacles on this path are removed (sins and disordered attachments). In other words, St Ignatius begins with man but ends with God.

The First Week of the Spiritual Exercises can be a suitable place for our consideration because it lays the foundation for a healthy life, for a life that is ordered, free of disordered attachments. This First Week deals with all the moral sensitivity and emotionality

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<sup>1</sup> Cf. JOHN PAUL II, Encyclic Letter *Redemptor hominis*, (4 of March 1979), nro.14.

which is so carefully studied by psychology today. Can St Ignatius say something new here? Perhaps it is for contemporary psychology to subject Ignatius's First Week dynamic to more thorough analysis? Can spiritual experiences — consolations and desolations, sins, disordered affections, in the language of St Ignatius — be better translated with the aid of contemporary psychology? We will try to answer these questions in what follows.

## 2. The aim of the First Week

The aim of the First Week is defined precisely in the introductions to both the *First* and the *Second exercises*. In the first exercise, I am to ask «for a personal shame and confusion as I see how many have been damned on account of a single mortal sin» (SE 48), while in the second, I should ask «for mounting and intense sorrow, and tears for my sins» (SE 55). Whereas in the first case a concrete emotion — shame — is mentioned, in the second it is difficult to identify a precise emotion which is to be desired: it is a kind of a mixture of many emotions that are to cause pain and lead to tears for personal sins. Undoubtedly, St Ignatius refers to a very concrete spiritual experience, which, despite negative emotions (shame, pain, sorrow, etc.) in its content, is in its essence a spiritual consolation, as we will show.

St Ignatius leads the exercitant towards a general confession and *contrition* for sins. It is not easy to translate these religious concepts into the language of modern psychology. However, I do not intend to draw on the whole of psychology here; rather, I will focus on a few threads which seem to me both useful and usable.

First, let me present some details concerning the First Week itself, because even contrition for sins which we have mentioned does not appear directly in the Spiritual Exercises.

### 2.1. Perfect and imperfect contrition

Undoubtedly, in the First Week, St. Ignatius leads an exercitant towards a perfect contrition. It is an echo of the theology close to Ignatian times, when fierce disputes took place around the topic of confession and the question of perfect and imperfect contrition. The intriguing fact is that St Ignatius avoids the notion of contrition in the text of the exercises for the first week; it is mentioned in passing in Annotation 4 (cf. SE 4; but — what is important — a fruit of the week is given there) and in Addition 1 (SE 87). It looks like St Ignatius avoided theological notions, which were dominated by scholastic controversies and disputes, and there was much to avoid!

Perfect contrition (Lat. *contritio*, from *contero* — to crush) is a repentance because of the love of God. An imperfect repentance (Lat. *attritio*, from *attero* — to break) results from much more prosaic reasons, especially due to the fear of eternal damnation in hell. These terms were already used by the early scholasticism of the 12<sup>th</sup> centuries. Probably, the Fourth Council of the Lateran (1215) contributed to taking this issue into account, initiating the obligation of an annual confession. All theologians before the

12<sup>th</sup> century require perfect contrition on the part of a sinner, because it is only perfect contrition which removes sins and eternal punishment. An imperfect contrition, *attritio*, only prepares for experiencing grace and a real repentance. One of the proponents of such view was St. Thomas Aquinas. However, the practice of an annual confession forced certain concessions because it posed a problem: how can ignorant people be persuaded to something so subtle as repentance due to God's love? The event which forced not only theologians, but Church teaching (Magisterium) to take a more explicit stand was the Reformation. «Luther decidedly negates all the earlier disputes on *attritio* and *contritio*. The first in only “hypocrisy”, which makes a human an even greater sinner. The second comes after, when a human has already received grace»<sup>2</sup>.

For Luther the most important element is a belief in Christ's forgiveness. There is no need of either confession or of a priest's mediation, it is possible to confess even to lay persons! «Firmly believe yourself to have been absolved, and you will truly be absolved, whatever there may be of contrition» — said one of Luther's theses condemned by the papal bull *Exsurge Domine*<sup>3</sup>.

In response, the Council of Trent repeated the necessity of a detailed confession of sins to a priest and the importance of perfect contrition, and it took a middle position towards imperfect contrition:

«Illam vero contritionem imperfectam quae attritio dicitur, quoniam vel ex turpitudinis peccati consideratione vel ex gehennae et poenarum metu communiter concipitur, si voluntatem peccandi excludat cum spe veniae, declarat non solum non fecere hominem hypocritam et magis peccatorem, verum etiam donum Dei esse et Spiritus Sancti impulsus, non adhuc quidem inhabitantis, sed tantum moventis, quo poenitens adjutus viam sibi ad justitiam parat. Et quanvis sine sacramento poenitentiae per se ad justificationem perducere peccatorem nequeat, tamen eum ad Dei gratiam in sacramento poenitentiae impetrandam disponit»<sup>4</sup>.

It was only after this Council that a real war broke out, in a dispute where neither words nor other means were spared. This led to a Papal intervention, when in 1667, Alexander VII, without condemning any of the parties, insisted that all who would speak on this subject, including the cardinals, should cease to denigrate their opponents: «Before the Holy See takes a stand, let them not try to apply any theological

<sup>2</sup> J. DELUMEAU, *L'aveu et le pardon: Les difficultés de la confession XIIIe-XVIIIe siècle*, Fayard, Paris 1990, 55-56.

<sup>3</sup> Cf. *Ibid.*, 56.

<sup>4</sup> COUNCIL OF TRENT, *Session XIV*, Chapter IV «On Contrition» (November 25, 1551). English translation: «as to that imperfect contrition, which is called attrition, because it is commonly conceived either from the consideration or the turpitude of sin, or from the fear of hell and of punishment, it declares that if, with the hope of pardon, it exclude the wish to sin, it not only does not make a man a hypocrite and a greater sinner, but that it is even a gift of God, and an impulse of the Holy Ghost — who does not, indeed, as yet dwell in the penitent, but only moves him, whereby the penitent, being assisted, prepares a way for himself unto justice. And although this (*attrition*) cannot of itself, without the Sacrament of Penance, conduct the sinner to justification, yet does it dispose him to obtain the grace of God in the Sacrament of Penance».

«censorship or express offensive or contemptuous opinions about one side or the other»<sup>5</sup>. Eventually, victory tilted to the side of imperfect repentance («attrition»). Already at the time of Alexander VII it was the most widespread opinion, and it was sealed by the success of the moral theology of St Alphonsus Liguori. The pastoral arguments prevailed — in order to attract as many penitents as possible to confession a softening of the practice was required.

St Ignatius corresponds in a subtle way to this long and complex Church tradition. With this background, we can better evaluate and appreciate the Ignatian pedagogy. The intuition of St Ignatius is most properly expressed by the request for a fruit, with which we are expected to begin every meditation on sin (cf. SE 48, 55, 65). It is evident that St Ignatius wants in all sort of ways to lead the exercitant to a perfect contrition, and only if this fails — to an imperfect contrition. Probably, for that reason, the meditation on hell, namely the last punishment for deadly sins, comes only at the end of this week.

Further light on the aim of the First Week is given by the concluding colloquies (SE 53, 54, 61, 63). Clearly, the atmosphere of an intimate relation with God, with Christ in particular and with the Holy Mother of God, predominates. These colloquies are full of thanksgiving towards God for His mercy, gratitude for His patience and for keeping the exercitant alive, and they are directed towards the future. It is clear that the driving force of this conversion is not a fear of punishment for sins, but love towards God.

Another most crucial confirmation of this intuition is to be found in the rules for the discernment of spirits, where we find «sheds tears which lead to the love of our Lord, whether these arise from grief over sins» (SE 316) which St Ignatius defines in terms of spiritual consolation and free gifts of grace.

The experience of one's personal sinfulness, as something positive and full of spiritual consolations, is a surprising fruit of the First Week of the Spiritual Exercises.

## 2.2. Repentance for the love of God

It is worthwhile to focus for a moment on the «techniques» of St Ignatius, which aim to arouse repentance in the exercitant. St Ignatius means a perfect contrition, but he does not avoid using means which would typically lead to imperfect contrition. These techniques we will later compare with the contemporary models for arousing moral emotions (self-conscious emotions), and on their basis we may better understand a problem that St Ignatius poses for contemporary psychology, which does not offer an appropriate language for expressing Ignatian terms.

First of all, we are surprised by an extraordinary pedagogical and psychological sensibility on the part of St. Ignatius, which prepares an exercitant for experiencing the truth of personal sin in a systematic and gradual way. An exercitant is led there by suggestive comparisons, which aim to arouse a feeling of shame and repentance. The series of scenes in the first exercise — the first sin of the angels, the second sin of Adam

<sup>5</sup> H. J. D. DENZINGER, *Enchiridion Symbolorum*, Barcinone 1957, 1146.

and Eve and finally, a deadly sin of any man — are the prelude to entering into oneself, which takes place in the *Second Exercise*. First, St Ignatius creates a big picture for the contemplation of the truth about a sin in order to highlight the mystery of a human wickedness (lat. *mysterium iniquitatis*).

In the *Second Exercise*, the further levels of various comparisons are mentioned: starting from a personal history (SE 56; *regarding year by year or period by period*) and the ugliness of a personal sin (SE 57 and SE 38: 4th and 5th point), and finishing with the comparison of ourselves to all other people, to the angels in heaven and saints in paradise, and finally to God Himself (SE 58, 59, 60).

St Ignatius applies both a quantitative approach (recalling **all** personal sins; comparing oneself to other people, to saints and to angels) and a qualitative approach (considering the **ugliness** of a sin as well as comparing it with the **virtues** of angels and saints and the **qualities** of God) in order to evoke in the exercitant an almost physical explosion — an exclamation of wonder (cf. SE 60). St Ignatius refers to all the powers of a human being — his reason, emotions and will, as well as his sense of justice; but he does not exclude aesthetic sensitivity, as for example in using a very suggestive and repulsion-evoking picture of a wound or ulcer, from which vile poison flows, as well as corporal ugliness and depravity (cf. SE 58; *I look upon all the corruption and foulness of my body; I look at myself as though I were a running sore, from which many sins and evils have flowed, and the most vile poison*). In other words, St Ignatius encourages us to applying all possible means to achieve the aim of this exercise: a perfect contrition.

In the meditation on a personal sin proposed by St Ignatius, he focuses on comparing oneself with other human beings. It seems difficult not to relate this simple method to the psychoanalytic theory of Heinz Kohut in his self-psychology<sup>6</sup>. Self-psychology describes the formation of a mature self through the use of the so-called self-objects. The essence of this process is a simple mechanism of comparing oneself with others, which accompanies a human from the first years of life and which is never fully abandoned, though obviously it loses its original primitive character. From the very beginning, a human being wants to be the same as others (alter-ego needs), and even wants to be better than others (grandiose-exhibitionistic needs) or at least possess omnipotent allies (need for an omnipotent idealized figure). Self-objects — as Kohut defines these meaningful persons in human life — are like mirrors, which serve to build self-esteem and healthy relations with others.

St Ignatius uses this mechanism of comparing oneself (these mirrors), and — to be more precise — he reverses it to arouse feelings of shame, sadness and repentance in an exercitant. It means that he is not like others, but is worse, unworthy of relations with them and worthy of condemnation. The personality disintegration of an exercitant does not take place here only, due to the fact that a positive element appears here, which re-

<sup>6</sup> Cf. H. KOHUT, *The Analysis of the Self. A Systematic Approach to the Psychoanalytic Treatment of Narcissistic Personality Disorders*, International University Press, New York 1971; ID., *How Does Analysis Cure?*, University of Chicago Press, Chicago – London 1984.

evaluate all these negative comparisons: a relation with loving and merciful God. An exercitant discovers to his amazement that he is a sinner, but a sinner loved by God who forgives all his faults.

### 2.3. Astonishment – forgiveness

The fifth point of the second exercise explodes like a bomb in the *Spiritual Exercises: An exclamation of wonder, with intense feeling...* (SE 60). It is a climax and a turning point at the same time: all the dynamic of discovering one's sinfulness, which was so meticulously prepared, at the moment of highest intensity, is turned upside down: instead of rejection — acceptance, instead of punishment — love and being kept alive, instead of cursing — prayer and intercession. Using Kohut's language, one could say that all self-objects (like mirrors of truth) that previously served to make me feel worthless, now serve to keep me alive.

Personally, this point in the Second Exercise reminds me of the last meditation of *Spiritual Exercises* «the contemplation to obtain love» (SE 230-237); even more, it is a mini-contemplation to obtain love. The internal logic is very similar: all creatures — angels, saints, the whole earth — allow me to live and support me, although I am worthy of condemnation and of hell. In the midst of the experience of sin, the sinner discovers that he is loved. Here is a specific version of the exclamation from the Easter Vigil *Exultet: O felix culpa!*

It is extremely important to emphasize the relationship with God — the human self can endure such a measure of negative truth about itself only because it discovers the loving look on the part of the other, God. God, who forgives, turns out to be the perfect image of my Father (God the Father), my alter-ego (Jesus Christ), my advocate (Holy Spirit) — this is the kernel of the experience of conversion. If a human being discovers that he is a sinner but is loved by God, he experiences exactly what is described with such clarity in the return of the prodigal son (Luke 15), which became the basis for two important documents of John Paul II on the mercy of God<sup>7</sup>.

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Concluding this part of our reflection, I would like to draw attention to the extraordinary drama of the First Week: from a wide vision, we go to the mystery of the human heart in which we discover the truth about mercy that includes all existing reality. Theology intertwines here with psychology in the strict sense, so that it is difficult to distinguish one from the other.

<sup>7</sup> Cf. JOHN PAUL II, Encyclical Letter *Dives in Misericordia* (30 November 1980); Apostolic exhortation *Reconciliatio et Paenitentia* (2 December 1984).

### 3. Self-conscious emotions

In this part of our considerations, I would like to go a bit more into the field of psychology and ask how psychology can help us understand the internal drama that take place in the first week of Spiritual Exercises. Of course, the notions of contrition for sins, repentance, conversion or relationship with God do not belong to the language of psychology, but the question of moral development or moral emotions is of interest to psychology. Precisely *moral* emotions can be an interesting point connecting psychology with the SE elements discussed here.

From the wide range of possible psychological theories that relate to these issues, we chose the theory of Michael Lewis regarding self-conscious emotions<sup>8</sup>. The theory is extremely simple but suggestive. It is true that the author is essentially limited to four feelings (two positive and two negative), but in this way he creates a fairly convincing map of possible experiences related to transgression of moral norms and rules. What is more, it concerns two basic feelings connected with violating moral norms: shame and guilt.

#### 3.1. A cognitive-attribitional theory

Lewis defines his approach to self-conscious emotions as «a cognitive-attribitional theory». Let us present briefly the central points of this theory. Lewis distinguishes three fundamental elements in his model:

- a. Standards, Rules and Goals (SRGs )
- b. Evaluation (Success or Failure)
- c. Attribution of self (Global or Specific)

The first feature of the model has to do with the Standards, Rules and Goals which govern human behaviour. Standards, Rules and Goals are defined as a «beliefs about what is acceptable for others and for ourselves in regard to standards having to do with actions, thoughts, and feelings»<sup>9</sup> which are acquired through culturalization in a particular society or group<sup>10</sup>. The second feature of the model — «the evaluation of one's actions, thoughts, and feelings in terms of SRGs» — is the cognitive process that serves as a stimulus for self-conscious emotions. If evaluation is positive (success) there follow emotions of hubris or pride, if evaluation is negative (failure), there follow emotions of shame or guilt. In any case, evaluation must be internal (vs external), it means that people attribute the resultant success or failure of the SRGs to themselves. The third

<sup>8</sup> Cf. M. LEWIS, «Self-conscious emotions: Embarrassment, pride, shame, and guilt», in M. LEWIS; J. M. HAVILAND-JONES; L. FELDMAN BARRETT (eds.), *Handbook of Emotions*, Guilford Press, New York 2008, 742-756. See also: M. LEWIS, *Shame. The Exposed Self*, The Free Press, New York 1992.

<sup>9</sup> M. LEWIS, «Self-conscious emotions: Embarrassment, pride, shame, and guilt», 626.

<sup>10</sup> Cf. *Ibid.* 697.

feature of the model is attribution to the Self which can be «global» or «specific». Lewis explains that in global attribution a person focuses on the total self: «for any particular behavior, some individuals, some of the time, are likely to focus on the totality of the self; they use such self-evaluative phrases as “Because I did this, I am bad (or good)”»<sup>11</sup>. In contrast, in specific attribution, a person focuses on specific actions of the self. Lewis comments: «It is not the total self that has done something wrong or good; instead particular specific behaviors are judged. At such times as these, individuals will use such evaluative phrases as “What I did was wrong, and I mustn’t do it again”»<sup>12</sup>.

Lewis’s model presents these three sets of activities or processes which lead to four self-conscious emotional states. Shame is a consequence of a failure evaluation relative to the SRGs when the individual makes a global evaluation of the self; similarly, hubris (or pridefulness) is a consequence of success and global evaluation of the self. Guilt is a consequence of a failure evaluation of the self’s specific action; similarly, pride is the consequence of a positive evaluation of specific action of the self. For our presentation it could be useful to examine more specifically what Lewis means by the two main negative emotions: shame and guilt.

As Lewis explains, shame «is a highly negative and painful state that also results in the disruption of ongoing behavior, confusion in thought, and an inability to speak. The physical action accompanying shame is a shrinking of the body, as though to disappear from the eye of the self or the other»<sup>13</sup>. What is essential in shame is not exactly the fruit of any specific situation, but rather the effect of an individual’s interpretation of the event which can be either public or private<sup>14</sup>.

In contrast, guilt lacks the negative power of shame and does not lead to confusion and to loss of action. «It is not self-destructing, and as such can be viewed as a more useful emotion in motivating specific and corrective action»<sup>15</sup>. In guilt we see people reacting positively and trying to repair or correct their action.

### ***3.2. Shame, guilt and the Spiritual Exercises***

Two moral emotions — shame and guilt — are present in the Spiritual Exercises, even though they require some explanation, especially shame, which, as it was presented above in the approach of a contemporary psychologist, is a very negative and destructive emotion. Why does St Ignatius expect an exercitant to experience such negative and self-destructive emotions?

<sup>11</sup> Ibid. 627-628.

<sup>12</sup> Ibid. 628.

<sup>13</sup> Ibid. 629.

<sup>14</sup> Cf. Ibid. 629.

<sup>15</sup> Ibid. 629.

### 3.2.1. Shame

Shame appears in the Spiritual Exercises **only** in the context of the first week (por. SE 48, 50, 74). St Ignatius expects an exercitant in the *First Meditation* to ask for «a personal shame and confusion» (SE 48), and in the first point — meditating on the sin of the angels — to «feel all the more shame and confusion» (SE 50). The stress on experiencing shame is enforced even more by the second additional note for the first week, where St Ignatius encourages the exercitant immediately on waking each morning to evoke suitable images which enforce this experience of shame and confusion. For example, to imagine «a knight coming before the king and his court, filled with shame and confusion for serious offences against the Lord from whom in the past he has received many gifts and many favours» (SE 74). According to Brendan Callaghan, this image corresponds to what a contemporary psychology perceives as a characteristic attribute of shame: «to be exposed in public as one who has failed»<sup>16</sup>. Callaghan, trying to explain the intention of St Ignatius, refers directly to a similar differentiation used by Lewis, namely the difference between guilt and shame<sup>17</sup>. However, he unnecessarily introduces the distinction between a pathological and healthy shame. In my opinion, St Ignatius refers to shame due to the fact that it is a direct experience of being condemned, doomed to eternal condemnation. In such an experience of shame, all the primitive force of that experience is accentuated, which makes that a human being want to disappear from the earth, as not having a right to live there, as no longer worthy of existence. However, someone who is able to experience such shame (condemnation) can much more easily get to the truth about salvation and the impossibility of deserving salvation. Over concern with the distinction between healthy and unhealthy, between pathological and normal shame, can unfortunately lead to a weakened understanding of the Ignatian terms<sup>18</sup>.

My stress on the psychological depth of the shame experience in the First Week can prove useful in translating Ignatian intuitions into the modern language. Modern sensibility is often far removed from the image of a knight or a king, an experience of sin, a vision of hell or condemnation; but the self-conscious emotion of shame is what will allow people to experience the whole depth contained in these images and concepts. Furthermore, it is the intense experience of shame that gives these images their depth — because, what is hell if not the experience of evil which we deliberately allowed and from which there is no appeal, which cannot be repaired?...

<sup>16</sup> *Diccionario de espiritualidad ignaciana*, vol. II, 1767.

<sup>17</sup> Cf. *Diccionario de espiritualidad ignaciana*, vol. II, 1767.

<sup>18</sup> The danger of pathology is of course important and should be taken into account, but this should be addressed at the time of accepting candidates for the Spiritual Exercises. If someone is deeply disturbed or mentally ill, he should not be allowed to undertake the Spiritual Exercises. For such people with a too fragile personality structure, the experience of shame can lead to deep complications and even to disintegration of the personality. But this is a topic for a separate article.

### 3.2.2. *Guilt*

St Ignatius makes use of the sense of guilt, even though it does not occupy a central place in the logic of the first week. As noticed by the commentators of the Spiritual Exercises, the guilt appears also **only** in the first week of the Spiritual Exercises, also in the meditation concerning consideration over sin. In number 54, St. Ignatius adds, in the context of a final prayer after first meditation (colloquy),: «Cuando pidiendo alguna gracia, cuando **culpandose** por algun mal hecho» («at times asking for some favour, at other times accusing oneself of something badly done»). This very specific context — a final prayer or colloquy — shows that St Ignatius encourages frequent «accusing oneself of something badly done», since such a prayer, as outlined in Spiritual Exercises 53-54, is to finish each meditation of the first week. As can be easily noticed, such a notion of «guilt» corresponds exactly to what Lewis describes as a self-emotion – guilt. However, the context of prayer with Jesus hanging on the Cross accentuates that the aim is not to arouse negative emotion in itself but quite the contrary, to change it to positive action. In his commentary, Michael Ivens distinguishes: «Here, at least in the third question, the focus shifts from past to future, and from “shame and confusion” to the desire to serve. Note also that these questions represent the typical movement of Ignatian response from the affective to the effective, from the response of the heart to, eventually, the response of “doing”»<sup>19</sup>. This is exactly what Lewis see in guilt.

The logic of guilt can probably also be noticed in the examination of conscience, which St Ignatius encourages in the Second Exercise of the first week, when he asks the exercitant to «call to memory all the sins of a lifetime, looking back on them from year to year or from one period to another (...) considering the intrinsic foulness and malice of each deadly sin committed, quite apart from its being forbidden» (SE 56-57). As we can easily guess, this «quantitative» approach is in order to lead to more intense experiences of repentance, taking «quality» into account.

Why talk about guilt today? Because we live in a culture that wants to erase guilt from the face of the earth. «We live in a society in which we can say we disagree with someone, but can no longer say that he or she is wrong, let alone that he or she is bad. From the politician to the intellectual, we are all aided in avoiding contrition, remorse, responsibility, and the need to make reparation»<sup>20</sup>.

### 3.3. *Exclamation of wonder*

So far, we have tried to show how a contemporary perception of the psychology of shame and guilt can be very useful for a person giving and practicing the Spiritual Exercises. However, a problem appears when by using these psychological notions we try to

<sup>19</sup> M. IVENS, *Understanding the Spiritual Exercises*, Leominster 1998, 54.

<sup>20</sup> D.L. CARVETH; J.H. CARVETH, «Fugitives from Guilt, Postmodern De-Moralization and the New Hysterias»: *American Imago* 60 (2003) 475.

explain a psychic mechanism of transformation, which is to take place in accordance with the logic of the above-mentioned 5<sup>th</sup> point of the *Second Exercises* (SE 60). How can we to explain this emotional transformation which is to take place in an exercitant? As far as the moral side of this dynamism is concerned, it resembles a peculiar «salto mortale». It is impossible to go so rapidly from self-destruction to self-affirmation, from hatred to self-love, from deep negative emotions to positive ones. At least, Lewis' theory does not propose any solution.

### 3.3.1. *Psychology of forgiveness*

Among contemporary psychological theories we can find one which justifies a psychological possibility of such a «salto mortale», but it will be easy to accuse it of taking its inspiration precisely from Christianity. I refer to the so-called psychology of forgiveness<sup>21</sup>. The essential transformation, which takes place in an act of unconditional forgiveness, is just as radical a change of emotional attitude: from hatred it changes to love and empathy, from a desire for revenge to abandoning revenge.

Evereth Worthington — one of the leading figure of psychology of forgiveness — proposes the following definition

«forgiveness is defined as the emotive substitution of the hot negative emotions, anger and fear, that follow a wrong or a perceived offence, or of the cold negative emotions, unforgiveness and indifference, that follow rumination about a transgression, with positive emotions like disinterested love, empathy, compassion, or even romantic love»<sup>22</sup>.

Actually, this transformation does not concern a culprit (sinner), but a victim of some act of injustice, however, the psychological truth of that emotional transformation is analogical to the one concerning a culprit (sinner), who is capable of accepting an unconditional forgiveness. A meaningful icon of this situation is the already mentioned story of the prodigal son (cf. Lk 15). We refer to this image in order to understand a psychological truth about forgiveness (merciful father and prodigal son) and about the refusal of forgiveness (elder son). We wish here only to indicate the possibility of a psychological deepening of the first week mechanisms, which the psychology of forgiveness offers us.

### 3.3.2. *Lawrence Kohlberg's stages of moral development*

Another path of deepening is the issue of moral maturity, which is required from an exercitant. The above-mentioned emotional transformation can be expected only, relying on Ignatian intuition, from persons «who are making serious progress in the purification of their sins, and who advance from good to better in the service of God our

<sup>21</sup> Cf. M. E. McCULLOUGH; C. V. O. WITVLIET, «The psychology of forgiveness», in C.R. SNYDER; S.J. LOPEZ (eds.), *Handbook of positive psychology*, Oxford University Press, New York 2002, 446-458.

<sup>22</sup> E.L. WORTHINGTON, *Five steps to forgiveness: The art and science of forgiving*, Crown Publishers, New York 2001, 32-33.

Lord» (SE 315), since a characteristic feature of such a person's spiritual consolation is the enormous depth of the emotional experience, which gives such a person «courage and strength, consolations, tears, inspirations and quiet, making things easy and removing all obstacles so that the person may move forward in doing good» (SE 315). Only such a person is able to practice a perfect contrition. A person at a more primitive level of spiritual development, who goes «from one deadly sin to another» (SE 314), is not capable of such emotional sensitivity, and so the spiritual experiences made use of by the good spirit will have a more intellectual character, «causing pricks of conscience and feelings of remorse by means of the natural power of rational moral judgement» (SE 314). At this point, an imperfect repentance is accentuated. In this context, Kohlberg's classical theory of moral development<sup>23</sup> can serve as a psychological background for our considerations. It can easily help us to notice the difference between a morally primitive person (conversion due to a fear of punishment) and a morally mature person (conversion due to more to a sense of the good and love towards people and God). Undoubtedly, the first type of person belongs more to the pre-conventional level, while the second will belong at least to the conventional, if not post-conventional level. This theory can be also used with a great benefit in the Spiritual Exercises.

#### 4. Conclusion

In our considerations we tried to examine the dynamism of the First Week of the Spiritual Exercises, revealing both a certain background of theological considerations (perfect and imperfect contrition) and some psychological mechanisms concerning moral maturity (self-conscious emotions). Finally, we can say that the intuition of St Ignatius does not cease to surprise us, thanks to its psychological and theological depth. Despite the passage of time, the text and the practice of Spiritual Exercises remains an interesting and stimulating subject for study.

<sup>23</sup> Cf. L. KOHLBERG, *Essays on Moral Development*, vol. I: *The Philosophy of Moral Development*, Harper & Row, San Francisco (CA) 1981.

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