

ON PREPARING AFFECTIVE MOVEMENTS IN PRAYER

Diego Alvarez de Paz

Diego Alvarez de Paz (1560-1620) was born in Spain, and was sent as a young Jesuit to Peru. As a student, he had drawn deeply on the early Christian and medieval spiritual traditions, as well as on Jesuit sources and on mystical currents in sixteenth-century Spain. During his time in Peru he taught theology, and also served in various posts of Jesuit government. At the same time he wrote three large Latin treatises on spiritual theology that were published in Lyon between 1608 and 1615. He is the first person to have published extensively on 'affective prayer', and his work was greatly influential on later Jesuit writers.¹

The passage given here comes from **On the Quest of Peace** (*De inquisitione pacis*), book 2, chapter 9. At one level it is presenting a firm position—couched in a rather unfamiliar dualism of heart and head—on the need for preparation in prayer. Prayer is not an end in itself: we undertake it so as to grow in relationship with God and in habits of right action (virtues). At another level, the passage is illustrating in its own way how, in the Ignatian tradition, our desires properly shape the way we read the biblical text. It is presenting one account of what it is for the Word of God to be active among us, in different ways depending on our different situations.

¹ The best source of further information is Joseph de Guibert, *The Jesuits: Their Spiritual Doctrine and Practice*, translated by William J. Young (St Louis: Institute of Jesuit Sources, 1986 [1942]), 264-266. The present extract—taken from the six-volume edition published in Paris by Vivès in 1875-1876 (volume 5, 325-328)—was inspired by a similar publication in *Christus*, no.202 HS (May 2004). Even admirers of Alvarez de Paz note his prolixity and his fondness for elaborate schematizations, and a short extract such as the one presented here needs to be cut for a modern readership. The sub-headings are editorial.

The passage also points up some questions. Alvarez de Paz is certainly not prepared to say that the text means what we want it to mean: the understanding has its place. But he does not resolve the questions about how the affective, subjective response he stresses here relates to the more objective, detached reading that he also advocates. And just as his stress on preparation for prayer might seem too rigorist, too controlling, so his approach to the Scriptures perhaps fails to allow for the possibility that God's work among us through the text might be different from what we consciously desire. The Ignatian prayer for what we want stands in counterpoint with 'the usual preparatory prayer': 'that all my intentions, actions and operations may be directed purely in the service and praise of His Divine Majesty' (Exx 46). Perhaps we need to leave more space for God's unexpected action than Alvarez de Paz seems to allow.

MENTAL PRAYER ... CONSISTS IN TWO THINGS, namely the intellect's thoughts and the will's affective movements. And just as we do preliminary work on the material of our thoughts by reading, so we prepare for the affective movements by an attentiveness to what we are reading, and by focusing within ourselves on our particular need. It is not enough to look ahead at the points for meditation on which we are to reflect, or to recall those points that we had read previously. Rather we must also have in view the affective movement to be elicited from our thoughts on the points. For just as the understanding, unless we offer it something definite to think about, wanders in distraction hither and thither from one thing to another, so the will, if we set nothing specifically before it such as hatred for sin or love for God or something similar, is brought fruitlessly—or with very little enrichment—to different movements, movements of which we have rather little need.

To support this point, a text from Paul can be adduced (though in a transferred sense): 'and if the bugle gives an indistinct sound, who will get ready for battle?'² To explain: if our thoughts (the bugle) are leading us towards an affective movement that is all over the place, because we are not seeking anything established by the thoughts, anything fixed, but rather whatever has first come into our heads, what fruit will we gain from our thoughts?

² 1 Corinthians 14: 18.

But you are not sure about how to prepare the affective movement, because whether we are touched by one movement or another seems to be something beyond our control. To deal with this difficulty, we need to remember that



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prayer ... should be taken up for the sake of perfection and purity of life. For we are not meditating or contemplating for contemplation's sake, but rather so as to emerge humbler, purer, more fervent, more observant of the divine law. This we attain by desires and affective movements on the one hand, and by the holy deeds proper to all the virtues on the other. And we expand the desires and affective movements in the very act of prayer—it is as though they are warmed by the fire of the thoughts; and we do the deeds by making efforts in every aspect of our life. Therefore, the immediate aim of all our meditation is to awaken affective movements in the will—movements from which, as the need arises, deeds of virtue emerge and holy, pure dealings with others come forth.

We notice here also that the meditation which is part of mental prayer must be shaped with a view to persuading ourselves of something. When we are preparing a sermon to be given to the people, we think about the arguments by which the people will be stirred to hatred of sin and love of virtue. And the more we come down to details, and encourage people to escape from *this* sin or to acquire *that* virtue, the more useful our sermon will be, other things being equal. So too, when we withdraw to meditation, we must think about what will stir up, not other people, but ourselves, to the hatred of evil and to the love of a particular good.

It is in this sense, therefore, that we need to prepare the affective movement to be drawn out of our prayer. You, man³ of God, should consider your state of mind and level of virtue, and make an effort to note what you need by way of conquest of some passion or of virtue.

³The original is *vir*, gender specific.

And you should wonder discriminatingly about how you will draw out from the material to be meditated on the affective movements which are appropriate to your position or your need.

For example: perhaps you are a beginner—you have only recently cut yourself away from the thickets of this world, and have not yet wept for your sins abundantly; rather, hatred and grief for your sins are still things you need to seek in order to bring this about. Think, then, a little, when you are preparing the material for meditation by reading, how you might be touched during this thought by detestation for your sins, or how, as you are chipping away at the hardness of your heart with an iron chisel, you can draw out a spark of contrition.

Now let's suppose you have moved forward a bit—you have felt great grief at your sin and poured forth abundant floods of tears, and now you see in yourself that some tiny movement of anger or vainglory or the like is pent up within you, a movement that will later cause you problems. When you are reading the material for meditation, think about how I will stir myself from this particular point to do this passion to death. And you will proceed in the same way if you want to move yourself to some virtue, such as humility, or fraternal charity, or obedience, or something else.

Preparing affective movement, then, is not so much trying to foresee the affective movement that we want from our meditation. After all, this, if we are meditating usefully, will be one and the same over many days, and even if we are changing the points of our meditation every day, we will not be changing the affective movement until the victory over our viciousness, or the acquisition of a virtue, shines forth. It's not, as I say, so much that we foresee the affective movement. Rather we briefly note how we will stir up the movement in ourselves from the particular point that we are thinking about. This is what it means to consider one's particular need regarding amendment of life, and to apply a remedy to it, and to ask in our prayers not for something which has nothing to do with us, but rather for what we need. ...

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Express Desires Repeatedly

Paul was tormented by an angel of Satan, and rather often asked the Lord that he be liberated from it: 'Three times I asked the Lord that it

would leave me'.⁴ Three times—in other words, often. But a person who asked often also desired often—and underwent many and repeated affective movements in keeping with that need. Christ in the garden lay stretched three times in prayer, not with different affective movements but with the same ones. And he prayed three times, saying the same words.⁵ For why else do we think that the same words were said by the Lord, other than to lay open to the Father the same desires of his nature, to have the same affective movements of resignation, and to repeat the same petition? The same thing can be seen in David, who, when he praises God in the Psalms, offers his praise in a thousand ways. When he gives thanks, he stretches out the same affective movement of thanksgiving over many words; when he weeps over his sin, or brings out another affective movement, he does not desist from repeating that same thing in various ways. For the nail is driven in, not by one blow, but by many; the body is refreshed, not by one repast, but by many, so that it can live over a long time; and the earth is watered so that it can bring forth fruit, not by one light shower, but by a great abundance of rain. So we should dispose ourselves for any one virtue, not by one affective movement or interior act, but by several, ardently practised, thus bringing it into our minds. Since, therefore, the same affective movement is to be repeated in prayer, and to become perfect in a way suited to the kind of person we are, it is not so much that we are to foresee it—rather, we are to search out the means by which we will draw it from our meditation.

The reason for understanding these matters in this way is to recognise that it is not what we do, but what we are aiming at, on which we should focus. Indeed, each person is called by God to a different affectivity, corresponding to their state. ...

Complementary Desires

But though all this is so, the just person, following the Lord's call and action, intersperses other affective movements, so that prayer may be more joyfully and usefully grounded. For if we try all the time to stay with one affective movement, then we will become weary at the sheer length of time, or from repetitions of the same act. We will surely find

⁴ 2 Corinthians 12:8 (Vulgate).

⁵ Matthew 26:44.

it bothersome that the same food is being brought to the will's mouth so often; and we will do other deeds of virtue, deeds that are not to be omitted, less often than we should.

In keeping, therefore, with what various thoughts demand, many different affective movements pour forth in one and the same prayer. Now a person feels themselves moved to the praise of God; now it's thanksgiving; now it's the imitation of some virtue that is resplendent in Christ, now the love of God or grief for sin.

For prayer is like a splendid party, where many different foods, prepared in the best possible way, are set before the diners' desires. Truly it is a 'feast of well-aged wines',⁶ where each person finds not only food to meet their needs, but also obtains a range of flavours for their delight. It is like an armoury where there is a diverse range of weapons (in other words many affective movements to virtue) which we brandish at our enemy (namely the whole range of vices). It is like a garden where not only the roses or the violets but all the flowers are born redolent of gentle fragrance; and the field, which the Lord has blessed, is full of fruit.

But these affective movements are to be exercised in such a way that the soul, concerned for its own progress, moves more diligently towards that affective movement which it knows itself more to need, and which it has prepared for in reading. It should order the other affective movements to that one, and its efforts to seek and promote that movement should be greater. After all, it is healthy food that is primarily given to a sick person, food suitable for getting rid of the disease and for the recuperation of health. But it is not just healthy food that is given; other foods are offered too, that will make the healthy food (that must at all costs be taken) gentler and easier to swallow. So we too should be more concerned with that affective movement which we need—that is what will be healthiest for us. But the other movements we will



⁶ Isaiah 25:6.

also use freely, so that we do not get tired of the central one, and sometimes also so that the central one be strengthened by the addition of others.

Affective Movements and Spiritual Progress

I say quite openly that these things I've been speaking about do not come easily. They are being spoken of here, however, so that everyone can know what they should be trying to aim at in prayer: namely to work harder at drawing frequently on the particular affective movement that is most necessary for their state and progress If a person has not managed to fit themselves in to this mode of prayer, they should not for that reason become sad, but rather follow the lead of the Spirit as He is teaching them. They should be striving ever more carefully, not in any way to get stuck in the intellect's thoughts, but rather to turn themselves to the will's desires and pious affective movements. However, this should be taken here as settled ... in reading, we should be looking not only for points for meditation, so as to keep our understanding occupied, but also for affective movements; for it is by assiduously dwelling on these, and coming back to them, that the will is nourished.