

I WANT TO!
FORMATION OF THE WILL

MIGUEL ANGEL FUENTES

I WANT TO!
FORMATION OF
THE WILL



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Introduction

Is it possible to *educate* a will in which disordered habits and corrupted vices have grown like weeds? Can we *re-educate* it when it has gotten off of the right path for years? Can the will be re-invigorated when it suffers from a complete failure and is laid out in indolence? It is possible, always and whenever a work that includes several different elements is carried out.

The first is to achieve a sure knowledge of all the defects that a person suffers from in this area because, as the old saying goes: “the first medicine is to know the illness.” An impediment to healing, education, or re-education of the will is a superficial or partial knowledge of the true problems that affect the will.

The second is that we must be convinced that everything that we *should* do is possible, but not necessarily everything that we *want* to propose for ourselves is possible, since it is entirely possible that we might propose goals for ourselves that are in themselves impossible, idealistic, or not what God wants for us. We must be realistic.

Thirdly, we must bear in mind that . . .

. . . we must avoid the naturalism of the Hollywood variety (Pelagianism), which repeats the motto “Yes, you can!,” applying it foolishly, as if the problem and its solution could be reduced exclusively to a faulty understanding of self. It is true that we can achieve very high and even heroic goals, and that there is no obstacle that cannot be overcome, but *assuming* certain truths: 1st, that I propose something realistic for myself (I cannot become an angel, nor become invisible); 2nd, that it should be something honest (because although I *could* do bad things, I should not do them, nor do they make me a better person); 3rd, that I truly undertake a serious work on my will; 4th, that God helps me.

. . . I can do many things because, in fact, they are within the reach of my human strengths, even though I might erroneously think that they are not.

. . . and all the things that I cannot do with my strength alone, be it because my will is sick or because they surpass my human nature, I can do them *with God’s grace, which He offers to all of us* in order to obtain salvation.

Fourth, we must not lose sight of the fact that it is absolutely necessary to have a clear and precise goal, that is, one loaded with serious reasons that make it not only desirable to achieve it but rather *impossible not to hurl myself into seeking it*. It is important to examine time and again the reasons for which we move ourselves and to continue adding new ones. If the young man who is in love

does not “meditate” upon the reasons that he loves his girlfriend (beauty, virtue, or good qualities), he will soon cease to love her or he will not love her seriously.

Fifth, I must know the means in order to obtain what it is that I propose for myself.

Finally, I must untiringly work my will.

In what follows, we will attempt to offer some general indications for this important work.

1.

The three types of will

There are three general sorts of will, or, if you will, *volitive attitudes*, with numerous subtypes.

1) The fickle and indecisive will

The fickle will is the one that is expressed in the “potential indicative”: *I would like to, I'd like to, I should. . . .* This form of will is not a true desire; it keeps itself in the stage prior to it. It is a will *in potency*. Nonetheless, often (that is, not always) *such a will recognizes its limitation*, that is, it is aware of its inability to really want the good. It does not have the energy needed in order to really want, but at least such a one usually realizes it. It is a *long-faced* will: a will that cries, is sad, and bitter. In a certain sense, the will can also be *resentful* towards itself, since the one who is fickle and unable to choose complains and laments their own uselessness . . . but they do little or nothing to fix it.

In the most serious cases, we don't even have a whim – an “I would want to” – but rather indifference, abandonment, a lack of desire: in a word, “apathy.” Perhaps here we are faced with an affective problem (that is, on the sensible level of the passions or the emotions), and not one of the will (as is seen in the word itself: *a-pathos*, a lack of passion, emotion, or affection). In the sphere of the will, there are some anomalies that arise, such as *weakness of the will*, or *abulia*, which is the marked lessening of the will. It is a sort of powerlessness to move oneself or to control one's train of thoughts, which flow before consciousness without the person being able to stop them. These anomalies do not always mean that there are strictly pathological problems; they can also be found in people who are healthy but weak as well as in cases that are, properly speaking, cases of illness. As Ribot indicates, “a certain beginning of *abulia* can be found even in normal but weak characters who need recourse to another in order to do anything. If not, they never reach the point of making a decision; any new thought is sufficient to make them begin to doubt again. [In contrast] *abulia*, properly speaking, is something pathological.”¹

In other cases, what happens is, properly speaking, “asthenia,” that is, “a *fatigue prior to effort*. Fatigue has two aspects: one physical, which is produced after excessive work, and the other psychological, which is, above all, subjective, and which does not depend on the works that have been carried out (perhaps the

¹ Cited by Fröbes, J., *Compendio de psicología experimental*, Madrid (1949), 355.

person has worked very little, or not at all), nor on account of fatigue from that challenge. When we speak of an asthenic person, we refer to someone who gets up without energy, without strength, who is spent.”²

Other times the problem stems from the difficulty or inability to make a decision, which often corresponds more to the fear of renunciation that every decision implies than a lack of energy; I will deal expressly with this topic later on.

2) The deluded will

This attitude is *more dangerous* than the previous one, and this danger arises from the falsehood that it entails. It is a will that *lies to itself* regarding those “means” that must be chosen in order to achieve a determined end. Our will is always moved by tending towards an end; it could be the ultimate end of life (which could be God or something that takes His place: power, the pleasure of food or drink, sex, fame, money, or any other things), or of intermediate ends, which are realities that are sought in turn for a higher end (for example, the one who seeks work — an intermediate end — in order to have the economic means with which to maintain their family — the higher end); these intermediate ends are means-ends (they are ordered as means with respect to other ends). Now then, the “deceived will” *wants to fool itself* by convincing itself that it really wants this or that end (which is noble and good), when in fact the means (or intermediate ends)

² Rojas, Enrique, *La conquista de la voluntad*, 203

that the will chooses to obtain that end *do not efficaciously lead to that end*, but rather to something else (or to nothing). Thus, this is the case, for example, of a sick man whose doctor has told him that he *must* (strict obligation) stop smoking, and who wants to convince himself that he fulfills that medical advice by *only smoking when he is very nervous*; or the one who attempts to break their addiction to pornography by limiting themselves to watching some movie with those themes only on the weekends. Daily life is full of examples of this sort of will. Saint Ignatius describes this class of people by saying that they want to give up what God demands they give up, but in such a way that, in the end, they end up retaining what it was they were supposed to give up.

The danger of this way of desiring is found in that the one who is accustomed to this psychological way of reasoning and desiring lives enclosed in sophisms.

We can say that this person *lies regarding the means*, but in what sense? The person lies inasmuch as he or she wants to convince themselves that those means are ordered to the end that they claim to have proposed for themselves, when that is not really the case. To drink *only one bottle* of beer a day might not be a problem for a healthy person, but it is not an efficacious means to leave alcoholism. Yet, the alcoholic *wants to believe that this is the case*, and they want to think that the only problem is to drink more than that quantity. We could give innumerable examples of this.

People like these can only realize their delusion if they “are made to *talk to the means*.” What does this mean? It means that

they should ask themselves, with seriousness and honesty: “Where does drinking one liter of beer take me, a person sick with an alcohol dependence? Am I really getting rid of my problem in this way, or am I rather maintaining, or even encouraging, it?” They shouldn’t be content with their own answers to the question, but rather ask specialists in order to assure the *objectivity* of their reasoning, thus coming to see their coherence or deviation.

This is why, when someone tells us: “I want to be cured of this or that problem,” “I want to obtain this or that virtue,” “I want to uproot this or that vice,” we should ask them what means are they putting into practice. If the means are really efficacious, the person is speaking the truth. If the means are ineffective (or if they haven’t set any means), we should let them know that they are deceiving themselves.

3) True will

There is also a sincere and true will: the will that desires and end and the means that *effectively* lead to that end, even though they might be hard and difficult. That will sincerely desires those means and promptly puts them into practice. This is the will that Jesus Christ demanded before His miracles: *Do you want to be well?* (Jn 5:6); *What do you want. . . ?* (Mk 10:51); *If you wish . . .* (Mt 19:17,21). It is clear that such a will has degrees; it is not the same in all people, but there are fundamental characteristics that are seen in all of them: the will is persevering, tenacious, firm (and it becomes stronger and stronger in the measure that it repeats its

THREE TYPES OF WILL.

acts), it overcomes failures by undertaking again the works that turn out poorly (for, in spite of the fact that they have a firm will, the person is not free from mistakes, errors, or frustrations), accepts challenges, overcomes their falls, and is able to finish works that they have undertaken (they don't leave things half done).

Let us attempt to point out the way to acquire a strong will and/or how to make it stronger.

2.

Sounding out the will

One of the most serious problems that we often face is the little or utter lack of knowledge that we have of ourselves. We often come across people who are unaware of their true characteristics, their defects and limits, their temperament, and their dominant defect. It is for this reason that we must begin our work by attempting to know *all* of the defects of our will, since this is what we are attempting to correct and strengthen. For this reason, I will present, in very general lines, some “kinds” of will that can help us to identify the good and bad qualities of our wills:³

³ For these classifications, I base myself on what Enrique Rojas explains in his work *La conquista de la voluntad*. However, I have changed some terminology used by the author and I have introduced some different concepts and other classifications that I consider important.

1) Some classifications

a. According to the scope of the will

We have the following subtypes:

a) Initial will: this is the will that is able overcome inertia and to set into motion the dynamics of the individual towards the objective that appears before it.

b) Persevering will: this is a will that is capable of persevering in the work undertaken; it implies tenacity, determination, and firmness, and it is strengthened in the measure that those efforts are repeated. In some cases, this type of will can be associated to the nature received (that is, to temperament), but generally speaking, it is the fruit acquired with education or self-education; in the latter case, it demands overcoming oneself and insisting.

c) The will capable of overcoming frustrations: this is the will that does not give up and that doesn't go under when things turn out in a way different than planned, or simply when they don't turn out. Today there is a great deal of talk about "tolerating frustration," but what is most important is not to "tolerate" passively, but rather to overcome it and to continue with the plans and objectives proposed in life "in spite" of failures.

d) The will to finish well the work that was undertaken: this is the will that does not cease until it has finished what it has begun; it implies patience and industriousness.

b. According to the content or object of the will

a) The will to obtain physical goods: this is the sort of will that aspires to something bound to their corporeal nature: to get thin, to look good, to be beautiful. . . . There are many people who have “will power” for these sorts of things, but not for other goals.

b) Will for the goods of health: this is the will that has energy to submit itself to medical advice in order to recover bodily health, in spite of the efforts and great sacrifices that it implies.

c) Will to obtain psychic or mental goods: in other words, in order to modify the negative aspects of our personality to make it more balanced and mature.

d) Will to socialize: that is, to communicate with others, to overcome shyness or difficulty in expressing oneself in public, etc.

e) Will to grow culturally: that is, to progress in knowledge and to leave behind mediocrity and superficiality. The contrary to this is to be content with what the means of mass communication offer, magazines, newspapers, the radio, and especially television. The will to grow culturally is shown in the desire and restlessness for literature, the visual arts, classical music, and the like.

f) Will for spiritual realities: this will seeks natural and supernatural values: the moral virtues and values and a profound spiritual life (holiness and prayer; that is, union with God).

c. According to the subject's attitude

By this, we mean the degree and intensity of the desire that the will has to throw itself into the pursuit of the proposed objective. The individual with a motivated will knows what they want and on their part they do everything necessary to advance, little by little, so as to obtain it. We can point out some key levels:

- a) The “dead” will, or the one without motives to act (*abulia*).
- b) The will that is barely motivated.
- c) The motivated will.
- d) The highly motivated will.

d. According to the distance of the goals that are proposed:

In this sense, there are three sorts of will:

a) An immediate will (that is, short term, looking to things with nearby or quick solutions): such a will only moves towards objectives that can be brought about or realized immediately or in the near future.

b) The mediate will (of intermediate term): such a will is able to move itself proposing means to achieve goals that are not immediate, but are not too far off in the future either (for example, to propose a goal that can be achieved in a week of work, or in one, two, or three months, such as to save a certain amount of money, to study a certain subject, to finish a work that requires various steps, such as the one who paints a picture and

follows a certain technique that requires first preparing the canvas, waiting until it dries, and then a second step, and so on).

c) The long term will: this will is able to propose for itself distant objectives, such as a plan for a spiritual, psychical, or cultural work that will take a year or two, or even much more time (perhaps one's whole life).

e. According to the will's direction:

Here we have two different modes:

a) The exterior or centrifugal will, which goes from within towards the outside. This is the will that is able to project itself outside of itself, able to *impose* its will and to carry out externally what the person wants or has planned. It is the will that is able to overcome external obstacles.

b) The interior or centripetal will, which goes within: it is the will able to *impose itself on itself*, to *transform oneself*, of taking charge of one's interior feelings, movements, and lower tendencies, following precise educative principles as well as trying to imitate some *model* that the person wants to become like.

f. According to the way the will manifests itself

Here we find the following sorts of will:

a) The will that has a determined and complete project. Such a will is opposed to the will that only moves itself on account of superficial external stimuli, things that are circumstantial, and passing things that change from moment to moment.

b) The will that is able to approve and consider for itself what it recognizes as good and decisive. This is the will that can push a person to change their whole life if they quickly realize that they were wrong and the truth is in fact quite different from what they had thought previously.

c) The reflexive will, that is, the will that is able to reflect on its own experiences; it examines its own daily decisions and considers if they were appropriate or not, and *in what they were lacking or missing in order to be appropriate*. Only in this way is experience formed and committed errors are corrected.

2) A general examination of the will

On the basis of these classifications let us try to respond as truthfully as possible to the following questions in order to give ourselves a true picture of the good and bad characteristics of our will. In order for this examination to really give valid results, we should bear in mind not only the most recent episodes in our lives, but rather a considerable amount of our lives (for example, considering the last five or ten years of our lives).

a. Regarding the scope of our will

a) How is your “initial” will? Do you move easily or is it hard to undertake something? Are you one who starts things on your own? How many (and what) things have you undertaken in the last five years?

b) Do you have perseverance and constancy in the works you undertake? How many of the works undertaken in the last five years have you continued until the end? Which ones have you finished as of today?

c) How do you react to frustrations? Do you easily give up? Do you face them? What have been your main frustrations in the last five years and how have you faced them?

d) What is your ability to finish the works started? How many and which works undertaken in the last five years have you finished perfectly, and how many and which have you left halfway or unfinished?

b. Regarding the will's content

For what reasons are you usually moved?

a) Physical: Does it motivate you to look good? Be thin or more robust? Have an attractive body? Looking sporty?

b) Health: Does the desire to fight for your health move you, to undergo a strict diet, to strict medication? Once the treatment is finished, do you continue with the regime imposed on your health or return to the same rhythm of food or activity that had previously been prohibited?

c) Psychological: Does it move you to desire harmony of character and personality? Do you aspire to any quality of character that makes you better than you are?

d) Social: Are you interested in improving your relationship with your neighbor? If you are shy, do you aspire to overcome

your shyness so as to express yourself, to deal with others? If you are outgoing, do you try to be deeper in your relationships by avoiding superficiality or reducing everything to fleeting sympathy?

e) Cultural: Do you have cultural interests? Are you interested in reading and engage in it? How many and which books have you read last year? Do you play any musical instrument? What music do you like? What classic musical work is your favorite? Do you have artistic interests? Do you like painting, history, architecture, and the like?

f) Spiritual: Do you have serious spiritual interests? Do you have a spiritual life project? Are you interested in the spiritual life? Do you have a spiritual director? If yes: how often do you see them? What are you talking about with them? What have you worked on in recent years? With what results?

c. About the attitude of our wills

How motivated (excited, passionate) has your will been in recent years?

- a) Nothing?
- b) Little?
- c) More or less?
- d) A lot?

d. About your goals

a) How is your way of planning things? Do you make long-term plans or do you prefer medium-term plans or are you content to undertake works with very close views?

b) How have you acted in the last five years? What plans (for example, “life plans”) have you made? How have you been checking them or how often have you examined them to see how they are going?

c) What has been the result?

e. Regarding the direction of the will

a) Do you have clear models whom you truly aspire to imitate? Are your models truly models, that is, do they attract you intensely? What are those models - or that model - of personality?

b) What traits of theirs have you imitated (or of him or her, if only one) in these past five years?

c) What is the trait that you are trying to reproduce in yourself at this time? Is it a feature of their personality, their physical appearance (way of dressing, speaking, moving) or their spirituality (a virtue, a vice, etc.)?

d) What features of your model have you taken on in these last five years? Do you look more like them now than a few years ago or have you not changed at all?

f. Regarding how our will externalizes itself

How does your will externalize itself?

a) Do you move with real determination or only superficially? Are you excited only with what produces rapid stimuli or do you keep your plans and projects even when the initial charm has passed and despite other things that may tempt and attract you? Or do you abandon plans and projects sooner or later?

b) Do you fall in love with the things you detect as truly valuable? When you know something is really true and meritorious, do you want it, or does it leave you indifferent, or do you wait until later to make a decision about it?

c) Do you usually reflect on your actions? Do you examine your conscience daily and look for the reasons for your failures, or are you content to list them but without looking for the “why” of such failures?

d) Do you have an interest in reality, a true and healthy curiosity (that is, a true desire to learn), or superficial curiosity (of unnecessary and unimportant things)?

3) “Historical” examination of the will

We need to supplement the previous examination with a second one that is more focused on the problems we have experienced in the past related the will. So answer:

1) What difficulties have you experienced regarding the will in the past? Some of these could be: lack of motivation, inconstancy, fears, disorder, weakness, laziness in wanting something or in making a decision, sloth, indecision, attachment or dependence or even addiction, compulsions, and more.

2) In what realms are these problems manifested? In all areas or only in some specific area? (There are people who have difficulty mastering their relationship with drinking or with food, but they are not lazy at work. Others are inconsistent in study, but not with their manual work. A person could be disordered with material things - clothes, money, etc. - but detailed and precise with the use of their time).

3) Since when have you experienced this? Can you point to any event from which these disorderly manifestations of your will began?

4) Is the disorder in your will permanent, or is it linked to the emergence of well-determined circumstances (being in a specific place, dealing with certain people, etc.) such that you don't experience it in the same way in other places or in the absence of such or said people?

3.

The deficient will: roots and causes

With the examination that was suggested in the previous chapter, it is likely that some concrete failings in our will have been discovered. In general, these failings are symptoms of some vice of the will, or they could also be a negative temperamental trait that was not corrected even by a good and efficacious education.⁴

1) Impediments to the voluntary act

Let us begin by speaking of what are usually called “impediments” of the voluntary act; this concerns certain psychic phenomena that make difficult or impede an act from being

⁴ All of the temperaments have both positive and negative aspects (for instance, the choleric is an energetic, dynamic, and tenacious person, but, at the same time, they are inclined to attacks of unexpected or disproportionate anger); an education that aspires to form a solid and well-disposed character takes advantage of these elements in order to solidify and cultivate the positive and correct the negative.

entirely voluntary. Indeed, in order to judge the goodness of an act and the responsibility of its author, it is necessary to have these factors in mind.

First, we have *violence*. An act is not voluntary, and therefore the person does not have responsibility for it, in the measure that it is the fruit of an external coercion contrary to the will's inclination. Violence is considered an impediment of the voluntary act always and only when there is resistance on the part of the person who is subject to the violence and when they do not consent to the action that they suffer (we are referring here exclusively to actions that are externally performed by the person who suffers the violence, for instance, the person who is forced to kneel before an idol or who suffers sexual abuse).

Violence properly speaking should not be confused with a similar phenomenon which is "to act *under threat*." This is considered "moral violence," but it does not produce an involuntary act. Rather, it produces what moral theologians call a "mixed voluntary" act or a "mixture" of voluntariness and involuntariness (if a judge declares a criminal innocent out of fear that he will kill his family members, the act is a *mixed voluntary act*); in this case, the person has mixed feelings (in the abstract, he doesn't want that act, but he does in the concrete, that is, here and now, given that it is the only way to avoid the evil that he fears); with this background, the act is *voluntary* but *with repugnance*. Said in other words, the act is voluntary; for this reason it is said that the threat doesn't excuse the person from sin when the act that is

performed is gravely sinful (I cannot perform a seriously unjust action out of fear of suffering an evil since, as Socrates says, it is better to suffer an injustice than to commit one⁵).

Likewise, *ignorance* can *sometimes* (but not always) cause an act to be involuntary. In this regard, we must be careful, since sometimes ignorance diminishes the willfulness of an act, and other times it does not. It diminishes or even completely annuls the voluntariness of what I do when *ignorance is the entire cause of the act*, and is what moral theologians call *antecedent and invincible ignorance*: that is, when a person acts “out of” ignorance, that is, when someone performs an action only because they are not aware that it is bad or that they should not do so, or they are unaware of these or those consequences, and this always provided that they have no way to escape that ignorance (for example, when, as I go hunting in the woods, I kill a man because I mistook him for an animal; in this case, *I wouldn't have shot had I known it was a man; that is, I did it because I was unaware of the true nature or morality of the action*). It is said that “there is no way out of that ignorance” (that is, that the ignorance is *invincible*) when there are not even doubts or suspicions that the action is evil. In contrast, the voluntariness of the act is not annulled because of ignorance *that can be overcome* (when a person performs the action with serious and well-founded doubts, that is, they have reasons

⁵ Cf. the famed dialogue with Polus, in Plato's *Gorgias*:

“Socrates: That may very well be, inasmuch as doing injustice is the greatest of evils. . . .

Polus: Then would you rather suffer than do injustice?

Socrates: I should not like either, but if I must choose between them, I would rather suffer than do.”

to doubt), or when the action would have been performed anyways, even in the case that the person knew what they were doing, which is called *concomitant ignorance* (for example, the person who mistakes their enemy with an animal, and shoots thinking that it is an animal, but, in any event, they would have done the same had they known it was their enemy); or when someone, because of their own fault, is ignorant of what they should know, for example, the person who is ignorant of essential elements of their profession because they were negligent in their studies or, even worse, the person who *wants to be ignorant* of something in order to act without a burden on their conscience (an ignorance that is called *affected* or *willful*).

Another possible cause of involuntariness can come from some *very intense affections or passions*. Note that we say “some,” and not “all.” Indeed, the person who acts *completely dominated by the passion* does not have control over what they do, but that lack of control or responsibility is really only involuntary when the passion has come to take control over the person without them being able to impede it; for example, when the passion arises spontaneously, or when a person has been unsuccessful in preventing it in spite of having attempted to do so through various means (for example, the anger that arises in the face of the sudden and unexpected appearance of a thief or the news of the betrayal of a friend). In contrast, it is not involuntary in the person who deliberately caused the passion (for example, a soldier who voluntarily attempts to awaken courage within himself before

entering into battle, or the student who tries to become passionate about the topic he is studying, or the one who attempts to excite himself with pornography in order to realize a sexual act more intensively), or if, upon experiencing the rising up of the passion, he did nothing to stop or hinder it.

A particular case of passion is that of *fear*, which often can reach the point of making a person *freeze* and thus becoming the cause of truly involuntary actions, especially acts of omission (as, for instance, a person who, in a state of panic or under emotional shock, doesn't help an injured person or someone who is drowning). In these cases, it is said that the person acted (or let themselves act) "out of" fear. In contrast, there is a situation of fear in which the fear doesn't negate the voluntariness of the act but, on the contrary, *manifests the intensity of the desire*, and that is the case of the one who acts "with" fear, or, better said, "in spite of fear," such as the thief who, in spite of their fear of being caught or killed, nonetheless commits robbery; in this case, the fact that the thief experienced fear is a sign of a very intense desire to commit the act; he is so determined to steal that he does so *in spite* of being afraid; he wants to steal, and he wants to overcome his fear in order to steal.

In a special way, a person's freedom is diminished by the *vices* they have acquired, especially when the vice reaches the point of taking control of the vicious person's psychology in such a way that it ends up as a true addiction and slavery. Nevertheless, in these cases, it must be kept in mind that since the acquisition of a

vicious habit is caused by the repetition of free acts, what has happened here is called “voluntary *in causa*.” In other words, the cause of this vicious habit has been freely formed; thus, the acts that this vice in turn gives rise to, the person is responsible for in their cause. This voluntariness is only broken with the radical withdrawal from the habit and with the decided fight against it. In the case of a person who, in spite of having repented from their habit and of fighting against it, *on a particular occasion*, falls into that vice on account of the great strength of the habit acquired, that particular action should be considered with at least a diminished voluntariness.

Lastly, we also should point out, as attenuating or annulling causes of the voluntary act, *psychical impediments* (neurosis, psychosis, and psychopathologies) which influence in a very different manner in voluntary actions. The voluntariness of the actions of a person affected by some mental affliction should always be analyzed case by case, bearing in mind that many such problems do not entirely impede the sick person’s freedom, but they do diminish it, and that often persons thus affected by some pathology suffer from difficulties in a particular realm of their actions but can maintain their lucidity and freedom in others (as happens in those who suffer from phobias, scruples, and the like).

As one might suspect, in the majority of these cases the fight against these impediments does not imply a work of re-educating the will, since, with the exception of the case of vice, the difficulties come from sources outside of the will. In the case of

violence, there is an exterior agent, in the case of ignorance the problem is not in the will but in the intellect, in the case of psychological impediments the majority of the cases find their cause in some organic disfunction, in fear and in the other passions in some affective disorder. From here it follows that the work of re-educating the will comes about principally regarding the deficiencies that we will now point out in the following section.

2) Some deficiencies that are more properly of the will

Setting aside the so-called “impediments,” let us pay some attention to other difficulties that give the impression of being a “parasite” with respect to the will, that is, of setting their roots in it and giving rise to weakness, disorder, slowness, and more. It will be precisely regarding these difficulties that the work of educating the will comes about.

a. Principal defects

Let us begin with *laziness*, which is a sort of repugnance to work and a tendency to leisure. It is characterized by a fear of and a flight from effort. The lazy person remains delightfully inactive or, if he acts, he chooses his task, not guided by reason (out of the duty to fulfill his obligations) but rather according to what his whims suggest to him at that moment. The lazy person tends to begin their work slowly, to continue it without any sort of liveliness, and to finish it in a hurry (sometimes they feel a sort of

“irrational” rush to quickly finish what they are doing, even finishing it superficially: and this without any obligation that urges them to begin something else important); they stop or delay in the face of even the slightest difficulty; they follow the path of least resistance; they are incapable of a detailed, methodical, and deep work. This tendency can manifest itself in all different areas: physical, intellectual, moral, and religious. It is connected with fear and sensuality. It is connected with *fear* because, as Cicero defines it, it is “dread of some ensuing labor”⁶; Saint John Damascene sets it, with the *segnities* (shrinking, shame, disgrace, consternation, panic, anxiety), among the species of fear⁷; and Saint Thomas defines it as “when a man shrinks from work for fear of too much toil.”⁸ It is also connected with *sensuality*, because the lazy person allows themselves to be carried away by an excessive love for comfort and rest, that is, for pleasure (which he prefers to his duty). García Hoz said that: “we are faced with one of the vices that, with the cloak of necessity, covers up superfluity.”⁹

In connection with laziness, we should mention *acedia*, which is the laziness proper to spiritual realities and activities, or, better said, “sadness or disgust for the spiritual good”; it is a sort of renunciation for the search of spiritual goods (knowledge, science, virtue, prayer, etc.) because of the discouragement caused by the efforts that these require. This form of laziness makes the person flee from prayer, study, recollection, and reflection, and instead

⁶ Cf. Cicero, *Tusculan.*, l. IV, c. VIII, n. 12.

⁷ Cf. Saint John Damascene, *De fide orthodoxa*, l. II, c. XV; PG, 94, 931.

⁸ Saint Thomas Aquinas, ST I-II, q. 41, a. 4.

⁹ García Hoz, Víctor, *Pedagogía de la lucha ascética*, Madrid (1946), 182.

they immerse themselves in activism, in eloquence, in indiscretion, and in research into things that are forbidden. As a capital sin,¹⁰ it gives rise to numerous other vices, among which we can mention: idleness, drowsiness, indiscretion of the mind, restlessness of the body, instability, wandering, boredom of the heart, murmuring, verbosity, and curiosity.

Even more serious is *spiritual lukewarmness* and *mediocrity*, which are sorts of spiritual relaxation, often the fruit of not having energetically fought against acedia. They are a laziness of the spirit that is deeply rooted in the soul, a laziness which neutralizes the will's energy in its search for holiness; the soul becomes languid, without desires, resigned to its lamentable condition, and ready to accept the state of habitual venial sin (which is the gateway for mortal sin). The person dominated by laziness feels horror at being within themselves, they flee from sacrifice and mortification, they act without reflection, following their tastes, giving preference to vanity, sensuality, and self-love. So that we can speak of laziness in the proper sense of the word, these characteristics must be present in the soul as a chronic state, in addition to the habitual acceptance of deliberate venial sin.

The lazy person becomes mediocre because they cease to understand the renunciation required by the Gospel, and the desire to obtain it disappears from their sight. This state therefore

¹⁰ A capital sin is called such because it is the cause of many other sins, which can happen in many different ways which are not pertinent to explain here (cf. see this topic in Saint Thomas Aquinas, *De malo*, q. 11, a. 4).

means a renunciation of holiness and the lack of a deeper penetration into the supernatural principles of faith.

No less damaging to the will is *emotional instability*, meaning, the unjustified, frequent, and disproportionate change of emotional states. Even though these changes principally affect the emotional (that is, the sensible) part of a person, they tend to come about because the will surrenders or refuses to exercise its controlling action on the sensibility (the will's control, although limited and not absolute, is in control at the end and at the beginning). Unstable people very easily pass, and often for childish reasons, from being content to discouragement, and vice versa. For this reason, they are usually unpredictable. One of the most outstanding characteristics of these unstable people is the strength that their *whims* exercise upon them; it is their *whims* that are the ultimate source for their decisions.¹¹

¹¹ Here is how Enrique Rojas describes the capricious person: "Their profile is the following: *they are not prepared to renounce their immediate desires, they do not have a habit of making concrete and frequent efforts, they want everything in the moment. . . . They do not know how to deny themselves. . . .* There is constant movement: why? For two reasons: first, because they do not really know what they want and, second, because they have not been formed in the value of renunciation, since too many times they have been told yes to everything that comes by that they want. The capricious person is immature, weak, and has a deficient foundation for any serious work that implies strength in order to overcome the resistance of their desires, apathy, and laziness. . . . The one who has a fragile will does not decide for themselves, but rather there is something or someone who decides for them. This has concrete implications throughout the whole of daily life: a person who is accustomed to eat without restrictions and rarely goes without something, because it costs them, and even makes them sad when they don't get what they want; the student who is little accustomed in their study plans, who doesn't end up sitting at their work desk in front of their books, who does anything whatsoever, except study; the one who has a very bad character and who always is in the right, for whom it is difficult to be corrected and will not accept even the slightest reproach of their conduct. These examples are the samples of what

While we are on the topic of affectivity and the realm of the will, let us also mention *sadness*, *melancholy*, and certain manifestations of *depression*. I connect them with the will in the measure that they produce effects upon it (paralysis, lack of motivation, apathy, *abulia*, a lack of meaning in life), without ignoring the fact that in some cases these are truly pathological states that can even require medication and professional treatment. By attributing a certain responsibility to the will in these problems, a greater or less responsibility depending on the case, we only mean to highlight that this faculty can assist (in some cases) in impeding the subject from falling into these states, or it can aggravate them and, even more, it is able, if it proposes for itself this goal, to get out of the well once it has fallen into it (or, rather, at least it can attempt to get out of them). For this reason, there are people who become depressive – or who do not get out of that sickness – because they really don't encourage themselves to fight. From here it follows that, in the measure that they are responsible for their surrender, we can consider them, in part, responsible for their situation.

the capricious person will become little by little. Since they say yes to everything and allow themselves everything, such a person is transformed into someone without submission to norms or rules; they are an arbitrary person, who is inconsistent in their objectives and lacking clear and firm goals. They live only as far as the end of their noses with a desire for things are change and go around, looked upon with a baseless curiosity. . . . They walk towards the construction of a personality that is very *sui generis*: frivolous, superficial, changing in its tastes and directions, appearing as a spoiled child who has had everything given to them, poorly raised, volatile, ruined for any sort of human work that requires a certain caliber. They are really people of little value, who will undertake poorly almost everything they do, if they are not able to correct themselves and learn from their failures" (Rojas, E. *La conquista de la voluntad*, 207-210).

We should also add to this list problems of *unhealthy dependence*. People with low self-esteem, the insecure, and the weak tend to form a dependent will. Let us make it clear that not all dependence is bad, not is all independence good. For example, to see and acknowledge that we are dependent on God is to accept our condition as creatures and, as such, it is essential to our internal balance; to attempt to declare our independence from God and from His law is simply to commit suicide, just like the one who, claiming for himself an apparent freedom, cuts the branch that holds him up; freedom is not a free-fall into the abyss. Nor is the dependence that is established by the vow of obedience by a religious a bad thing either; such a one freely submits their will to the superior's command, but *without renouncing their conscience*, which is the limit of all human obedience: the religious decides to immolate their will to the commands of their superior in everything that is good or indifferent. Obedience can never extend to sin, no matter how slight that sin might be; this limit makes it clear that obedience isn't robotic or a renunciation of one's own dignity; indeed, it is the contrary.¹² Something analogous could be said of those who bind themselves through the indissoluble bond of marriage.

¹² "It is obedience and obedience alone that shows us God's will with certainty. Of course our superiors may err, but it cannot happen that we, holding fast to our obedience, should be led into error by this. There is only one exception: if the superior commands something that would obviously involve breaking God's law, however slightly. In that case the superior could not be acting as a faithful interpreter of God's will" (Maximilian Kolbe, *Gli scritti di Massimiliano Kolbe eroe di Oswiecim e beato della Chiesa*, vol. I, Florence (1975), 44-46).

There is, therefore, a healthy dependence as well as an independence that is part of personal maturity (which does not contradict what we said earlier, because only an independent or free person is able to give themselves totally in a perpetual vow, as the religious does who promises obedience to a superior or a person who gets married): this necessary independence is what is lacking in degrading forms of slavery. Such dependencies could be seen with respect to *people* (submitting oneself to another person on whose approval one's security, tranquility, and happiness are based, and whose disapproval gives rise to bitterness and anxiety; this is what happens with people who are subject to sectarian leaders, for example; the most serious case is that which psychology calls *codependency*¹³), or with respect to *ideas* (for

¹³ Codependency is an illness that is characterized by a lack of self-identity. It is an unhealthy relationship which a dependency or addiction causes in the person or persons who surround the addict: the codependents lose their self-identity, and come to depend on the points of view and judgments of the addict or sick person. The most well-known example is that of the wife of an alcoholic (which could also apply to the children), who begins to try to live with the husband's problem by making excuses for his conduct, excusing his acts, and even justifying them in a certain sense ("They don't understand him," "He's weak," "He has many problems," etc.), and she ends up seeing things in the same way that the husband sees them and denying the reality of the problem. This also happens frequently in the case of the wives of abusive men, who even contradict those who point out to them that things are not right (for instance, they come up with excuses for the bruises and wounds that appear on their bodies, and with ever increasing frequency, attributing them to accidents suffered randomly in the house). Codependents end up so involved in this way in the addict's illness, that they come to take on behaviors and qualities similar to the one who is sick. Their relationship with the addict is an addictive relationship that leads them to tolerate anything provided that it helps avoid a break (in the friendship, living together, dating, etc.). Codependency isn't true love; true love, no matter how intense it is, cannot be addictive, co-addictive, or codependent. The more intense and deep love is, the more it personalizes and perfects. But when love is lived out in a tortuous or obsessive way, we no longer have a true love, but rather a mere emotion that has an outward similarity with love.

example, dependency on what “others will say,” on fashions and what the masses are doing, as happens in those who let themselves be manipulated by the public opinion, advertising, or what the *majority* think), or even with respect to *emotional states* (as happens with those who *need* to feel good – thus, they *need to avoid suffering* – at all costs, which in general gives rise to a dependency on drugs or alcohol or disordered sexual behaviors).

The person with a dependent will is often recognized by the great difficulty that they have in making daily decisions if they don’t have affirmation from others, by the need to have others take responsibility for the principal aspects of their lives, their serious difficulties in expressing their disagreement in serious questions of conscience out of fear of losing the support or approval of others, the difficulties they have in starting their own projects, even in spite of their abilities and having been encouraged to do so, or in the way they feel helpless or uncomfortable when they are alone. . . . One of the phenomena connected with this lack in affectivity and in the will is called “*Peter Pan syndrome*,”¹⁴ that is, a refusal to mature and grow, binding oneself to one’s parents and one’s home, which they do not leave even though they are economically independent adults (it is an increasingly common phenomenon today to find *thirty- and forty-year-olds* who not only live “with” their parents but also “off of” their parents).

¹⁴ Polaino-Lorente, Aquilino, *¿Síndrome de Peter Pan?*, Bilbao (1999).

The above-mentioned characteristics are vices that, in a certain sense, “depress” the will; perhaps they are the ones that most interest the person who has the need to educate this faculty, since the term “educate” is often seen as a synonym of making capable, giving power, and drawing it out of passivity. However, this is undoubtedly an incomplete vision. The will can also be deformed by the contrary attitude: by an energy unleashed by a disordered love for its object, and thus the will can require a great effort to control and place it within its proper limits. This is what happens in *pride* and *self-love*. Pride implies a perverse self-affirmation of the will. The Italian psychiatrist Giuseppe Vattuone maintains that the origin of pride should be sought in its opposite, in fear of being inferior: the person who considers themselves as *unjustly inferior*, that is, because of an error in their consciousness that is unaware of their true greatness which is rooted in being in God’s image and thus infinitely open to God (man is “capable of God” and “capable of grace”); when man ceases to recognize this truth which is essential to our identity as God’s creatures, he forms an enslaved consciousness, and becomes vile to himself. In the face of this change, at least in the long term, he tends to react by overcompensating, inflating himself in a way that is strange, like the mentally insane or spiritual proud. For this reason, pride is a mask of greatness and a rebellion of the one who, in the depths of his or her soul, fears being inferior, and for this reason needs an ostentatious disguise. It’s easier and more comfortable to believe that one is God than to establish true greatness by recognizing that we are not God, but rather have been made in His image and

likeness and thus we should construct our greatness by imitating God and by filial submission to His plans.¹⁵

Pride is a true deformation of the will that, in the Western spiritual tradition, has been defined as a greed for one's own excellence; this is the root of all sins (cf. Sir 10:15), and it is "the first and the last in battles and conflicts," as Fray Juan de los Ángeles affirmed. It can take on many forms: it can be of the flesh or spiritual according to the goods upon which the person's greatness is based. It can reveal itself as vainglory, vanity, self-love, desire for control, false independence (from God, for example, or from His law). It can be a purely spiritual vice, or penetrate deeply into the psyche as a pathological disturbance, as in the case of narcissism or the narcissistic personality.¹⁶

In these cases, to educate the will means to obtain, in an eminent degree, the virtue of humility, which *rectifies* the will inclined to pride; this virtue is essential for a person's interior balance.¹⁷

¹⁵ Cf. Vattuone, G., *Liberio pensiero e servo arbitrio*, Naples (1994).

¹⁶ "Narcissists revolve around themselves, asking others for applause and verbal gratifications, always concerned with producing a strong positive impact in the people who surround them and, in turn, by demanding praises, admiration, and recognition of their greatness. Nonetheless, what they think about their own greatness turns out to be more important than what others think about them. The norm of their conduct is based around the impression of the supreme greatness of their person and the need to be acknowledged by the people who surround them. In such a one, there is presumption, aggrandizement, a fallacious and isolating pride, boasting, and petulancy" (Enrique Rojas, *¿Quién eres?*, Buenos Aires (2006), 255-256).

¹⁷ Cf. Fuentes, M., *Naturaleza y educación de la humildad*, San Rafael (2010), 51-72.

Although it might not be as common as the other defects that we have been pointing out, let us also note, among the disorders, the mistaken identification of healthy asceticism with what could be considered, rather, as a pathological hypertension of the will. The cultivation of the will should be the result of the harmonious and progressive development of all the faculties (will, intellect, sensibility, and affectivity). It can never be reduced to an inflation of the will at the cost of the person's emotional and/or intellectual life. Excessive ascetic efforts, misunderstood as a persistent and obsessive fight against one's own sensibility and emotions, as a universal mortification of the body and of the emotions, usually results in, first, a hardened and bitter personality, and, in the long run, an exhausted and neurotic will.¹⁸ It is not strange to observe that such educational mistakes—which today, on the other hand, are not so common, since we witness rather the opposite error, which uproots all asceticism and effort from education—leads, as a sort of compensatory consequence, to emotional and sexual excesses (every closed container that is under pressure tends to explore at its weakest point, and our emotions are undoubtedly our most fragile facet).

b. Possible Causes

Speaking rather of problems that “crush” the will, Lersh said: “In all cases wherein we witness a failure of will-power . . . we should not content ourselves to simply speaking of the weakness

¹⁸ Cf. Biot-Gallimard, *Guía médica de las vocaciones sacerdotales y religiosas*, Buenos Aires (1948), 144-146.

of the will, of *abulia*, or of a lack of will-power, but rather we must try to determine the point at which the whole system of personality is disturbed, a point which must be held responsible for the will's defect."¹⁹

These words open for us a veritable treasure of directions in which we can seek the causes of problems of the will. These can be the result of different sources, and the solution that we will attempt to seek must be in accord with its true foundation. Following Lersh, we can point out that the problem (or the problems) can arise from:

- (1) A lack of ability to make decisions, that is, to set a determined end or goal for oneself (we will examine this point in chapter 10).
- (2) From a lack of appreciation or attractive force (Lersh says "independence") of the ends; in other words, not being able to reach the point of really understanding the value

¹⁹ Lersh, Philipp, *La estructura de la personalidad*, Barcelona (1974), 478. The text in its entirety reads: "In all cases wherein we witness a failure of will-power . . . we should not content ourselves to simply speaking of the weakness of the will, of *abulia*, or of a lack of will-power, but rather we must try to determine the point at which the whole system of personality is disturbed, a point which must be held responsible for the will's defect. Thus it happens that in an individual who does not carry out acts of the will, or in whom that process has been disturbed, there are different roots of this problem. It could come from a lack of ability to make decisions, or independence from the ends, of a weakness of the will's strength which is shown externally or internally, or in both, or in a lack of ability to make an effort, or a lack of a skill on the part of the will. Lastly, we must point out that there will always be a lack in the will's operations when a person lacks impulses or desires; if these don't reach the endotypic foundation, the will won't have the occasion to develop itself. The lack of desires is seen, then, also in the man's life of will as a lack of activity governed by the will; however, it is not primarily a defect of the will, but rather of the man's tendential disposition."

and necessity of certain values. It is for this reason that they cannot effectively move the will. Others do not have difficulty in identifying a goal, but this does not turn out to be sufficiently attractive in order to seduce them. This usually happens, among others, to those who suffer from feelings of inferiority and who have a character of being subordinate (that is, dependent): these are moved if others command it, but they themselves do not have their own initiative because the goals that they have in front of them are not loved enough for them to set themselves in motion to achieve them unless someone orders them to (we will see this in chapter 4).²⁰

- (3) From a weakness of will in its internal orientation: in other words, in its task of organizing the inner world of feelings, instincts, tendencies, desires, and passions.²¹ Thus it happens that the one who gives into their whims allows their emotional state to direct their behavior, even though they know that this is inappropriate; or the ones who lack the strength of character to remain firm in their resolutions (perhaps those of abstinence or fasting) when they are pinched by unpleasant bodily sensations like

²⁰ I distinguish between the person who docilely submits themselves out of humility or true obedience, which has an elevated, realistic, and just understanding of hierarchy, order, and the common good, and, on the other hand, the person who has a “servile character,” a “follower,” who submits themselves, not because of reason or faith, but rather out of the weakness of their character. The first is virtuous; the second is a vice.

²¹ Lersh calls this realm the “endotymic background”; it is our emotional-affective reality, and it is comprised of our emotional states, feelings, emotions, affections, instincts, and tendencies.

hunger, thirst, or desires for sexual delight or stimulants (alcohol, nicotine, and the like). “The control and conquering, above all of physical pain, are tasks of the will in its interior direction.” In this sense, “it is understood,” says Lersh, “that an education that demands the surrender of delights and the endurance of bodily fatigue constitutes an efficacious means for training the will, and it leads to positive forms of the will’s internal direction, which we call serenity, self-discipline, conquering and self-control, a strictness with oneself and self-education.”²² (This will be the topic of chapters 5 and 6).

Likewise, the firmness of a decision depends on this task of interior direction undertaken by the will; this firmness is a definitive and irrevocable attitude, a capacity for resolution and determination. When it is lacking, the person falls into an endless process of making a choice, which is proper to the irresolute and indecisive. (We will deal with this in chapter 10).

Within this sort of problem, we can also place emotional people, the impulsive, and those bound by their appetites and passions; likewise, we can include the passive, the indolent, the abandoned, and the negligent, as well as their opposites: the uncontrolled, impulsive, and unrestrained. Their characteristic mark is not their changes in humors, feelings, or emotions, but rather their will,

²² Ibid., 472.

which fails to exercise its organizing and regulating functions in the face of these emotional experiences.

- (4) From a weakness of will in its exterior orientation. The will must also face difficulties and obstacles that get in the way of the proposed goal; its task is to overcome these oppositions. The effort of will “towards the exterior” is nothing other than the concentration and organization of psychosomatic energy in order to face and resolve those external inconveniences. When the will acts in an adequate way, we find ourselves with people whose strength of will increases along with the difficulties (they seem to be ruled by the saying: “now more than ever” or “now, with even more reason do I want to achieve what I’ve set out to do”); and, at the opposite extreme of the spectrum, are those who are resigned, depressed, or indifferent, those who shrink below difficulties. Between one and the other group there is a very wide range of persons. Nevertheless, the people who lose heart or are demoralized easily when external difficulties arise do not necessarily have problems of the will regarding their internal government as mentioned in the prior point. (We will consider this in chapter 5 – 7).
- (5) The problems can also come from a combination of a lack of will from both of the aforementioned planes; that is, an incapacity to govern oneself within and to face the

difficulties from without, difficulties that any proposed goal entails.

- (6) From a certain inability to make an effort. Every process of the will (both for those that are directed exteriorly as well as those towards the interior) are bound to tensions in the body's muscles, tensions that we perceive of as "effort" or "force." For some, this effort—as we commonly say: you have to *break a sweat* in order to achieve a demanding goal—produces happiness, while it causes discomfort and fear in others; even among those who experience it as discomfort we have some who consider such a discomfort as a price worth paying in order to achieve the desired end, and others *who consider it as a reason to give up the act of will*. Thus, among those who suffer from this type of problem of the will, we have those who *do not want to be bothered* with doing something that demands work: those who seek comfort, the lazy, and hedonists (this will be the topic of chapter 8, 9, and 11).
- (7) From a lack of "skill" in the will. By this "skill of the will," Lersh means the different forms in which the will's tension can appear. There are people who, in order to perform some act of the will, become *excessively tense*, forcing themselves to the point of muscle spasms. In this case, the voluntary action is "anti-economic" regarding the body's energies, and for this reason they tire themselves out with acts that do not objectively demand as much

energy as they perform them with. Our author compares them with those people who, as they learn to ride a bicycle, grasp the handlebars with immobile hands and with the arm muscles completely tense, in such a way that it becomes difficult to maintain their balance and they tire themselves out after pedaling just a few meters. In such a situation, there is an unbalanced use of effort. The same happens with those who tense up in order to perform some act of the will, especially that of rejecting temptations, in this way spending their energies and being left, in a certain sense, spent for new acts that become increasingly difficult, tense, and agonizing for them. (With respect to this, what we say in chapter 7 will be useful).

- (8) From a lack of impulses in the emotional-affective depths of the person, which impedes the will from having the chance to develop. This is a problem that is more physical than of the will. The lack of impulses is thus manifested in the life of the will as lack of activity governed by the will; however, this problem is not primarily a defect in this, but rather in man's tendential disposition. In these cases, the work pertains more to psychiatry and to the medical clinic than to the psychologist or spiritual director.
- (9) To these causes, all them found substantially in Lersh's text, we can add one more that is found with a certain frequency: this is "the spirit of complication." It's highly unlikely that anyone among us has never had an encounter

with someone who seems to have a particular inclination to *complicate* their life, especially when it comes to the realm of “motives” and the “search for means” in order to make decisions. This type of individual does everything that can be done easily in a difficult way; the path that could be crossed in a straight line, they take making useless circles, and get caught up where there’s no reason to get caught up. Popular sayings dedicate a number of aphorisms in order to attempt to reflect that desire for making things difficult: “They look for the cat’s fifth paw,” “they look for hair on the egg,” “they have more twists and turns than a roller coaster,” and so on. The idea is always the same: “They seek complications for things that, in themselves, don’t have them.” As a result of this attitude, their acts are slowed down and clumsy (as if they were walking within an enclosed ditch), they leave them unfinished (because they have become too complicated), or even remain simply undecided and never even reach a decision to act or not, or what concrete act to perform.

We will see the different solutions to these problems in the next sections.

4.

Work regarding the will's motives

Viktor Frankl has written: “It often happens that the psychotherapist, the ‘doctor of the soul,’ explains to his patient, to the mentally ill, what he must do, how he must behave, but the sick one explains to the therapist that he can’t do it, that it’s impossible, that he doesn’t have the strength necessary for this or that, in a word, that he has a weak will. Is there really such a thing as weakness or firmness of the will? Or is speaking of them simply an excuse? Usually it is said that where there is a will, there is a way. I would like to modify that phrase, and I would dare to affirm that *where there is an objective, there is also a will*. In other words, the one who has it clear in their minds what their goal is, and who truly aspires to obtain it, will never complain that they lack will power.”²³

²³ Frankl, Viktor, *La psicoterapia al alcance de todos*, Barcelona (1990), 138. Given that we’ve just used the phrase, one which is so common and yet so confusing, “will power,” a valuable clarification by Lersch is worth citing: in

One of the roots of problems of the will is found in the intellect. This is because even if the will and the intellect mutually influence each other, and something isn't known unless it is loved (this is the motor influence of the will upon all the other potencies, *including the intellect*: I know because I want to know²⁴), it is absolutely certain that the will does not love what it does not value. I don't say "what it doesn't know" but rather "what it doesn't value," since it isn't sufficient that something be known as good so that we fall in love with it and it has the strength to move the will, but rather we must apprehend it as *something good for me*, that is, as *something fitting*: "the object that moves the will is the good known as fitting; hence it follows that if some known good is proposed to the will as good, but not as fitting, it will not move the will."²⁵ "Fitting" is something more than "good"; "good" means that it is able to attract the will, but "fitting" means that it is in fact attractive to me, that I see it advantageous, useful, adequate, opportune, and even *necessary and obligatory*. The young man who is about to get married might recognize that the priesthood is something very good, but it isn't something fitting for him. Likewise, the one who is about to be ordained to the

connection with the will, it is really only appropriate to use the term *power* or *strength* with respect to the bodily energies and instincts; on the other hand, the will could be better compared with a lens through which the various rays of sunlight, which are all dispersed, are collected together and directed to a specific point with a great increase in its capability to start a fire; the lens isn't a power or a strength either, but rather an apparatus that acts according to its form, and it is by that form that the energies or powers are organized; it would therefore be more precise to speak of "will capacity" or of "the possibility to make use of the will." Thus, we should understand the expression analogously.

²⁴ Saint Thomas explains this in detail in *De malo*, q. 6.

²⁵ Saint Thomas, *De malo*, q. 6.

priesthood doesn't reject marriage as something bad, but rather he judges it as good *for others*; however, he doesn't want it for himself, because he doesn't see it as fitting for him. This is the reason why, even though we recognize so many things as good in the objectives that we propose for ourselves, we are yet left stuck and apathetic; love is much more than an abstract consideration of what is good.

Some people have problems in their will (be it to begin desiring something or persevering in that desire), not because of problems of weakness in the will properly speaking, but rather because they *do not have reasons* to love what they must or to do what they propose for themselves. This seems so simple and yet it is a problem that many people never solve. These people lack "depth in the liveliness of their values. . . . They lack the imagination to propose for goals for themselves, visions for possible achievements, productivity in the configuration of their lives. If they come to perform any act of the will, they need others to propose the goals for them."²⁶ This is why in this life there are no "forever loves." To fall in love with a person or with a cause is a continuous task. The one who, finding themselves deeply in love, thinks that their love is eternal and irreversible, is condemned to lose it or to become disenchanted with it. "Love is always renewing itself," writes Pascal. Sentimental love (that is, sensible attraction) is spontaneous; but willed love (spiritual) is mainly the fruit of the lover's work to fall more and more in love,

²⁶ Lersh, Philipp, *La estructura de la personalidad*, 469.

day by day, with the beloved. “Where there is no love, put love and you will find love,” wrote Saint John of the Cross.

Hence, work must be done on those motives which can make whatever it is that we propose to carry out desirable. These motives are of two orders: rational and emotional, and a person must fight in both orders in order to fill up with motivation those realities that we want to love.

1) The first order is of reason

We should start with rational motives. Since we are rational beings, we should see if the difficulties in our will perhaps come from insufficient or poor intellectual reasons that should bathe the will in light. Any project that lacks true reasons to be performed is insufficient to move the will; the same can be said of every project whose motivations are not clear enough or, on the contrary, are too diffuse, or lack personalized reasons (meaning, that it's not clear why this thing is *fitting for me*, or why I have to do it here and now). Hence, in order that the end be able to move our will, it is necessary that we do some intellectual work on it, aiming for it to be perceived:

a) As an *objective and true* good, that is, as an authentic good: honest, worthy to be sought after, necessary. Such are the good that we really need in this life, as well as eternal goods.

b) As *possible*, that is, we need to see it as *possible to be obtained*, either with our own strengths or with the help of others (at least with God's help).

c) As *clear and as concrete* as possible: what is it, exactly, that I want? The will isn't moved towards things that are generic or confused, or towards an "abstract concept." Although they might seem similar, the will of a young person is not equally moved by the desire "to be missionary" as by the desire *to be a missionary following the style of this or that missionary* whom they have known and admire; the desire to imitate concrete models (an *incarnated ideal*) is always stronger than an un-incarnated idea.

d) As *fitting* for me; we've already said this: we must not only see this thing as good, but rather as fitting for me, as what is the best for me, as what is the path that is suited for me because of my way of being or my concrete aspirations; or it is what here and now will really bring me to live fully and completely develop my abilities. Nevertheless, we must not reduce these "conveniences" to a purely sensible or pragmatic level. There are realities that are supremely fitting for us even though they do not sensibly please us nor do they produce any gratification, as happens, for instance, with bitter medicine, with painful treatments, or with a deserved humiliation. When we say that the goal should be judged as fitting or advantageous for my person, we must understand that we are referring to the person considered integrally, not only in light of their most personal characteristics (tastes, education, inclinations, culture) but also in their social characteristics (office, duties of their state of life, obligations they are under), and in their spiritual and transcendent characteristics (their eternal vocation, their responsibility before God, their mission in this world, the

salvation of their soul). In this sense, for example, fidelity to a spouse who no longer physically or emotionally attracts us, or who perhaps does not share our tastes or goals, continues to be what is most fitting for a married person, both in the temporal as well as in the eternal sense. This important clarification must not be forgotten.

e) And *present* in the moment of decision making. We must distrust the motives that we have seen very clearly in the past if they have remained in the past, and we have not continued reliving them now. All of us know how much the passage of time erodes and darkens such motives; for this reason, even when decisions were made with great lucidity, for example, in the choice of our vocation, with the passing of the years the reasons that moved us to take that step lose their clarity and light, and it is easy for temptations and doubts to make a life-long project shake. How many marriages and how many consecrated lives have ended in disaster because of the failure to update the reasons that motivated that initial surrender to God or to their spouse! One must go back to periodically meditate and refresh those reasons, or to see new ones, which can always be found.

This intellectual work is done by means of a *weighted consideration* of these reasons: meditating, encouraging oneself, and praying.

2) The second is passional or affective (emotional)

The truth is that a purely intellectual consideration of the reasons is not enough. If we want to have something move us, or, even better, to have it seize hold of us, it must be able to arouse our affectivity. It is well-known that the passions, affections, or emotions can grab hold of our will. We are speaking now of emotions that are voluntarily aroused, not the ones that arise spontaneously. If, with respect to what we have planned, passions spontaneously arise, these will cause no difficulty, since the passion will reinforce the desire. What interests us here is to highlight that a languid desire can be helped by *deliberating provoking an emotion that reinforces it*.

Hence, then, we speak of *stimulating* a passion, so that the passion can help us to desire more intensely. This isn't a vicious circle, since, as healthy psychology teaches, the will can move itself by itself. Nor is it surprising that, in spite of having the strength of will for some things, we might not have it for others, be it because we don't like them or because they don't bring us enthusiasm. Hence, with a little bit of will that we might have (and all of us have a little, unless we are suffering from major wounds such as *abulia*, apathy, or laziness), we can try to load up with passional or emotion motivation the things that we are obligated to do, and this, once "emotionalized" or "subjectivized" will strongly move the emotional cords.

This is the principle by means of which great leaders directed burning discourses to their followers when they were at the point of facing great dangers, or things that required heroic deeds, or in the face of which the will naturally languished out of fear or fatigue. The reminder of all the goods that are to follow from the carrying out of this or that act, or that of the evils that could follow from not doing it, fill the person with emotion, and transform a simple desire into a *passionate desire*. A worthy example is the discourse that Shakespeare puts on the lips of Henry V before the battle of Agincourt, on the feast day of Saints Crispin and Crispinian in 1415, after acknowledging that his ten thousand fatigued soldiers would need to face a fresh French twice that size:

What's he that wishes so?
 My cousin Westmoreland? No, my fair cousin:
 If we are mark'd to die, we are enough
 To do our country loss; and if to live,
 The fewer men, the greater share of honour.
 God's will! I pray thee, wish not one man more. . . .
 God's peace! I would not lose so great an honour
 As one man more, methinks, would share from me
 For the best hope I have. O, do not wish one more!
 Rather proclaim it, Westmoreland, through my host,
 That he which hath no stomach to this fight,
 Let him depart; his passport shall be made
 And crowns for convoy put into his purse:
 We would not die in that man's company
 That fears his fellowship to die with us.

This day is called the feast of Crispian:
 He that outlives this day, and comes safe home,
 Will stand a tip-toe when the day is named,
 And rouse him at the name of Crispian.
 He that shall live this day, and see old age,
 Will yearly on the vigil feast his neighbours,
 And say 'To-morrow is Saint Crispian.'
 Then will he strip his sleeve and show his scars.
 And say 'These wounds I had on Crispin's day.'
 Old men forget: yet all shall be forgot,
 But he'll remember with advantages
 What feats he did that day: then shall our names
 Familiar in his mouth as household words
 Harry the king, Bedford and Exeter,
 Warwick and Talbot, Salisbury and Gloucester,
 Be in their flowing cups freshly remember'd.
 This story shall the good man teach his son;
 And Crispin Crispian shall ne'er go by,
 From this day to the ending of the world,
 But we in it shall be remember'd;
 We few, we happy few, we band of brothers;
 For he to-day that sheds his blood with me
 Shall be my brother; be he ne'er so vile,
 This day shall gentle his condition:
 And gentlemen in England now a-bed
 Shall think themselves accursed they were not here,
 And hold their manhoods cheap whiles any speaks

That fought with us upon Saint Crispin's day.

Reasons of this sort were enough to swell the wills of the fatigued soldiers and cast them into battle with redoubled courage, thus obtaining a resounding victory.²⁷ If you prefer Biblical examples, read the discourse by Judas Maccabeus before the battle of Emmaus, with similar results (cf. 1 Mac 4²⁸). Certainly, this work isn't simply about arguments directed purely to reason, but rather ones that resonate an emotional cord.

In a similar way, everyone who wants to become enthusiastic about the works they must do, be it studying, praying, manual work, or fighting, must do the same. Affectivity is excited by seeing all the reasons for the fittingness, the pleasant aspects, the present or future benefits, the useful consequences, etc., of the act that is to be done. Likewise, other emotional effects come from considering the pains, losses, evils, and disadvantages that would be wrought by not performing a determined action. The passions

²⁷ Discourse before the battle of Agincourt in 1415, the day of Saint Crispin and Crispinian, in "Henry V," act IV; it was a complete victory for the English who fought with 9,000 men against 18,000. The English had between 100-500 men killed, according to various sources, and the French, between 5,000 and 8,000, according to the same sources, and 1,000 prisoners. Shakespeare exaggerated when speaking of 60,000 French.

²⁸ "So the following year [Lysias] gathered together sixty thousand picked men and five thousand cavalry, to fight them. They came into Idumea and camped at Beth-zur, and Judas met them with ten thousand men. Seeing that the army was strong, he prayed thus: 'Blessed are you, Savior of Israel, who crushed the attack of the mighty one by the hand of your servant David and delivered the foreign camp into the hand of Jonathan, the son of Saul, and his armor-bearer. Give this army into the hands of your people Israel; make them ashamed of their troops and their cavalry. Strike them with cowardice, weaken the boldness of their strength, and let them tremble at their own destruction. Strike them down by the sword of those who love you, that all who know your name may sing your praise.' Then they engaged in battle, and about five thousand of Lysias' army fell in hand-to-hand fighting" (1 Macc 4:28-34).

that contribute to reinforcing a desire are, first and foremost, sensible love, which is the fundamental passion that we find at the base of all other emotions; likewise zeal, desire, confidence, hope to obtain the good that is loved in spite of being surrounded by difficulties, and anger which rises up when a beloved good is threatened. On the contrary, fear is more ambiguous, because it paralyzes some people but encourages others to act; in any event, when it is made good use of, it can strengthen the will for the contrary act (for example, the one who attempts to strengthen their will for studying by arousing a lively fear of failure if they don't study well); for this reason, there is the saying that "fear doesn't wander aimlessly," in the sense that sometimes fear stimulates the lazy person and makes them find ways to escape from a danger, even a silly one. On the contrary, pain, sadness, and despair tend to paralyze the will's activity, and for this reason those who are predisposed to said emotions should learn to overcome them so that they are not left submerged in abandonment and passivity.

3) Finding "the" motive

Really, the point is not to accumulate reasons, but rather to find one that is sufficiently powerful to push the will to leave its inertia, its desire to stay put. Viktor Frankl's expression is well-known: "Man's main concern is not to gain pleasure or to avoid pain but rather to see a meaning in his life. That is why man is even ready to suffer, on the condition, to be sure, that his

suffering has a meaning.”²⁹ Suffering is one of the afflictions that our nature rejects the most. That the will *be positively disposed* to assume it implies that, even under the appearance of resignation, it has an enormous energy that inclines it towards the patient acceptance of suffering; *however, this requires a powerful motive that gives meaning* to such a sacrifice.

For some, it means trying to find that “reason” which is able to change one’s direction in life when it seems like it is heading towards a disaster, as Odysseus (Ulysses) found in the episode which gave rise to what Heinz Kohut would call “the semi-circle of mental health.” Odysseus was happily married with the beautiful Penelope and they had a small son who was only two, when news of an imminent war with Troy reached Ithaca. Odysseus did not want to abandon his family in order to undertake a war that he could foresee would be long and bloody, but it was clear that they would come to recruit him since he was a wise and courageous soldier. For this reason, when Menelaus and Palamedes came to find him, Odysseus thought up the idea to make them think that he was crazy so that they would leave him alone. With that end in mind, he set himself to plowing the beach with a plow pulled by an ox and an ass, sowing salt instead of wheat, while he dressed his head with a bonnet and repeated incoherent phrases. However, Palamedes, realizing that this was a trick, suddenly grabbed his son from his mother’s arms and threw him in front of the plow. Upon seeing the fallen child, Odysseus

²⁹ Frankl, Viktor, *Man’s Search for Meaning*, New York (1984), 136.

performed a rapid turn, tracing a semi-circle around him in order not to hurt him, the reaction proper to the balanced man. Love for his son was the *powerful motive* that set his will to reveal his deception before his recruiters and to prefer the undesired warfare and separation from his family to the death of his child.

In the same way, the person with a weak will has perhaps not found the *motive par excellence*, that immensely strong motive that is capable of setting their will in motion and to bend the arc that leads to ruin. It is not uncommon that when motives of this sort cannot be found among human goods, they can indeed be found among the supernatural ones.

4) Something more regarding the will's motives

Explaining some examples of surprising changes of behavior (in particular, the example of a hardened and uncorrectable Spanish convict, a murderer and thief, who, after having become a soldier in Africa, radically changed when he was treated with respect and affection by a captain, and became loyal, generous, and sacrificial) Laburu said: "experience tells us that 'will strength' is not like muscle strength. If a person has the muscular strength to lift 50 kilograms of weight, it is indifferent to the matter of that weight; they can lift 50 kilograms of anything. The will doesn't work like that. The matter regarding which the act of the will works can make the will stronger in some cases, and weaker in others. Thus, it becomes clear that will strength is not a thing *in*

itself, but rather that it varies according to the ‘motives’ that are presented to the will.”³⁰

He says the same with respect to propositions or goals: “A goal, simply on *account of having been set*, has no strength whatsoever to move the will. It needs to have a ‘motive’ present in the moment in which actions will be taken to seek it out. . . . It helps if that ‘motive’ is present in conscience, so that upon setting the goal, the person acts well [= *they act in a conscious way*] in whatever occasion we want that virtue practiced or goal worked towards, and thus circumstances and motive will be linked.”³¹

For this reason, there is a need, as we have already said earlier, to *make one’s own* the motives given to the will; that is, to load them with value and personal interest.

Let us reiterate, once again, that this is the fruit of pondering, meditating, and praying regarding the nature and value of our vocation, our project, our goals, etc.

³⁰ Laburu, José, *Psicología médica*, Montevideo (1942), 279.

³¹ *Ibid.*, 282.

5.

Work regarding the will in the most serious cases

In addition to the will's motive, the very act of the will itself must be worked on. As is clear, the education of the will presents different difficulties based on the degree of deterioration it has suffered. The cases where the will is most compromised are those who suffer from serious problems such as *abulia* or apathy. In these extreme cases, it must be seen if we are faced with damage that might demand medical intervention, as can happen with those who have abused toxic substances (like drugs or alcohol) and those who suffer from pathologies like severe depression. Assuming that we only find ourselves faced with such extreme cases within the limits of those that can be treated with a strong educative work, with spiritual direction, or with some type of psychotherapy, we can give the following indications:

Irala explains: "Those who are abulic (that is, those who suffer loss of will power) because of not making true acts of the will lose

the internal consciousness or feeling for them. *They should above all practice simple acts which are thoroughly willed* (for example, walking, lifting their arm, touching some object) until they recapture the internal feeling of a will act. They should then go on graduating these acts from what is more easy to the more difficult.”³²

Thus, in these cases the re-education must begin with basic acts, like the exercise of raising an arm or a leg, walking a few steps, or lifting a chair. Perhaps some people carry out these acts normally, but lack the strength of will for other, more important tasks. The exercise of these acts (walking, sitting, or getting up) isn’t necessary, then, because these people aren’t doing it, but rather in order that *in those acts they might experience* the influence of their will (to be aware – to feel – that in that act I am performing it with my will), and later this experience can be applied to other, more important acts; in this way, they can also recover their confidence in the strength of their own will, which is what those with weak wills lose first.

I transcribe a concrete example taken from the same Irala: “One young man, though educated in Catholic schools, threw over every moral restraint when he went on to the university. By habitually surrendering to impure vice he ended up in such a state of *abulia* and indecision that to him it seemed impossible to practice continence. He felt depressed, enslaved and annihilated in his personality. The vicious obsession was moreover obstructing his concentration in study.

³² Irala, N., *Achieving Peace of Heart*, New York (1961), 58-59

It was not too hard to convince him that by re-educating his will he could remake his personality and recover his onetime vigor. In the first week of treatment he made external acts of the will eight or ten times a day by answering the following questions.

- 1) 'What's up? When and how is it to be done?' And he would make a concrete answer: the question is whether or not 'to get up out of bed, walk to the right or left,' and so forth.
- 2) 'Is this possible for me? If I order my feet to take me to such and such a position, will they obey me?' And he got himself to feel the feasibility of this by making affirmative replies. When a somewhat more difficult matter would come up, he would say in a tone of absolute confidence: 'Yes, I am sure I can do it!'
- 3) 'Are there motives for willing this? Yes, even if it be no more than to exercise my personality and educate myself.'
- 4) 'In that case shall I will it or not, yes or no?' And he would make the decision internally, setting aside the contrary possibility.

He experienced so much pleasure at feeling the strength of his will that on the third day he came to tell me all about it. Then he exercised himself in acts that were more difficult and required a greater conquest. Afterwards he practised acts in which his passion was involved; for example, instead of going into such and such a dangerous place, going into another. Or he would order his

eyes to fix themselves on some inoffensive object instead of an exciting one. And so on.

After sixteen days he was transformed. . . . And I should add that to these mental means he also added the supernatural one. He also reconciled himself to God in the Sacrament of Penance.”³³

We cannot set limits to this possibility of *reviving* that the will has, no matter how many cases of a flattened will we might know. Thus, for example, even if it is undeniable that one of the most severe problems is found in cases of those with endogenic depression and suicidal tendencies, nonetheless Frankl says in this regard: “Didn’t E. Stransky point out that certain officers with endogenic depression who had solemnly promised they wouldn’t kill themselves remain faithful to their word? Didn’t E. Menninger-Lerchenthal show that, ‘within certain limits of possibility,’ the unhealthy inclination to suicide can be controlled through a religious attitude?”³⁴ For this reason, the same author adds: “Both the brain pathologist and the general psychiatrist know from experience those limitations that spiritual freedom suffers because of a psycho-physical illness; however, it is precisely those two experts of psycho-physical conditions who are witnesses of spiritual freedom, witnesses of that free field of action that makes them conclude ‘by exclusion,’ that there exists a certain ability in the face of the psycho-physical conditions, the

³³ Ibid., 59-60.

³⁴ Frankl, V., *El hombre doliente*, cap. IV.

existence of spiritual freedom. These witnesses prove the power of the person in spite of their apparent ‘powerlessness’; I would say that they uncover the *spirit’s power of resistance*.³⁵

³⁵ Ibid., cap. II.

6.

To educate the will through acts

Since the will is a faculty, it is ordered to operation, and it is by acting that it develops and perfects itself. For this reason, “the cardinal rule of training the will is: Every day exercise yourself in conquests of the self however small, and after doing this for many years your will becomes strong. You need very many small practices.”³⁶

I’m assuming that those who read these pages either have a personal difficulty with the will or must help someone who so suffers. For this reason, I must warn you not to fool yourselves with magical or instant solutions; the work of education, or re-educating, as the case may be, the will is a slow and steady work. It will not be accomplished in a day, nor in a month; it is a long-term task. However, in the measure that the will performs truly voluntary acts (meaning, “wanting” them), without getting hung up on whims (“I would want,” or “I wish”), it will grow in

³⁶ Toth, Tihamer, *The Young Man of Character*, ch. 3, 95.

strength and resolution. In particular the process of *re-educating* the will should focus on *external* acts of the will, beginning with some easy ones (“I want to move my foot”; “I want to walk until that point”) and then attempting ones that are progressively more and more difficult (“Today I do not want to eat dessert”); after this, the subject can move on to performing internal acts (“I want to think about this or that thing”; “During the next fifteen minutes I want to think about this topic or I don’t want to think about this problem”). As we said earlier, the very fact of witnessing the will’s influence on movement and its command of our external potencies (hands, feet, etc.) help to show that we can perform acts of the will and recover our confidence (since often what we consider to be a “lack of willpower” is rather a lack of confidence that we can really efficaciously desire something).

The work must begin by making use of the will’s magnificent reflexive capacity. “Reflexive” here doesn’t refer to knowledge, but rather to the ability to act upon one’s self, which is proper to the spiritual faculties. In this sense, the will is reflexive because it can desire its own desire. Saint Augustine expressed this beautifully when he wrote in the *Confessions*: “Not yet did I love, and I loved to love. I sought what I should love, loving to love.” Since love, the act of the will, is a good, the will can want that good, that is, it can love *to love*. Hence it is here that someone who feels a weakness or a lack in desire, apathy, or *abulia* should start: they must aspire to *want*, they must love *to love*, to desire with all their strength *to truly and really desire*. They should ask this from

God as a gift: “Grant me to truly love; give me the grace to seriously desire something that is truly worth loving.”

1) Goals, means, and examinations

To work through acts of the will means to work by means of “commands,” “more or less short-term ends,” “goals” that are obtainable in a prudent amount of time. In the measure that a person can experience that they have been able to achieve a goal that they have set for themselves, no matter how easy or short-term it was, not only will their will strength grow materially, but also their confidence in that capacity, and this will redound in the intensification of that same energy.

This will require, at least at the beginning of the work, especially in people with deeper problems in their wills, a meticulous work that implies two tasks: a prior one of *planning*, and a posterior one of *examination*.

First, what the person desires to achieve should be *programed or planned*: what is the goal I want to achieve and by what means I will make it possible. Without an *end* or *goal*, nothing breaks out from its state of inertia; without *means*, no end can be reached. Thus, the first thing that must be established is what it is that we are proposing to achieve; this must consist in a concrete end, and something that is not too far off, as we have already insisted on the importance of witnessing – that is, experiencing and feeling – the efficacy of the work that we are carrying out. According to the case, this might mean: rising at a certain, set time, limiting the

quantity of food that we eat, praying certain prayers daily, spending less time on the computer, giving up smoking, limiting the use of the phone or television. . . . Everyone knows what it is they need to work on.

In addition to the goal, we must also make it clear what means we propose to undertake, given that then I will examine myself in detail regarding this. How will I make myself eat less? It might be that I need to impose certain measures on myself: to decide at the end of breakfast what and how much I will eat at lunch; to propose to myself that I eat only one plate (and this which pre-determined amounts), or to have a diet prepared by a professional, etc. Do I want to be ordered in my use of the computer? It can help me to set the computer in a visible place in the house where others can see what I see on the screen; to decide how much time per day I will use it and at what moments; to leave the computer off outside of those times so that, as the saying goes, “the occasion doesn’t make the thief”; to tell those who live with me what my resolutions are, so that I can always bear in mind that the fact that others are in the know regarding my resolutions might help me to be faithful to them; to use filters against pornography; to ask someone to periodically revise the history of my browsing. The list can be quite long and varied.

Then comes the task of reviewing the results. And I say “review” and not simply “enumerate.” It does almost no good to be aware that we have done well or that we’ve failed so many or this many times. What influences greatly in this work is to know

what contributed to the fact that we succeeded in order to achieve what we had proposed for ourselves, or *what got in the way* so that things didn't go right. Why didn't I do what I had planned? Was it a lack of concentration, laziness, distraction, too little prayer, to base myself only on my strengths, to not ask for help, to not update my goals, to not renew the reasons I have to overcome myself, not putting enough passion into what I do? Only a sincere examination can give me insight into *what works*, and *what doesn't work*. And afterwards, I should adjust or correct my plans according to the results of this examination. We can even make a weekly chart (which is something very important in the most serious cases, especially when we have "injured" wills, and even in cases that are not so serious, at least at the beginning of this education). It can be laid out, for example, in the following way:

Proposed Goals	Means in order to achieve it	Successes (why did it work?)	Failures (why didn't it work?)

In his *Spiritual Exercises*, Saint Ignatius proposes something very similar: the “particular examination of conscience,” which can be used for this work.³⁷

2) Imposing a penance on oneself

Simply by reviewing our successes and failures we will take an important step . . . but it is insufficient unless we supplement it

³⁷ Cf. Fuentes, M., *El examen particular de conciencia*, Colección Virtus n. 1, San Rafael (2011). Available in English as *The Particular Examination of Conscience and the Dominant Defect*. Regarding this point and the entirety of the Ignatian method contained in the Exercises, what Irala writes is very interesting, as well as the doctors that he cites: “The noted [Protestant] Dr. Vittoz had a great admiration for St. Ignatius Loyola. He believed that Loyola was three centuries ahead of his time in the fine introspection and effective pedagogy revealed in his *Exercises* and *Examens*. The purpose of St. Ignatius is to make a man perfect. He proceeds according to the most sublime laws of our higher mental activity without allowing the lower levels of activity or disordered feelings to disturb this process. This is indicated in the very first paragraph of his little book. To his end he uses the will’s legislative power in the *Exercises* to choose and determine a concrete way of life. In the *Examens* he uses the will’s executive power to bring this down into practice.

The *Exercises* propose motives which are most strong and noble in themselves and which are reinforced by the feeling of love for Jesus Christ.

These motives are to be subjectively felt and adopted by the exercitant. When his higher mental activity has been so directed that passions do not deroute it, then come meditations preparatory to the ‘Election’ (or choice of a way of life). And then come decisions about concrete details of the future way of life.

The executive power of the will has a very efficient instrument in the ‘particular examen.’ This is truly a control and stimulus to the will. The particular examen makes us perform true will-acts by making them concrete, each the subject of some one virtue or vice, and in a determined place and time. It makes us feel their possibility and facility by limiting the expenditure of energy and vigilance to a half day at a time. Finally it makes us renew our decisions three times a day, and strengthen it by comparison of one examen with another, with contrition when we fail and with love of Jesus Christ. *It is a spiritual treatment which is most efficacious for curing moral illnesses.*

Dr. Schleich, a Protestant, professor of the Faculty of Medicine at Berlin, asserts even more: ‘I say with all assurance and conviction that with these norms and exercises in our hands we could even today transform our asylums, prisons and mental institutions, and prevent the commitment of two thirds of the people who are today within their walls’” (Irala, *Achieving Peace of Heart*, 153-154).

with other things. We don't achieve anything only with knowledge of how things have been going for us. Thus, just as we need to be excited and become aware of the steps that we have taken (since, if we don't give positive encouragement to the one who is fighting, and in particular if we don't show our support and happiness at their successes, there is no way to educate), it is equally important to know how to impose a penance on oneself after each voluntary fall. If failing in one's resolutions has the same consequences as fulfilling them, why are we going to be on the lookout in order not to repeat the same failings?

Here, I present a story, taken from an old writing for young people, a story that, in spite of the decades that have taken place since, has lost not of its value. An author who is well-known and respected in this topic of ours writes:

“One day, as I was correcting a young man for his lack of fidelity and his sins . . .

—But, Father—he exclaimed—. What you say is right but . . . the temptation is stronger than I am. . . . I would like to give it up . . . but I can't do it. . . .

—If you want to, you can—I answered him.

—That's an easy thing to say; but . . . any little thing is enough to give rise to a storm in me and then to a fall!

—Do you want me to give you a simple remedy? With it, I promise that you'll be cured.

—I accept it. . . .

—Well then: each time that the storm is unleashed and you end up falling, you give me a small amount of money so that I can give alms to the poor.

Since the quantity was small, he began to laugh, saying that with that amount he wouldn't be easily corrected.

—Ok, in any case, try it out, and then let me know how it goes.

He left, and kept his word. It goes without saying that all his little incomes began to be sacrificed, and he had to begin sacrificing cigarettes and then other things that he was used to enjoying. Even then, at first there weren't notable changes.

—See, Father?²—he told me, triumphantly, in the face of the inefficacy of my remedy.

—Keep going, and we'll see.

One fine day, seeing that his wallet was always empty, he said to himself: 'I'm an idiot! If I keep going like this, I'll end up without any money, and goodbye to vacations, goodbye to outings. . . .' In these reflections a week passed, and he remained firm; that is, he was conquering himself. . . . His pocket and his wallet remained intact. . . . He re-doubled his efforts; every now and again he had a setback; but, happy with the victories that he had achieved, he swore he would finish what he had started, and at the end of a couple of months the whole spirit of rebellion disappeared from within him. Even more, he soon reached the

point of doing out of virtue what he had originally started doing out of not wanting to lighten or to empty his wallet.”

From what are we going to deprive ourselves? Or what are we going to demand from ourselves every time that we set aside our resolutions? Make it cost us something, even something small, and we will have an incentive to move forward!

3) Other means

Fr. Irala also suggests some other useful means, which I mention here for those who want to take advantage of them:³⁸

a) First, to distinguish between the act that is truly willed, the decided one, and the ones that are not: from desires, impulses, whims, and intentions to act. This is important, not only so that we don't fool ourselves into thinking that we are sincerely desiring something when we really only have inefficient or passing desires, but also to avoid unhealthy scruples when we fear having consented (with complete willfulness) in some evil internal act (a thought or desire) when really it was a temptation not perfectly accepted.

b) To be concrete, in order not to be satisfied with a mere desire or project. We cannot live from mere dreams, but rather from realities. If I want something, I must make the when, how, and in what way I will carry it out concrete.

³⁸ Cf. Irala, N., *Achieving Peace of Heart*, 188-189.

c) To move gradually from what is easy to what is difficult, in order to feel the possibility and avoid failures, or false acts of the will, with the discouragement that follows from them.

d) We can also dramatize (that is, imagine as if it were a scene in a play) our will process, presenting it as a fight and breaking it into four stages:

1st: The presentation of the contenders: what are the acts that I can desire or reject (for example: to remain in bed when they call me to get up or to get out of it)

2nd: The fight between the contenders: the discussion of the motives for and against: of what use or of what harm would remaining bring me, and what benefits follow from getting out of bed?

3rd: To feel the possibility that I can give to victory to the contender that I want.

4th: The victory of one of them, leaving it as the victor in the field of consciousness, imagining concretely how I will get out of bed, and putting out of my mind the possibility of remaining in bed, that is, making this second option impossible for me, on account of the decision I made (that is, to convince myself that “I can’t not want this thing that I have decided”); in other words, we must be convinced that if we have made this or that decision—given, of course, that it is a good action—we can’t simply “turn the page”; there’s no turning back. In this way men and women “of their word” are formed (the person *of their word* is the one who

never fails to fulfill a promise nor breaks with what they have said, even when this implies sacrifices and damages for them).

Moreover, it is necessary to act in a consistent way; everyday life offers us numerous occasions, and we can make use even of the smallest events for our work. I reproduce a series of suggestions from the great educator of youth, Tihamer Toth, suggestions which can be very useful to inspire us to do other things that are perhaps more suited to each one of us or are perhaps easier for us to achieve:

“Let us look at some examples:

When you cannot avoid some trouble, pain, or trial, do not snarl but endure it patiently. ‘I am so thirsty!’ ‘I have such a headache!’ ‘This shoe is too tight!’ – do not complain, groan and whimper . . . look on your crucified Lord, and endure it silently.

What you have decided to do, go through with it. By hook or by crook, do it. Once you started it, never abandon it half finished. [There are young people who every quarter hour come up with new plans without ever happily finishing one of them].

Faithfully fulfill your daily duties. Even the smallest one of them. If it is worth doing, it is worth doing well.

There is your early morning battle with your pillow (which many boys lose); when the time arrives, get out of bed immediately.

Control not only your bad moods but also the good ones. Be moderate even in your enthusiasm. Also in your speech and in your silence.

A good means of training the will is restraining our senses. Your eyes should not be roving. Do not look at everything that arouses your curiosity. There is a big crowd on the street and you are dying to know what is going on there. Never mind! Conquer yourself and just not go there.

And control your tongue. This is incredibly difficult. Not to betray a secret entrusted to you. Not to talk about the faults of others and gloat over them. Not to gossip. Not to ridicule and mock those present, not to slander those absent. Not to be intoxicated by your own voice so that nobody else present gets a chance to speak. Not to be able to keep your mouth shut. Not to brag about your own accomplishments. And at all times stick to the truth even if it is to your disadvantage. And never lie, even in the smallest things, even though they would lead to great advantages.

And the dining table is also a great place to practice self-denial. Do not be choosy as to what you eat, do not look for and give preferences to delicacies, and do not be greedy and stuff yourself full.”³⁹

In an old writing it was said, speaking of this last topic: “never get up from the table without having made a small sacrifice.”

³⁹ Toth, Tihamer, *The Young Man of Character*, ch. 3, 103.

4) The will and habits

The end goal of performing these acts of the will and repeating this is to form habits. True education is completed when a person has developed virtuous habits in their potencies – in this case in the will. This might seem baffling for a mind that has a weak understanding of what a habit is, that is, a mind that thinks of it as a simple custom or way of acting. However, this has nothing to do with what a habit truly is. A habit isn't simply a custom; a custom could be done for any number of reasons, including out of fear or routine; a habit is only acquired if the act is freely chosen. A young person can go to Mass all the years that they are in school, if their school requires it, only to avoid a punishment from their superiors or to avoid a bad grade or mark; in this way, even though they might become *accustomed* to going to Mass, they will never, ever form the habit of going. It could even be that an interior *habit* is forming of complaining against going to Mass, considering it as boring or obligatory, something that they would skip if they could. The end result will be that, when there is no longer any exterior obligation, the practice of going to Mass will be immediately abandoned. In order for someone to acquire a habit, they should do what is commanded “as if it were not commanded”; they should do it because they want to do it; that is, they must *choose it*. Only when a person acts out of their own choice will virtuous habits be formed. This is the reason why vicious habits are formed so quickly: no one obliges us to be bad or to sin; in order to act against God's commandments, one must

“choose” to sin, and often also to overcome obstacles like shame, the fear of being discovered, the fear of a bad reputation, and other undesirable consequences. Our passions incline us, but they don’t obligate us (we’re not machines). For this reason, on some occasions, perhaps a single bad act is sufficient in order for a vice to take root (which is also true for a virtue when only one act is performed, *but a heroic one*). In order to assure ourselves that our acts are truly free and that we’re not acting simply out of an obligation, it helps a great deal to always do a little bit more than what is required, sometimes giving up not only what is prohibited but even a little more (for example, the person who limits himself, not simply to eating only what is necessary, but even a little less than that; the person who doesn’t simply avoid gazing at what is obscene, but who even gives up looking at things that aren’t bad but that are motivated only by curiosity, etc.).

Virtues – that is, good perfective habits – are perfections of our spiritual faculties (intellect and will) and our sensible ones (the concupiscible and irascible appetites), which gives those faculties energy and the possibility to produce their acts in the most perfect way possible. In the same way that in another order of habits (artistic ones, which also suppose the development of certain technical abilities) we speak of a *virtuoso violinist or pianist* in order to say that the musician is able to make masterful use of their instrument and give the best of its musical capabilities, something similar occurs in the higher faculties, in which virtuous habits give a three-fold perfection:

1st: A perfection in the order of “knowledge,” since the habit “con-naturalizes” the potency with the object of its tendency, it assimilates it, and that similarity permits a sort of intuition (the chaste person *intuits* both what is pure as well as what threatens their chastity; the just person *senses* what is just and *smells* from far off what stinks of a rotten business). From here comes the Aristotelian expression that Saint Thomas takes up: the good end does not seem good “except to the good or virtuous man who has the proper evaluation of the end, since moral virtue rectifies the conception of the end.”⁴⁰

2nd: Moreover, it perfects the capacity for election, that is, it makes the person capable to choose the virtuous good. A habit is precisely that: an elective perfection; it purifies freedom by making it tend with greater strength and surety towards the good that crowns it.

⁴⁰ “The habit of prudence in the soul is not joined to this insight, i.e., this perceptive principle of shrewdness, without moral virtue which always refers to good, as has been pointed out. The reason for this is clear. As argumentation has principles in the speculative field so it has in the practical field, for instance, the principle that such an end is the good and the supreme good, whatever that end be for which a man operates (and anything may be used as an example). Thus for the self-controlled man the supreme good and a quasi-principle is the attainment of moderation in the desires of touch. But the supreme good is not apparent except to the good or virtuous man who has the proper evaluation of the end, since moral virtue rectifies the conception of the end. That what is really the supreme good does not appear in evil things is evident from the fact that vice, the opposite of virtue, perverts the judgment of the reason and causes deception in practical principles, for example, to follow his desires seems the supreme good to the licentious man. It is not possible to reason correctly if we are in error about principles. Since then it pertains to the prudent man to reason correctly in practical matters, obviously it is impossible for one to be prudent who is not virtuous, just as a man who errs about the principles of demonstration cannot acquire science” (Saint Thomas Aquinas, *Commentary on the Nicomachean Ethics*, VI, 10, nn 1273-1274).

3rd: Finally, in the executive order it helps the acts that come from that faculty to be carried out quickly, easily, and delightfully.

Worldly people live without understanding this truth; however, we must recognize that even the ancients had a very pure understanding of virtue. For this reason, Pinckaers writes: “in another time, virtue meant strength and grace, and its splendor made demons take flight.”

The virtuous habits that perfect the will are justice and the whole group of virtues that surround it and that elevate the strength of this potency in its relations with others: justice with respect to the common good and particular things, religion with God, piety with parents and country, gratitude with benefactors, and so on.

In turn, the will also requires that the affective potencies of our sensibility be perfected by virtuous habits (temperance which perfects the concupiscible appetite – the faculty of pleasure – and fortitude the irascible – the faculty of overcoming and conquest) so that these might become docile to the will (these habits perfect from within these faculties, giving them a sort of connaturality or affinity with the will’s command).

Finally, the virtue of prudence is needed to perfect the intellect in its role of directing actions, by means of which we can precisely determine which virtuous act should be done here and now.

7.

The will to concentrate and to be distracted

Among the causes of the difficulties that afflict the will, we pointed out earlier the poor use of the will's energies or, as Lersh had it, "a bad technique." Doubtless many problems come from attempting to exercise the will in an angry or tense way or, on the contrary, with a disinterested feeling which, sooner or later, can produce ruin or fatigue.

Many people perceive the weakness of their will in their powerlessness or in the fatigue they experience in trying to control their thoughts when these go where they shouldn't (not only provoking distractions but also when they wander into lands that are morally dangerous) or when they cannot fix their thoughts on one set point (difficulty in concentrating, in praying, studying, thinking, etc.). The problems of dissipated attention, lack of concentration, constant distraction, inability to reason, and the like: are they problems intrinsic to our faculties for knowing,

or rather of our tired or weak will? Often, all of these, are above all from the will.

Both attention and concentration are cognitive phenomena, but they imply an important influence of the will. *Attention* shows the will's energy when by means of it we attenuate, that is, we set aside, all the sensorial impressions that impede our observation of what is found in the center of determinate finality (that is, what is, properly speak, "the center of attention"). When the will inhibits all of the imagination's representations and directs thought to one idea only, we speak of *concentration*. When the will does not have the strength to maintain this control (or if it doesn't want to exercise it), we speak of distraction.⁴¹

We must not forget that the will is the one that moves all the other potencies to act, including the intellect and even, to a certain point, the internal senses: I think because I want to think, and I stop thinking of something because I want to stop thinking about it; I want to imagine something, or I don't want to imagine it (although the will's control over the internal senses – imagination, memory, etc. – is exercised indirectly, because these are sensible organs, but nonetheless it is the will that desires or consents to them acting, it decides if they don't act, or at least it decides as much as it can to direct its attention to other things).⁴² It is the will, therefore, that is directly or indirectly involved in the fight

⁴¹ Cf. Lersh, Philipp, *La estructura de la personalidad*, 438-439.

⁴² Cf. Regarding this point, see what Thomas Aquinas says in the disputed question *De malo*, 6.

against distractions or, on the contrary, annoying and obsessive ideas.

The lack of control over one's own ideas – and over the acts that follow from these ideas – is very often on account of the defective way in which we control our emotions, images, and ideas. With good judgment Irala maintains that “to govern one's feelings it is necessary to control acts and ideas, since the idea precedes and inclines to act, and the acts and ideas affect the feelings . . . but how many there are who don't know what they think, or don't think what they want to, dominated as they are by continual distractions at study, work, and prayer. How much unnecessary fatigue! How much energy is lost because of a lack of mental unity! And they could be great geniuses, inventors, artists, and saints, if only they would learn to concentrate their intellectual and voluntary efforts on an ideal.”

In order to overcome this difficulty, we must train our potencies in such a way that we are able to concentrate when we want, that we can shift our attention from an inopportune object or from an obsessive or disturbing thought, that we can rest, stopping the flow of the imagination. . . . In the end, all of these exercises create a great strength of will, since the will is involved in all of these acts. Regarding this point, I once again turn to Irala, who offers us a simple and effective means to work.

1) Two-fold cognitive activity

The base of this work is the two-fold activity of our mind: one activity is receptive, and the other emissive. We receive sensations from the exterior world and we emit – we produce – images and ideas. To receive conscious sensations doesn't tire us; rather, it is like a medicine for the nervous system. It produces happiness, enrichment, peace, and rest. In contrast, the work of emission (that is, the re-presentation of sensations that were previously experienced, or new images or ideas enriched with other experiences, or reasonings consciously or unconsciously elaborated) means working, and this can cause fatigue.⁴³

For this reason, following the investigations of Dr. Roger Vittoz, Irala begins from a two-fold principle: first, in order to rest from mental fatigue and from the tensions that come from the uncontrolled productive or emissive mind, one *must become merely receptive* of sensations and of conscious acts; second, in order to stop the ideas that sadden, irritate, or frighten us, it will help us to

⁴³ This fatigue does not directly affect our spiritual faculties (intellect and will), but rather the body without which there is no thought. The brain is not the organ of thought, but rather of the sensible operations that are the condition of thought. For this reason, we should say that it is the *condition* for thought (because we cannot think without images, as Saint Thomas explains: cf. ST I, q. 84, a. 7). However, this extrinsic dependence suffices to explain why brain lesions can provoke mental illness, and why certain chemical substances can provoke uncontrollable thoughts and words. It also explains why intellectual work can provoke physical fatigue and especially headaches: since intellectual work demands the cooperation of the imagination, which is bound to an organ, as well as other activities, such as reading and writing, being concentrated, and often in an unnatural position (bent over a book), all of which are of the physical order (cf. Saint Thomas, ST I, q. 75, a. 3 ad 2).

cleanly and clearly realize what it is that we see, hear, touch, and do, that is, to have conscious sensations.

As might be guessed, this method can become a solution for many problems of the will: lack of control over the imagination, lack of control over the fears that paralyze us or push us to act against our true good, difficulty to desire things that stems from a lack of concentration on the act that we should carry out, slowness in rejecting ideas, obsessive images, and temptations in general. . . .

Likewise, the famed French doctor Paul Chauchard recommended Vittoz's sort of "indirect psycho-physical" work in order to control disordered impulses, and he said that it "should be the breviary of all self-education."⁴⁴

In a general outline, let us very succinctly explain this work of education or re-education.⁴⁵

2) Re-education of receptivity

Receptivity is an active and conscious state with respect to what is being received by the senses, and passive to everything else. Here we are speaking of sensible, and not intellectual, consciousness. Vittoz says that "to have consciousness of an act is not to think of it but rather *to feel it*"; for example, I can wash up

⁴⁴ Cf. Chauchard, Paul, *Celibato y equilibrio psicológico*, cited in: Coppens, *Sacerdocio y celibato*, Madrid (1972), 517.

⁴⁵ In reality, this should be called "re-education," because what we will point out here little children learn spontaneously, and, since all of us have been little children, it was really the first way that we behaved. Rather, we have "unlearned" these things as the years passed, and now it is necessary to return to them.

in the morning, thinking of all the different things that I must face and do throughout the day, and thus begin to tire myself out early; however, I can also wash up trying to *sense* the noise of the water that runs from the faucet, its temperature, the smell of the soap, the taste of the toothpaste, the movements of my body, and the like. This doesn't suppose any effort nor any sort of interpretation. Rather, I simply have a real object, outside of me, and I spontaneously receive it, free from all thought or emotion.

To receive a conscious sensation implies not only excitation or change of the senses by their proper object, and the subsequent transmission of the nervous currents to the brain centers, but also the *enlivening* of the sensations, the clear (sensible) *consciousness* of them, and to *leave them archived* in our memory. Conscious sensation is the easiest of our cognitive acts, the one that the youngest children carry out. It is a gentle and tranquil attention focused on exterior reality; to receive it as it is, without us having to tense up. We become aware of the fact or of the object, but we don't reason regarding its causes or effects. We see a tree without thinking that it is a tree, and, even less, if it is of this or that species; we simply and only pay attention to the color that enters our eyes (without attempting to judge if it is green, yellow, or brown), the general sort of movement that the wind produces in its branches, the noise of the leaves as they move. . . . Many people, especially those who are nervous, worried, emotional, and almost all who have a mental illness, rarely have clear sensations, and instead they live in a world that is subjective, sad, and unreal.

By means of the sensation of “conscious acts” a person learns to live in the present moment without spinning their heads around the past (as the scrupulous do), without so many doubts (as the obsessive do), and without anticipating the future in an exaggerated way (as nervous people do). To live in the present moment is an experience that produces a feeling of tranquility, improves nervous equilibrium, and re-establishes serenity.

This is a fundamental exercise for people who are tense, stressed, and worn out by their nerves, and, as a consequence, have a weakened or broken will.

Here are a couple of possible exercises in order to re-educate receptive consciousness:

a) Visual sensations: apply one’s sight for a few seconds to the scenery, an object, a color, or a detail, with almost passive attention, in complete tranquility, without hurry, without fixing thoughts on anything else. This is to receive the sensation without exerting ourselves, without thinking about anything else while we receive it, without any subjective modifications.

b) Auditory sensations: apply the sense of hearing to a sound that is nearby or far-off, for one second or for a few seconds (it helps to gently close the eyes) and let the sound waves enter naturally.

c) Sensations of touch: this is the contact of the skin with some object (the foot with the floor, the back and back of the chair, the hand and the table, arms and the chair, sheets and the legs, a breeze and the face, etc.), without thinking about the object

(that is, without thinking if it is cold, hard, rough, soft, etc.), but rather *simply realizing that I have a sensation of it*. Tactile attention is one of the best means to relax and rest when one wants to, and to make sleep easier.

d) The sensation of my own movements (the kinesthetic sense): we are not used to feeling our body, except when something hurts us. We can control a “tic” when we become aware of our involuntary movement. The same can be said of our movements that are clumsy, meaningless movements, or shakes that have no organic cause.

For example, if I take a rock in my hands and I experience its texture, its weight, its temperature. . . . As long as I remain in contact with my sensations, I am present, as it were, to that reality and, what is very important, at least for a few seconds, I learn to *suspend*, without useless effort, the diffusion and train of my thoughts (how important this is for those who suffer from obsessive thoughts or from a bombardment of images or ideas that they try to stop with little or no success!). In this way, by placing ourselves in a situation of receptivity of just the right sensations, the brain *sets itself at rest* and recovers energy.

Irala also suggests the following training exercises for us.

a) To relax while seated on a sofa, attempting to have conscious sensations for a few minutes of our *muscles* that are relaxed, the muscles we use for *breathing* (the diaphragm, the thorax). After 4 or 5 days of training, a person begins to have

awareness of some movements that they had never perceived before.

b) Again, and always on a sofa, slowly bend the arm over the forearm; the right, the left, then both together, until the point of feeling, in a few days, the motor sensations of the forearm.

c) Again, and always on a sofa, do the same with the arm extended forward and backward, towards one side and then the other; then, while standing, make vertical movements, up or down.

d) Movements of flexion and twisting of the trunk.

e) Movements of the head. Simply let the movements “take place,” being content just to sense them happening. Again, this is always done gently and for a few seconds.

f) Movements of the legs: passive balance on one leg, then the other, like a pendulum or like something dead.

g) Once this has been mastered, it is very useful to move on to walking consciousness or the “sensed marching”: with steps that are neither very slow nor too fast, feel that your legs move, or feel the contact of the foot with the floor, the bending of the leg at the knee, etc.

In order to perform these exercises, it is important to avoid all neuro-muscular tension (of the forehead, the eyes, the jaws, etc.). If these exercises are done several times a day, even though it might not be for more than a minute or two at a time, receiving three or more sensations for each sense, in a short amount of time

a person will notice a greater peace and happiness, and the world will seem more beautiful since it will impose itself as it is, without the sad modifications of an uncontrolled unconsciousness.

3) Re-education of emissivity

Secondly, we must re-educate our emissivity or attention, that is, our ability to work and produce.

Our attention is *perfect* when we pay attention to only one object, to the exclusion of all others; in such cases production is at a maximum, natural pleasure great, and (physical) fatigue minimum. On the other hand, our attention is *deficient* when we follow an idea with the imposition of another, with distractions; in such cases production and satisfaction are less and fatigue greater.

Lastly, it becomes *harmful* when we follow several ideas (for example, a lecture or a presentation), and, at the same time (almost simultaneously), another *parasitic idea* (a concern, a fear, a dislike, a feeling of fatigue . . .); this is like walking while carrying a backpack full of rocks; in such cases fatigue will be disproportionate, abnormal (in terms of the psyche), and there will be no production (ideas don't stick, or, if they do stick, they are easily forgotten). This last situation has two main causes: a lack of interest in the present work, and an excess fear of or desire for the parasitic idea.

Many problems of the will come from this double source: the lack of interest or *lack of enthusiasm* for the things that we must do, and *concerns* that act like parasitic ideas dividing, not only our

attention, but also our energies. Saint Thomas calls this *weakening produced by subtraction or distraction*: “A passion of the sensitive appetite cannot draw or move the will directly; but it can do so indirectly, and this in two ways. First, by a kind of distraction: because, since all the soul’s powers are rooted in the one essence of the soul, it follows of necessity that, when one power is intent in its act, another power becomes remiss, or is even altogether impeded, in its act, both because all energy is weakened through being divided, so that, on the contrary, through being centered on one thing, it is less able to be directed to several [*the one who embraces a lot cannot squeeze much*, the saying goes]. . . . In the operations of the soul, a certain attention is requisite, and if this be closely fixed on one thing, less attention is given to another. In this way, by a kind of *distraction*, when the movement of the sensitive appetite is enforced in respect of any passion whatever, the proper movement of the rational appetite or will must, of necessity, become remiss or altogether impeded.”⁴⁶

Work on re-educating our ability to concentrate on what we what must do and the ability to focus ourselves only on this, efficiently rejecting all other worries or anxieties, is the key to solving problems of the intellect, will, and attention that come from this source.

Irala proposes different exercises in order to re-educate this ability.

⁴⁶ Saint Thomas, ST I-II, q. 77, a. 1.

a) By means of *external visual* concentration: learn to concentrate on one point, for example, by tracing figures (circles, triangles, spirals, or other imaginary pictures) in the air with a finger, following them with attention and only thinking about the drawing that I am making.

b) By means of *internal visual* concentration: this consists of doing the same thing suggested above, but without the physical movements of my hand or my finger and, rather, closing my eyes and imagining that I am writing upon a blackboard. In addition to figures, we can imagine that we are writing letters or words. This can be supplemented by then imagining that I erase them to the point of “seeing” everything cleared away.

c) With auditory concentration: to voluntarily pay attention to different noises, for example, to follow the sounds of the watch ten times without distracting myself. All of these should be done for a few minutes at a time and several times during the day.

d) With concentration on a reading: fix attention on what we are reading until we reach a first period. There, we should rest for a few moments with conscious sensations, and then return to reading until a second period, rest, and again and again until we read a whole page (this should be repeated three times a day). This is very good for slowing down the rush and anxiety to finish reading. It is important to maintain that neuro-muscular relaxation when we need to pay attention.

I recommend reading directly the books of Irala and Vittoz.⁴⁷

I want to emphasize that these exercises and those like them are not exclusively practices of the sensitive faculties (imagination, memory, attention, etc.) but essentially of the *will*, and for this reason they produce an intellectual-voluntary strengthening and development, that is, in our higher faculties.

In essence, when the imagination acts without the will's governance, as happens, for instance, in dreams or in distractions, the images follow a free, illogical, and even absurd association; one image evokes another with which it has a purely casual relation, and this is followed by others no less disconnected, all of which like a crazed dash can end up in the wildest and most undesired thoughts.

In contrast, with these exercises the will's "command" over what is imaginative (the group of faculties that have sensible images or phantasms as their object: the imagination, the memory, and the cogitative power) is trained; the will's governance, while not absolute, is extremely important for our psychic balance. For example, when we imagine, because this is what we have decided, that we are writing on an imaginary blackboard, and the letters make a name or a phrase, and then we continue imagining that we are erasing the letters one by one, it is not the imagination that is acting according to its free wanderings (which would produce an

⁴⁷ Cf. Irala, *Achieving Peace of Heart*, previously cited; Idem, *Eficiencia sin fatiga*, Buenos Aires (1994); Vittoz, R., *Traitement des psychonévroses par Contrôle Cérébral*, Paris (11th edition: 1981). This has recently been translated and published in Italian: *Trattamento dolce delle psiconevrosi*, Macro edizioni, 2003.

immediate distraction), but rather it is that the imagination has been set to that task by the will which determines concretely what it should do and governs it so that it does not escape into the wilderness of free association. From there it follows that at the same time it is an exercise of the will (as the faculty that commands), and of the imagination (as the faculty that is commanded). The result will be, therefore, a “quasi-habit” of imagination (because the imagination is not the subject of perfective habits) by which it is subjected, as much as possible, to the governance of our spiritual faculties.⁴⁸

⁴⁸ Cf. Saint Thomas, ST I-II, q. 17, a. 7 ad 2.

8.

The will and effort

We've already mentioned some problems of the will that are related with fear or rejection of effort. This hits upon one of the greatest problems of our times, in that everything is focused upon *easiness*: people want to obtain everything quickly and with the least amount of physical or intellectual effort possible (it suffices to look through magazines that offer methods to learn languages like the famous *Effortless Russian*, *Easy English Course*, or *Mandarin in Fifteen Days*). Advertising proposes an invitation that becomes wider as the work lessens and the success increases. For this same reason, today education is completely devoid of authority (both parents and teachers), discipline, punishments, obligations . . . and instead what is given students is a measureless freedom which quickly degenerates into the abuse of freedom.

This is the key to understanding the double failure of modern educational proposals. I say "double" because it doesn't give what it promises (it is impossible to obtain knowledge without a struggle), and it ends up ruining wills that become weak and

twisted. How, all the more, are minds being produced that are both “thin and big-bellied,” like the horse in the fable: big-bellied because of the quantity of pseudo-knowledge and scrawny because of a lack of existential assimilation of the same.

The truth is entirely the opposite: the “first rule of education is to not make the exercises too easy, because the goal of these exercises is to overcome the difficulty.”⁴⁹ In other words, education is directly precisely to *overcoming difficulties* and to becoming aware that *difficulties can be overcome*. Only in this way can a person be educated for a life that is sowed with difficulties. Moreover, while the discipline outside of a person becomes less and less, the more interior discipline is needed. From here it follows that it is dangerous to “cover the paths of infancy with flowers . . . and to sweeten its activities too much.”

1) Effort against easiness

Regrettably, in our days, even in the (so-called) good settings, attraction for the sensible good is given preference over heroism. However, heroism is a requirement of our nature. How much do we do so that those whom we are educating are aspiring to heroism? We’ve surrendered to the law of sensual advertising, that is, we’ve set all the persuasive force in things that are attractively pleasurable. We are afraid to invite someone to an activity that will require them to overcome themselves. Even when we know

⁴⁹ Hurtado, Alberto, *Puntos de educación*, Obras completas, I, Santiago de Chile (2003), 242.

that effort will later form a part of those events (like camps, hikes, outings, etc.), we try not to mention it, pointing out the positive and sensual aspects (fun and excitement) so that the cowardly “don’t run off.” Is this a good path? Perhaps not entirely, because we accustom ourselves to not motivate the will (both our own and that of others) by anything other than delight; we aim only at the concupiscible appetite, as if the irascible, the faculty of overcoming, didn’t need to be stimulated.

Let us not underestimate the need to be called to heroism: “If the youth are asked to give little, they won’t give anything. If a lot is asked of them, they will give more.”

In 1942, Saint Alberto Hurtado wrote: “Man is naturally a being that enjoys things. However, no matter how degraded he might be, he has need above all of greatness and of overcoming. Heroism is one of the deepest demands of our nature. The greatest leaders, the ones who caused the greatest changes in history, were not those who promised more pleasure, but rather more sacrifice. . . . Young people, above all, let themselves be spellbound by the fascinating call to heroism. In a world of cowardice, egoism, and delinquency, we must propose a complete ideal of sacrifice, that for us is the ideal of holiness.”⁵⁰ Also, “a child needs to win his happiness through the sweat of his brow; he must know difficulties and contradictions. If we want to make him happy, we must not tell him too much. If we want to get an effort out of him, we must not propose a pleasure. . . . And this

⁵⁰ Ibid.

method which must be applied to the child starting in infancy is the same that must be followed and employed with the youth in the center of Catholic Action [*and we could say the same of every center of education: a school, the family, formation group, etc.*]. It is anti-educational to invite a child or a young person to an activity by telling them ‘You’ll see that it’s really interesting, that it’s fun.’ Rightly we’ll receive afterwards this disconcerting response: ‘Is this all there is? Well . . . I’m not interested.’ This is the cause of so many caprices in infancy, as well as so many deceptions and inconsistencies in the works of Catholic Action.”

These are interesting observations from a great educator!

“A son left to himself grows up unruly,” says Sacred Scripture (Sir 30:8).⁵¹

⁵¹ We have recently had a confirmation of these principles after the tremendous problems that disturbed London in August of 2011, where thousands of youth were confronted by police. As a result of these incidents, in which a great number of young people from well-to-do families were involved, articles and studies were published about the issue. One article with interesting facts alludes to a study financed in part by the British Department of Education, tasked with finding answers to an earlier document of UNICEF which had described Great Britain as “the county where children feel the unhappiest” and “the worst place to be a child” among the 21 most developed nations. The study attributed this state of affairs to the fact that British children live trapped in a “cycle of compulsive consumerism” created by their parents, who do nothing other than give them gifts in order to make up for their spending long hours outside of the house. The phenomenon affects British children across the board, without ethnic or social distinctions, meaning, both rich and poor alike. This fact seems to lend credence to those who asserted that it was consumerism, and not poverty, that motivated the wave of lootings that had Great Britain in suspense in August 2011. The majority of the robberies took place in clothing and electronic goods stores. About 55% of the 1715 arrested were young people under the age of 20. “These kids did not go out in search of a roof over their heads,” maintains Kristian Niemietz, researcher for the Institute of Economic Affairs, “They were looking for brand-name products and things for entertainment. Poverty has nothing at all to do with this issue.” In a secular

Has that much changed on the horizon that *we reasonably fear* that if we mention heroism or courage we will frighten the youth? Isn't it, rather, that on our part we underestimate the nature of the will and the emotions of those whom we must educate? Does not every human aspire to both delightful pleasure as well as the joy of conquest? The youth that gather together in gangs in order to cause problems, gangs that are ever more common and increase in daring and dangerousness: are they only attracted by their physical well-being? Is there perhaps also a desire to experience their own value (in terms of their own daring)?

I insist on the point of this reflection: I'm not only criticizing the lack of occasions for overcoming and conquering in education, since this is present in many things that we perhaps organize for those we educate, but rather in the *silence* regarding these aspects when we gather a group of children and youth (or even adults) for these activities. The will *needs* effort and heroism to be present among the *goods and ends* for which sets itself in movement. Even if it is true that some frivolous people don't feel themselves attracted to an event in which there are opportunities to make an effort or to overcome oneself, adding up and considering that, is more lost or is more gained if we refuse to draw near to those who are only attracted by fun and pleasure, or

society, one motivated by consumerism as ours is, the only ethical value recognized by a majority of adults is some sort of vague notion of moral relativism. For many children who are alone in their rooms or in the jungle of the streets, this comes to mean 'anything goes.' We've left them for too long at the mercy of the markets, and if we don't act soon, the consequences will be terrible" (Graciela Iglesias, "Infancia con traumas. Gran Bretaña, el 'peor lugar' para ser niño," *La Nación*, September 17, 2011).

if we sacrifice on the altars of so many of these gatherings this fundamental resource of education which is to demand that the will being formed be moved by the desire for greatness? We should at least seriously think about it.

A true education of the will implies demanding of oneself – and of those whom one is educating – to do things in a perfect and complete way when it is possible; never half-way: “Do whatever you do with your entire soul.” “We must insist a great deal that children and young people too do well whatever it is that they do, to do it completely, perfectly, in as much as it is possible. Demand correction in everything from promptness in showing up for a meeting, the way of greeting, the way of dressing, the way of sitting, the politeness towards a person who comes to ask them for a favor, the respectful and affectionate way they deal with their parents, the jovial, happy, joking way they deal with their classmates, but always within a great respect for them; treating those who serve them in a dignified way, in consideration of the human value of the service that they give that cannot be paid with money; the Christian way of travelling in train or on the bus, giving up their seat . . . to women and the elderly. And not only respect towards people but even towards things, which in a certain – not pantheist – sense, participate in the redemption, inasmuch as Christ made use of them and elevated them to the level of instruments of the divinity. Thus, they shouldn’t throw trash on the streets, smoke where they shouldn’t, slam doors, and they should be well-mannered in their eating, be dignified when

they sit, even when they're alone. . . . The whole of their familial, social, and personal life should be lived with the same respect, and with an equal effort, because their reasons for doing so are always the same. This understanding of life presupposes an immense interior effort which is vastly more difficult to demand than exterior effort, but it will flourish in the most beautiful of virtues which is charity. Courtesy is the flower of charity. However, when a purely superficial culture predominates, a life of appearance in public while they live in interior disorder, a tyrannical future awaits. There are people who live in disarray alone but who are extremely cultured in public; disorganized, dirty at home, and very correct in public, bold with the servants and very refined with the ladies of high society . . . This is the dough of tyrants!"⁵²

It's certain that an education that judges everything based on "duty" and supports itself on moral rigorism is condemned to failure, or, more often, to a regrettable success: to carving statues of ice, feeling-less beings, without empathy and socially resentful; and, as a sort of dessert, as a result of the sort of pendular reaction that comes in the face of everything that has been imposed without love, these people, with the excuse of freeing themselves from every speck of duty that they *neither understand nor love*, break away from every moral obligation. However, equally dangerous is an education without demands, without a sense of duty or responsibility. The key is in the balance.

⁵² Hurtado, Alberto, *Puntos de educación*, 243.

It is also key for our self-education, in order to form our own wills and own character.

2) Something practical: the “non-negotiables”

Since these pages have basically a practical orientation, I think it will help us a great deal in our work on the will if each one of us were to have a well-defined “list of non-negotiables,” that is, a list of those things that we cannot give ourselves the luxury of doing without or doing halfway. This list can change throughout the different situations in life, but it is of no little importance to have these things before our eyes in the clearest way possible; for example, a person who is trying to strengthen their family ties could formulate a list of ten things like these:

“The things that not for anything in the world can I discuss or negotiate, and, for that reason, I should carry out even when they demand heroic acts from me, are:

1st: fidelity to my wife, because this is the most sacred promise I have made in my life.

2nd: Going to work and being on time for it, because my family depends on it.

3rd: Spending Sunday with my children (dedicated myself to them, and not *watching television in the company of my children*)

4th, 5th, . . . 10th”

Everyone will have different list that will change according to the person whom we're considering: a consecrated person, married person, a student, a worker, a young person, an adult. These lists will also vary based upon the problems that each one is facing; sometimes it will be necessary to include rules that are related to the person's physical or mental health ("I will never break my diet"; "I will never drink alcohol"; "I will walk an hour a day"; "I will sleep only seven hours a day"), and others, perhaps, related to their moral life ("I will never watch television alone"; "I will not connect to the Internet unless there is someone there who can see all that pages that I visit"; "I will not go to this or that place").

No matter what the acts are that are considered as "non-negotiable," they will represent the absolute "minimum" for which a person must fight in the moral life. From those very clear points, the will can take the first steps towards (re)building its strength.

9.

Procrastination and relaxation of the will

It happens to many people that the weakening of the will, the loss of attention, relaxation, or laziness, come from the acquired habit of waiting or putting off for later what should be done at a given moment. They live in opposition to the popular saying, “Don’t leave for tomorrow what you can do today,” precisely because they never do today what, with a good excuse, they can put off until another moment.

This action is called *to procrastinate*, and the bad habit that it gives birth to is *procrastination*, from Latin *cras* and *crastinus*, tomorrow; *crastinatio* and *procrastinatio* is that delay for the following day, and also for later or further in the future.

Procrastination is usually just an act of laziness, but it could also be, in the most serious and infrequent cases, a behavioral problem, sometimes a symptom of some form of depression. The most common case is to find oneself with a bad tendency that has

become a rooted habit because of constant repetition. At the root, we usually find softness or sensuality on account of which actions that require effort are postponed. The imagination plays a very important role in this, because a person who feels a certain tediousness or suffering in performing some action—and this is the reason why they put it off—in reality experiences *fear*: it is a fear of effort, sacrifice, and of leaving behind the comfort of their present situation. As is well-known, fear is caused by imaginary “representations” which produce terror, often exaggerated by our fantasy (a little mouse paralyzes a person, although, objectively speaking, it cannot cause them any harm). The seriousness of the fear is, for this reason, not measured by the *objective* harmfulness of what produces it, but rather by the *subjective* value that the person assigns to it (that is, as they imagine it).⁵³ This explains why the habit of procrastinating makes it progressively more difficult to leave inaction: because the person who procrastinates always has reasons that justify their delays (“This is very difficult, I don’t know how to do it, I have many other things to do, I’m not in conditions to do it, it surpasses my strengths, it really disgusts me, I’m not made for this, I’m tired, I’ve already tried it many times and I’ve failed, this really isn’t that important, if I don’t do it nobody gets hurt, who gets hurt if I do it tomorrow instead of today?,” and the like); and these justifications progressively color those acts with ever darker tints which, reinforced in their already harmful, burdensome, or tedious image, tends, with complete

⁵³ Cf. Miguel Fuentes, *Nuestros miedos*, Virtus/8, San Rafael (2008).

logic, to produce even more fear, and thus the tendency to procrastinate grows.

Procrastination doesn't always mean that a person is just left doing nothing. Often, they switch out the action they fear in order to perform a different activity that is more pleasant, that is disguised as one that is more urgent, unable to be delayed, most opportune, necessary. . . . In the depths, this action, which offers us an excuse not to do what we need to, is simply more sensual, pleasant, and better suited to our tastes, and although it might really be important in itself, *it is not what we need to do here and now*, and this is the reason why it is vicious to dedicate ourselves to it instead of doing what our duty obliges us to do.

There are those who are occasional procrastinators, but others reach the point of becoming chronic procrastinators. In reality, these latter ones might be suffering from some behavioral problem, such as a hidden depression.

We can speak of three sorts of procrastination:

Procrastination *by evasion*, when a person avoids starting a work out of fear of failure. In reality, this might involve a problem of low self-esteem.

Procrastination *by activation*, when a task is delayed by accumulating elements and means so that it turns out as perfectly as possible . . . until there is no other solution other than to perform it. This is what happens to perfectionists who attempt to carry out tasks that are so perfect . . . that they never finish them, and sometimes they don't even start them.

Procrastination by *indecision*, which is typical of hesitant people who attempt to carry out a work but lose themselves in thinking about the best way to carry it out without ever reaching the point of making a decision.

The activities in which a person takes refuge in order to avoid their obligations can even give rise to dependencies and habits that are very similar to addictions (if they aren't, in fact, addictions properly speaking); this occurs above all when those actions have a great ability to capture a person's attention, like surfing the Internet, watching TV, etc.

The habit of procrastinating ends up sickening and weakening the will.

If we have this habit, it is important, first, to analyze the excuses that we have pointed out above as examples, and to see if we use one or more of them, or different ones, in order to shrink from our responsibilities; second, to study which of the three modes of procrastination applies to our case (evasion, activation, or indecision), and, third, to apply the rules of work that we have been pointing out for the re-education of the will. And don't leave this task for tomorrow!

10.

Indecision or egoism?

Many other problems of the will in reality hide difficulties of another sort (psychological, spiritual, or moral). I will mention two in particular.

1) Low self-esteem

We must recognize that some cases of indecision proceed from the low esteem that some hold themselves in; they don't consider themselves as capable of certain undertakings, they excessively doubt their strengths, or they doubt themselves in an exaggerated way.

Such cases are faced with a healthy self-esteem . . . which has very little to do with the things that often circulate with this name. This requires a brief explanation.

We must not confuse *worldly* self-esteem with true and healthy self-esteem. The first, which the world exalts and pushes people to develop, is in reality a form of boasting and vanity. This

presumptuous and harmful self-esteem gives rise to numerous vices: despising others, class division, racism, pride, self-love, egoism . . . and the undue estimation of anything that could be a reason for self-esteem: beauty, muscles, social position, money, power, personal achievements, knowledge, race, class. . . . It is unjust and unstable, since all things on which it is based are fleeting, accidental, passing, easy to lose . . . and, moreover, *borrowed*, as the Apostle says: “What do you possess that you have not received? But if you have received it, why are you boasting as if you did not receive it?” (1 Cor 4:7). Forming this sort of self-esteem pushes a person from having a problem that is perhaps just psychical to another one that has moral connotations and disastrous consequences.⁵⁴

However, there is another sort of self-esteem which is not opposed to humility. The humble person acknowledges that *of themselves* they have nothing in which to glory, since everything they have has been received from God; they are also aware that of themselves, they can only have misery and corruption. However, *they also recognize what God has done or wants to do with them*. This is what we see in the Blessed Virgin Mary: “For He has looked upon

⁵⁴ Moreover, it must be kept in mind that there is a certain “low self-esteem” that is also a form of pride: it is the case of the person who suffers from a low esteem of themselves, scorning themselves, but *without forgiving* themselves for this state of affairs because they would like to be something important and great, *but for themselves and not for God*. These people with little self-esteem tend to be resentful and be envious of those who have what they lack and of those who can do or have the motivation to do what they think they are not able to. This is pride. From here it follows that by attempting to raise their self-esteem by making them “believe in themselves,” is only to change the exterior face of pride.

the *lonliness* of His servant; the Lord has done *great things for me.*” A saint has a high self-esteem or, rather, a great appreciation for what God has done or wants to do with them: precisely to make them a saint and a child of God. At the same time, there is no doubt that there are many obstacles that must be conquered in their own wounded nature.⁵⁵

This healthy self-esteem must be recovered when a person has lost it for any reason. As Aquilino Polaino says: “Self-esteem is found and recovered when *the error* that caused its loss *is corrected* or when *the erroneous feelings* that caused the loss *are educated.*”⁵⁶ Such an error is an insufficient appreciation of one’s self, or, better said, an “undervaluation.” The person who unjustly feels incapable of governing themselves or of directing their will towards a noble end, will remain paralyzed in their decisions and will never produce the acts that lead to that end; acts that they consider themselves incapable of performing. However, if this appreciation is erroneous and unjustly degrading, it comes from not recognizing what we are capable of, either in our nature or by God’s grace; if we are unaware of what we are capable of through our own nature, the error is vanquished by a realistic consideration of our own gifts and also of our own limitations . . . and of running the risk of attempting to do good. This is because

⁵⁵ Only in these sense can what some professionals teach be accepted, for example, Elisabeth Lukas: “Self-esteem is our *yes to existence*, which is found intimately united to the will to perform acts and to maintain attitudes that in each moment have more meaning and that adjust to our circumstances; existence rests in *the decision for meaning*” (E. Lukas, *Libertad e identidad*, Barcelona (2005), 78).

⁵⁶ Polaino Lorente, Aquilino, *En busca de la autoestima perdida*, 6.4.

it often happens that we don't know what we are capable of if we don't attempt it. And because generally we don't attempt anything out of fear of failure, ridicule, and humiliation, it is here that we have the false feelings that lead us to error regarding ourselves: a fear of messing up and pride which flees the humiliation of failure.

The horizon opens when we are humble and we cease fearing frustrations, and when we act trusting in God and disposed to attribute the success of our undertakings to Him.

A person has a proper self-esteem when they know that they have something, but that that something perhaps isn't enough to do what they must do, but not even that stops them, because they trust that God will give them what they are lacking in order to bring to success the works that He has begun. In other words, when a person is humble and bases themselves on *what God wants to do with them*, they won't end up being the victim of fears and erroneous judgments. The one who distrusts God errors regarding both God and themselves.

From here it follows, then, that people with low self-esteem or feelings of inferiority are often cured with *humility*, which gives them a realistic understanding of themselves, without bitterness and without resentment, and also without the risk of producing an effect as dangerous as false inferiority (which is its opposite and is

born from it as a sort of reaction: the feeling of a rejected superiority.⁵⁷

As Polaino Lorente points out in his excellent work on this topic: “The most stable, constant, and true self-esteem is that which fulfills the following conditions:

To love oneself in God;

To love oneself as God loves us;

To love others as God loves them;

To love God as God wants to be loved.

Is anything lost by trying to acquire this sort of self-esteem?”⁵⁸

2) The indecision of the proud

This case has as its background a particular form of pride or spiritual gluttony: wanting everything and not being disposed to renounce anything.

Lersh writes: “There are individuals who never act because it is impossible for them to make up their minds, that is, to decide between different possibilities regarding the direction and configuration of their lives. They can’t set clear goals for their wills, and it’s difficult to them to bring an act of will to completion by themselves. For this reason, they always tend to

⁵⁷ Cf. Miguel Fuentes, *Naturaleza y educación de la humildad*, Virtus/12, San Rafael (2010).

⁵⁸ Polaino Lorente, Aquilino, *En busca de la autoestima perdida*, 7.5.

push it off, and thus they find themselves bound . . . in the hesitating state of indecision.”⁵⁹

To love or to desire is to set oneself for or to do something, to choose something; and a choice not only implies a decision to go in one direction but also to surrender all other possible directions. “Every decision demands the sacrifice of some . . . possibilities. . . . On account of the fact that a decision always brings with it the abandonment of other possible goals of one’s desires, it can be understood why decisions are difficult above all in those people we call *unbalanced*, referring to their internal relations of their tendencies.⁶⁰ The more these are separated or opposed to each other in a person, that is, that the tendencies that act are found in opposition, the less likely it becomes that one of them will achieve that supremacy that is the reason for actions and human behavior and which leads to a decision. In *Clavigo* Goethe portrays a man torn between the tendencies of his ambition and the pull of his love, or, rather, his compassion, for

⁵⁹ Lersch, Philipp, *La estructura de la personalidad*, 464. He adds: “It is not uncommon that the subject who is unable to make a decision helps himself in this situation by making their decisions depend on external circumstances: for example, the number of buttons on their jacket will determine if they should stop doing something. We should also add that these people who are unable to make a decision often reveal themselves to be determined, tenacious, and willing to make an effort to achieve a goal when the difficulty of their decision is alleviated by someone else. The action of their will is only damaged in the fact that they are unable to make a decision by themselves.”

⁶⁰ For Lersch, the balanced person [Lersch literally says *armónico*, harmonious, but there is no good translation for the opposite, *disarmónico*, lacking harmony – Trans.] is the one who has interior unity; the dissociated or unbalanced person is the one who finds themselves divided by an interior struggle between different tendencies – “loves,” we could say – such as struggles between the impulses of their pride and the impulses of their sympathy towards others, things, and ideas (cf. *Ibid.*, 177-178).

his beloved, and which transforms him into an instrument without will in the hands of his friend, who tells him, “There is nothing in the world so pitiable as an undecided man, who wavers between two feelings, hoping to reconcile them, and does not understand that nothing can unite them except the doubt, the disquietude, which rack him. . . . Decide, and then shall I say—You are every inch a man.”⁶¹

The young man who proposes to a young girl, by choosing her, renounces all other girls; that is, he wants the goodness and good things that that young woman has which are, just like all created things, limited, and he surrenders all the other beauties and good things that other women could give him; because none of them is perfect. The one who chooses the consecrated life chooses the goods that it offers (complete dedication to prayer and to God, to the apostolate, the celebration of the sacraments, preaching, etc.), and renounces the goods that married life offers (the company and affection of a wife, children, the comforts of the world, and so forth). Some people have problems choosing, not because they have a lack of will, although often they think that this is the core of their problems, but rather because *they don't want to surrender the advantages or benefits that the other alternative(s) offer*; this is the “drama” of the one who doesn't marry the one who cooks well because she isn't as pretty as the one who doesn't cook well, but doesn't marry the one who is pretty because she isn't smart, nor with the one who is smart but ugly, because she's not pretty

⁶¹ Ibid., 465. “Clavigo” is the main character of the tragedy of the same name, written by Goethe in 1774.

like the dumb one. . . . They want everything, but it's not possible to have everything; we can't be the husband of all women, nor the wife of all men, nor married and celibate at the same time!

In this regard, I share a very enlightening paragraph from the psychologist Elisabeth Lukas as she related in her book *Libertad e identidad*.

“A woman published in a magazine some notes in the form of a diary where she explains how she fell into absolute isolation on account of her indecision. The woman lived in the same house as her widowed mother until she reached a mature age and always had a close relationship with her mom. However, when she turned 30, she met a good man who wanted to marry her. Her mother distrusted him and blamed him for everything bad that happened. There's no doubt that this attitude hid her desire not to lose her daughter. The woman lived in conflict, of having to choose between leaving her mother or forgetting her plans for getting married. However, as she herself related, she had *so little strength of will* that she couldn't make herself decide for one side or the other, and so she just kept living with her mother and seeing her boyfriend. This situation of uncertainty ended in a tragic goodbye scene in which the man let her know with the greatest possible vehemence that he didn't want to wait forever, and he disappeared. The woman unleashed all of her bitterness on her elderly mother, who defended herself by saying that she had always said that that man was worthless. What happened made the relationship between the two sour, and, in a moment of anger,

the mother packed her bags and went to live at a friend's house. It was there that she suffered from a heart attack that later, in the hospital, caused her death. The woman's autobiographical account ended by saying, as a sort of summary, that she herself had ruined her life *on account of not having enough strength of will* and that now she spends her lonely nights as she can with the help of red wine and sleeping pills in the house that her mother left her as her inheritance."

"Reading this story," continues Lukas, "arouses compassion for the protagonist, but not because fate has treated her cruelly, which is certainly true, but rather because her behavior was based on a mistake. Fate had offered her what it offers to almost everyone in the world: positive and negative circumstances. What happened is that the woman was not prepared to take advantage of the positive opportunities if they implied some negative consequences. This, and nothing else, was her real problem. Avarice, and not a lack of will power, was what impeded her from making a decision. She wanted everything: to keep being the beloved daughter of her mother, and, at the same time, a man's wife. She wanted everything, and she lost everything. Difficulty in making decisions is one of the typical traits of people who are psychologically unstable, since every choice implies renouncing what was rejected. Hence, it's not true that these people are unable to make a decision, but rather, *quite simply, they don't want to*

surrender anything. They cannot reconcile themselves to the fact that they can't have everything.”⁶²

To choose requires that, after a weighty consideration of the options, that the intellect and will move towards one of the different options, and this for serious reasons *but, often, these motives do not cancel out entirely the reasons of fittingness that have also been seen in the other option.* In other words: the one who chooses between two good things (and every true election is between good things) usually finds reasons of fittingness in both options (for example, in consecrating oneself to God or getting married); and although there are very strong reasons for a person in one of the options, there are often strong reasons in the other (although they are not of the same weight). From there it follows that the certainty that a person should aspire to in deciding for one option or another can only be a *moral certainty*, as in all human actions; there are no absolute certainties, nor mathematical nor metaphysical ones, in human actions.⁶³ The person who makes an important decision in their lives must be aware that they also assume the risks that go along with what they have decided, with the resolution not to look back (towards the option that they set aside) when difficulties arise that can come up in the future; nor should they allow themselves to lament what they left behind. A person cannot be happy when they spend their life crying over the onions they used to eat in Egypt (cf. Nm 11:5).

⁶² Lukas, Elisabeth, *Libertad e identidad*, 20-22.

⁶³ “In the business affairs of men, there is no such thing as demonstrative and infallible proof, and we must be content with a certain conjectural probability [moral certainty]” (Saint Thomas, ST I-II, q. 105, a. 2 ad 8).

A decision is the right one when it has serious and important reasons to be taken, and it will *always* imply the renunciation of things that are good and desirable, precisely because a decision is *a choice between goods*, and not between a good and an evil. Both the young person who decides to get married, setting aside the option of the consecrated life, as well as the one who consecrates himself, giving up the possibility of marriage, set aside and renounce something very good in exchange for another thing that is also very good. Every person will have reasons to think that what they choose is the best thing for them, but they must also know that what they are leaving behind is also good, and that they cannot avoid the suffering that follows from not having it all. In this life, we cannot have everything, and the one who wants to have everything will end up with nothing.

This greed or basic pride is, in many cases, the true face behind an apparent indecision or difficulty of the will.

3) The cure for indecision

In what follows, I transcribe what Irala says regarding those who have problems with indecision⁶⁴:

“The greatest enemy to will power is the *indecision* common to all such victims. There is a struggle between practical ideas. Shall they act or not? They do not know how to grant victory to one contesting choice and put an end to all discussion by excluding other possibilities. They should be able to correct this quickly”:

⁶⁴ Irala, *Control cerebral y emocional*, 189-192.

“In case of doubt, choose the path that seems best and have the courage to leave behind the rest” (S. W. Ford).

a) “When indecision comes from *lack of will power or laziness of will* you will find it helpful to practice frequent will acts even upon unimportant or indifferent matters, or those which you normally do by routine.

b) If this indecision results from a *lack of intellectual concentration*, because you are unable to fix your attention on the act you intend to perform, then re-educate concentration [*we’ve already explained how to do this earlier, in Chapter VII*]. You can then easily make the act concrete and reach a decision.

c) Sometimes indecision comes from *balanced motives for and against*, or at least so it seems. If it is an important question and you can consult a prudent person, then by all means do so and make the decision as it seems to him. If the matter is of less importance or you are unable to consult someone, then decide quickly for either one of the two. In similar circumstances some of the saints would make a short prayer and ask God to resolve the doubt by means of chance. They would then confidently accept the result.

d) Your difficulty may come from a *variety of conflicting motives*. If other motives obscure the principal one whenever you wish to make a decision or execute it, then allow yourself to be influenced only by the motive which moved you first. For this is usually the

principal one. You should make the decision at once without considering the secondary, conflicting motives.”*

The one who doesn't act after he thinks is the one who thought imperfectly (Guyau).

This education is not a lighthouse (or a crystal ball), an education that covers everything only in an attempt to avoid occasions of problems in order to make it impossible to fail, nor is education merely negative, content simply to correct defects, but rather positive, which always proposes advances to be made, perfections to acquire, virtues to practice. This increases happiness, enthusiasm, and courage. *Education does not consist so much in doing what is good, as in teaching the person to love and desire the good.*

“I had a student,” continues Irala, “who was really basically good but whose will was very weak and vacillating. He was always being punished. I asked him why he made no effort to correct himself. ‘I want to, Father, but I can’t.’ I examined his act of will. To help him to keep silence at the proper times I proposed that he bite his tongue (lightly of course) on the way from recreation to study, from study to the classroom or lecture hall. ‘Can you do that?’ ‘Yes, Father.’ By making the thing concrete and feeling its possibility he did make definite will acts, one day to please me, another to honor the Blessed Virgin, or to please Our Lord. At night I would ask him, ‘How many times did you fail?’ ‘Eight.’ ‘Then kiss the Crucifix eight times and promise not to fail

* Irala, *Achieving Peace of Heart*, 61-62.

tomorrow.' The result was a rapid improvement which was joyful and complete."*

The will is for man to conquer himself, and the education of the will is the strategy of this conquest (E. Faguet).

* Irala, *Achieving Peace of Heart*, 152.

11.

The will and responsibility

One of the other causes of indecision “is based on the avoidance of accepting responsibility and risks. The majority of decisions bring with them a risk, and presuppose the courage to take that risk and to accept responsibility; thus, a decision also implies a confidence in one’s own strengths.”⁶⁵

For this reason, the education of the will has, as its main manifestation, a *sense of responsibility*. The person who really has a formed will, if we want to speak of character, is the one who is truly responsible. The most logical temptation would be to identify the formed will with heroism; however, there are two different sorts of heroism: one is circumstantial, and the other permanent. The first is seen in momentary but fleeting flashes, and could pertain to a true heroism of the will that surrenders itself in an absolute way by exposing itself to personal sacrifice, but it could also be the result of a passional fit of daring or of

⁶⁵ Lersh, Philipp, *La estructura de la personalidad*, 466.

anger, that is, of a wave of adrenaline that flows through the blood once something that is loved has been threatened. The second, on the other hand, could pass unnoticed, but it demands more effort, more conviction, and greater courage, since it is carried out in the daily fidelity, constantly repeated, of doing well all that must be done, in not abandoning the commitments that have been accepted, conquering the monotony of repetition, fatigue, and discouragement. 50 years of being faithful to one's marriage vows reveals more heroism than playing the savior for one's wife in a moment of danger. The meaning of responsibility goes in this first line of courage.

The formation and re-education of the will must keep that sort of strong will in sight; the one who possesses a strong will will also be a hero in the second sense, if circumstances require it. However, the person who confuses heroism with the occasional bold deed, and who does not train their will in the courage of being faithful to their daily duties, that is, in being totally responsible in their obligations, should not be considered brave or firm, even though they might, sporadically, have some spark in that sense.

Regrettably, there are many people who think that they are brave when in reality they are people with a very weak will.

Seventy years ago, when things were going *a little better than they are now*, Fr. Hurtado was lamenting that: "One of the most outstanding features that calls the attention of anyone who carefully studies our day and age is the lack of responsibility that is

seen today. The general impression that is given is that the contemporary generation of young people doesn't take anything seriously, they don't follow through with their word, or follow up with tasks that have been undertaken. We could cite innumerable examples. Young people take up charge of a work, the protection of a poor family, an apostolate, in a firm way, and for the least difficulty they cease to continue what they had begun, in a most natural way, without stopping to think of the consequences that their attitude will have on others. They enter into a group, they begin to attend meetings, but, for the slightest reasons they stop attending. . . . They pay their dues, but, on a most unexpected day, they will stop paying 'just because.' Punctuality! It is unknown to most. They haven't thought about the value of time for others, about the respect that they should have for their equals, who shouldn't be made to lose even a minute of their time. They don't value each thing for its intrinsic value, and hence they don't give things the place that corresponds to them in the hierarchy of values. One of the youth is set in charge of preparing a cycle of talks, and he doesn't prepare them or does so superficially in order to do other things. How many realize that perhaps their companions will never hear that topic again, that perhaps they will wander from that activity because they feel cheated in their hopes for being formed and doing apostolate? And the failure of a work to which they had offered their assistance doesn't seem to concern them very much, nor does it

make them lose a moment of sleep or their incredible peace of soul.”⁶⁶

Who among us hasn't experienced a similar bitter situation with many of those who should have been next to us in our labors or great undertakings . . . of those who “are-but-aren't,” meaning, those who want to help us but without taking on any sort of total, absolute commitment, *as if their eternal life depended on it?* For this reason, they don't persevere.

This great educator whom we have just cited attributes the cause of this lack of responsibility to fear of sacrifice: “Another of the characteristics of our young people regarding the problem of responsibility is the *lack of sacrifice that they show in accepting the responsibilities that correspond to them.* Not only do they not consciously delve more deeply into what their responsibilities are, but rather even when they come to know what they are, they don't face the sacrifices that are necessary to fulfill them. A spirit of comfort, indolence, a lack of effort . . . an anxious desire for pleasure have all invaded our modern world. . . . The youth have become bourgeois; they have completely settled down in the environment of this world and many of them have completely lost sight of the eternity of life and consequently they anxiously seek excessive pleasure. They have forgotten that they have been made, not for pleasure, but for heroism. They want to avoid all the inconveniences that action entails. The overwhelming love of a Saint Francis of Assisi, who renounced everything for Christ, that

⁶⁶ Hurtado, Alberto, *Puntos de educación*, 245.

of Saint Francis Xavier who abandoned all comfort in order to win souls for Christ, the zeal of Saint Paul which aspired even to be cut off in order to win his brothers for Jesus, all of this is very far from even being understood by the spirit of the vast majority of our contemporaries.

The inconstancy we see in the good undertaken is a natural consequence of this spiritual attitude. Since there isn't a sufficient ideological grounding, there is a lack of a spirit of sacrifice in order to confront, on bad and difficult days, the commitments undertaken, and so in those moments it is feelings and emotions that determine behavior. If there is a desire, it is heeded; if there's no desire, it isn't undertaken and the work that was begun is abandoned, as we are tragically witnessing every day, with the extreme harm that is being done to works that have been undertaken.”⁶⁷

Many today have a real fear of *commitment*, that is, to be bound and obligated by their own words and promises to some activity. From here it follows that everything that might seem definitive is avoided, be it at work, in the apostolate, in service, and even *in love itself*, and for this reason the number of marriages has been decreasing and we see an increase in the number of “free unions,” that is, cohabitation without any sort of commitment, “love with an open door,” in order to say goodbye, leaving behind the person that was used to satisfy their desires, or who was perhaps loved with a sort of emotional affection, but who wasn't loved

⁶⁷ Ibid., 246-247.

enough to surrender oneself to them *forever*. This shows very clearly that a person is living more on the level of the sensible emotions than on the level of the will, as Aquilino Polaino wrote: “Today, desire or love is more rooted in emotivism than in the rational will; in the epidermis rather than in the heart. Perhaps for this reason there is so much fear of commitment. An authentic human desire doesn’t use half measures; it’s not a jacket that you can take off and put on, nor is it a transitory experience or, in the majority of cases, something instantaneous. It’s nothing transient and fleeting that, after it passes, leaves nothing behind. A true love for a person demands that one’s entire being enter into the wager, that a person bet their entire person and their future projects on a single card. To love, as Aristotle wrote in his *Rhetoric*, consists in ‘desiring the good of the other.’”⁶⁸ If the level of the emotions is confused with that of the will, reducing everything to the first, it’s no wonder that people, even when they think that they have loved a great deal in life, have, in reality, an atrophied will and a hyperactive affectivity.

Thus, on this plane of spiritual work regarding the will, it is necessary to work, be it in ourselves or in those whom we must educate, on creating a “sense of responsibility.” This is the cornerstone to see if we really have a formed will or not.

Responsibility comes from *respond*, the Latin word for which (*respondere*) has two possible meanings: first, that of “responderare,” which means “to weigh the thing that one has in their

⁶⁸ Polaino Lorente, Aquilino, *En busca de la autoestima perdida*, 3.2.

hands,” and “responderere,” which means “to give a response or a reason for something.” Responsibility needs to be formed in both senses.

First, it must be formed as “pondering.” A person must become accustomed to taking into account the “weight” (*pondus* in Latin) of things that we have in our hands. To weigh, in this case, means to take charge of their importance and value; to be aware of the consequences that follow from what we have decided to do and what we have decided to set aside, how many goods and evils depend on each act that is under my responsibility. Often people act with a frightening superficiality because of a lack of consideration. How many people and how many things *depend* on what I will do and how I do it! Including my future! How many lives have been bankrupted because of a stupidity during a pilfered youth! How many nations, like *ours*, are discomposing like a corpse, because of the irresponsibility of those who have governed or have governed stupidly. We should be completely clear as to the incalculable value that a good word of counsel that they hear today from our mouth can have for many people, or the harm that a nefarious example that they see us do now.

Secondly, it must be formed as a “response.” We are going to have to respond, that is, to render an account of all of our actions and decisions before God and before men. And this, not only on the day of the last judgment, but, as we can often see, sooner rather than later in this life.

In short, it is necessary to fight aggressively against superficiality, since it is this, more than an unbalanced passion or a vice that dirties the soul, that is the true enemy of the will.⁶⁹

⁶⁹ Cf. Miguel Fuentes, *La superficialidad*, Virtus/15, San Rafael (2011).

12.

Religion and the formation of the will

“It is generally recognized that morality and religion favor the formation of the will. The ultimate reason is found in that religion offers the believer the strongest motives possible to live a moral life.”⁷⁰

In this last point, I will limit myself to just giving a general outline, because I don't think that understanding this point offers any great difficulty. It is clear that the whole work on the will finds its greatest source of energy and perfection from spirituality and religious practices. This is for many different reasons which I will mention.⁷¹

First and foremost, this is because we know by faith that our will, just like the other potencies, has been wounded by original

⁷⁰ Fröbes, J., *Compendio de psicología experimental*, 354.

⁷¹ The considerations that I have pointed out, following Saint Manuel González, might be of some help: Miguel Fuentes, *De lobos a corderos. Educación y gracia*, Virtus/4, San Rafael (2008). Available in English as *From Wolves to Lambs: Education and Grace*, Virtus Series 4, Chillum (2018).

sin; that wound is a particular weakness in the order of desiring and doing what is good. The sacrament of baptism truly washes away original sin, but it doesn't take from us the wounds that sin has produced in our faculties (the *fomes peccati*), and it will be precisely in the fight and overcoming of those wounds that the obtaining of eternal life consists.⁷² Grace not only elevates nature but also confers upon it new strengths in order to carry out what is morally good,⁷³ although it does not suppresses its fragility or its weakness.⁷⁴ Together with grace, it confers upon us a whole complex of infused habits (the theological virtues and the gifts of the Holy Spirit) and elevates natural good habits.⁷⁵

⁷² Cf. *Catechism of the Catholic Church*, n. 407: "The doctrine of original sin, closely connected with that of redemption by Christ, provides lucid discernment of man's situation and activity in the world. . . . Ignorance of the fact that man has a wounded nature inclined to evil gives rise to serious errors in the areas of education, politics, social action and morals." Ibid., n. 418: "As a result of original sin, human nature is weakened in its powers, subject to ignorance, suffering and the domination of death, and inclined to sin (this inclination is called 'concupiscence')."

⁷³ Cf. Saint Thomas, ST I-II, q. 109, a. 1-4. Without grace that strengthens our nature, we can know the truth and do the good things that *are proportioned to our nature* (the truths and goods that are intrinsically supernatural are, on the other hand, unattainable and unthinkable without divine grace), but without grace *we cannot* know the whole of natural truth without great effort, without a great deal of time, and without a great risk of error (as the history of great philosophers shows, since, in spite of the lucidity of their thought, they have mixed great errors with their unquestionable achievements, teaching some, with absolute certainty, that would be completely rejected by others), we cannot perform all that is naturally good, nor fulfill all the commandments together and always, not persevere in doing what is right, nor get out of sin. . . .

⁷⁴ Cf. *Catechism of the Catholic Church*, n. 1426: "The new life received in Christian initiation has not abolished the frailty and weakness of human nature, nor the inclination to sin that tradition calls concupiscence, which remains in the baptized such that with the help of the grace of Christ they may prove themselves in the struggle of Christian life (cf. Council of Trent, DS 1515)".

⁷⁵ Cf. *Catechism of the Catholic Church*, n. 1810: "Human virtues acquired by education, by deliberate acts and by a perseverance ever-renewed in repeated efforts are purified and elevated by divine grace. With God's help, they forge

Secondly, because it gives new motives which are higher and clearer for our actions: our personal sanctification, the sight of eternal life and supernatural merit in order to obtain it, the life of grace and imitation of Jesus Christ and His saints, the vocation to be adopted children of God the Father, and more.

Likewise, religious practice also has innumerable means to strength the will: the sacraments which give life, renew, and feed the soul (in particular confession and reconciliation of the sinner and Eucharistic communion with the Lord's Body); the Holy Mass; the life of prayer and pious practices; the influence of the prayers of other Christians (the communion of saints), and, in particular, the intercession of the blessed.

There can be no doubt, then, that the person with serious religious convictions can count on means that are priceless in value when it comes to working on their will.

character and give facility in the practice of the good. The virtuous man is happy to practice them." Here the *Catechism* takes from the tradition of moral virtues proposed by authors such as Saint Bonaventure. On this point, other authors, such as Saint Thomas Aquinas, have maintained that God also gives *infused* moral virtues along with grace. These virtues give man a capacity that is completely superior to that of the acquired moral virtues. Both orders of virtues (that is, those infused by God and those acquired by man's efforts) are connected and are mutually required for supernatural action. In fact, in this line of thought, thinkers maintain that the infused virtue is that which enables us to perform supernatural acts (for example, acts of supernatural justice or prudence), but it is the acquired virtue is the one that gives us the ease and facility to perform them. Theologically speaking both theories have arguments in favor, and so the topic is open to discussion and further proposals.

13.

Conclusions

At the end of these pages that have simply outlined some indications for work on one's own will (self-education) or to help someone who needs to overcome their weakness or apathy, we will try to summarize the main ideas in a series of principles.

1st: Without a strong and unbreakable will, it is impossible to cross the rough seas of this life without shipwrecking in some vice or falling wounded as a victim to some degrading slavery.

2nd: The will that is weak because of temperament, because of a deficient education of character, or because it has been deformed by poor conduct, will not solve its problem without serious and methodical work. *Education* and much less *healing* of the will cannot be left to chance and spontaneity, unless we want to wait for a miracle.

3rd: We must begin by identifying all of the defects of our will, making ourselves clearly aware of and taking responsibility for its precise vices, defects, and anomalies.

4th: We must also try to find out sufficiently what are the ultimate causes of these problems of the will.

5th: The objective of work on the will is to correct the deficiencies and to acquire those virtuous habits which perfect the will.

6th: A fundamental step is work regarding the motives which, in the depths, implies learning to love the virtuous good, because only a will that is in love with and passionate for virtue will be able to move itself without fail.

7th: Then, it will be necessary to learn how to establish a life of the will: proposing for one's self *goals* (ends) that are concrete, current, and attractive; as well as *means* that are truly effective and lead to those objectives.

8th: There is no education, and even less re-education, of the will without serious control, that is, without making a daily examination of the work being done on the will.

9th: In many cases, it will also be necessary to learn how to correctly use our potencies, in such a way that we can make use of them efficiently and without any useless expenditure of energy. By re-educating our reception of conscious sensations and learning to concentrate on only one idea at a time, we will be able to combat those parasitic ideas that weaken us and even cause obsessions.

10th: The will is the faculty of effort; to educate is to improve the ability we have to push ourselves and to work towards the achievement of an ideal. Even if the work of educating our wills

must be slow, going from small efforts to efforts that are increasingly bigger, patiently accepting this slow path that is strewn with successes and failures, we must never let our guard down by surrendering ourselves to the illusion of ease.

11th: This work is more costly and difficult at the beginning than in its later development; for this reason, we must not lose courage in the face of the first setbacks and fatigues. The acquisition of virtuous habits turns entering upon this work into a pleasant stream, although it should never be assumed that the work is “done” (the one who doesn’t advance, goes back).

12th: Sometimes difficulty in making decisions comes from a low self-esteem which is corrected, not through a harmful narcissistic self-esteem, but rather with a correct understanding of oneself that is completely compatible with Christian humility, realism, and magnanimity.

13th: Other times, in contrast, indecision stems from a person’s pride, which doesn’t want to surrender any of the advantages that are offered by the different options between which they must choose.

14th: We think that we haven’t obtained any sort of real success in educating the will if the virtues that perfect the will haven’t been acquired. Education is either a question of having deeply-rooted virtuous habits, or it isn’t anything at all.

15th: We shouldn’t think about a rapid education of the will. This work takes time, just like any work of art, or, like the most

important and difficult work of art that a human being can propose for themselves.

16th: Working on our wills will take a lifetime.

17th: The only possible education or re-education of the will demands the help of divine grace, because we really have a deeply-rooted defect that affects our will (the marks of original sin) and certainly our will has a destiny that goes beyond the natural horizon: to reach God. This is not a principle that is only valid for believers, but rather for every person, since every human being, pagan, Jew, or Christian, has that wound (and the non-Christian has not only that wound but also the cause of that wound itself, which is original sin, if God hasn't provided a way to remove it for them through some path known only to Him) and is called to the only happiness that fulfills man: the vision and love of God, One and Three. The man who is inculpably ignorant of these truths will not be responsible for his ignorance, but he will not for this reason have fewer difficulties nor is he oriented to a less noble end.

As Santiago Alberione has written: "To order the will means to order the whole man, and thus also the body. The will is well-ordered, on one hand, if it is strong, to the point of being able to order and make the other potencies and senses obey it; on the other hand, it is well-ordered if it itself is so docile that it always obeys the will of God, either His *direct* will or His will *of good*

*pleasure*⁷⁶: thus there is a two-fold task. Both are difficult, because often the senses grow impatient, and it lacks firmness, uprightness, divine grace. And even more, great light, persuasion, faith.”⁷⁷

⁷⁶ *Direct will . . . will of good pleasure*: these expressions, taken from Saint Francis de Sales (*Treatise on the Love of God*, Bk. 8), indicate the two aspects of conformity to God’s will. His *direct* will, or *absolute* will, is the one that is clearly manifested by means of precepts or counsels; His will *of good pleasure* is that which is manifested by the situations of life or events that are desired or permitted by God.

⁷⁷ Alberione, Santiago, Blessed, *Alma y cuerpo para el Evangelio. Opúsculos (1953-1957)*, Rome (2005), 242-243.

