

ON POVERTY WITH CHRIST POOR

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IN THE SECOND WEEK OF THE SPIRITUAL EXERCISES, Ignatius encourages us to relate to Christ in a quite distinctive way. The key exercises—the Kingdom, the Two Standards and the Three Classes—end with similar, complex petitions.¹ The culminating expression comes in the third of the Three Kinds of Humility. After the first humility, of keeping the law of God and avoiding mortal sin, and the second, of perfect Ignatian indifference, we read:

The third is most perfect humility; namely, when—including the first and second, and the praise and glory of the Divine Majesty being equal—in order to imitate and be more actually like Christ our Lord, I want and choose poverty with Christ poor rather than riches, opprobrium with Christ replete with it rather than honours; and to desire to be rated as worthless and a fool for Christ, who first was held as such, rather than wise or prudent in this world. (Exx 167)²

Alongside such passages from *Spiritual Exercises*, there is also a key section in the *Examen*, a document about admitting new candidates to the Society of Jesus, where this grace of the Second Week, in a yet more complex articulation, appears as an ideal:

Likewise one should very much draw the attention of those being examined (cherishing it and pondering it before our Creator and Lord) to how great a degree it helps and profits in the spiritual life to

¹ These exercises of course have rather different functions—on this the relevant sections of Michael Ivens, *Understanding the Spiritual Exercises: Text and Commentary* (Leominster: Gracewing, 1998) are masterly.

² Translations from *Spiritual Exercises* are based on the literal translation of Elder Mullan, reproduced in David L. Fleming, *Draw Me Into Your Friendship: The Spiritual Exercises: A Literal Translation and a Contemporary Reading* (St Louis: Institute of Jesuit Sources, 1996). Other translations are my own unless otherwise stated.

abominate, completely and not in part, whatever the world loves and embraces; and to allow and desire with all possible force whatever Christ our Lord has loved and embraced. Just as worldly people who follow the world love and seek with such diligence honours, reputation and the esteem of a big name on earth, as the world teaches them—so those who are moving in the Spirit and are truly following Christ our Lord love and desire intensely the complete opposite: i.e. to dress in the same clothing and livery as their Lord because of due love and reverence. So much so that, where there would be no offence to his Divine Majesty, nor any sin imputed to the neighbour, they would desire to suffer injuries, false witnesses, affronts, and to be held and esteemed as crazy (not themselves giving any cause for it), as a way of desiring to resemble and imitate in some way our Creator and Lord Jesus Christ—dressing themselves in his clothing and livery (Examen 4.44 [101])

Clearly, Ignatius is expressing something dear to his heart. According to Joseph de Guibert, writing around 1940, all reliable interpreters see here the quintessence of Ignatius' thought.³ But just what is Ignatius saying here? What can it amount to for those who live out of the Exercises today? Is it a teaching which we can honestly affirm and live by?

Ignatius' Demands

There are five key features in this text that any sensible interpretation needs somehow to respect.

Desiring the Negative

First and foremost, Ignatius is encouraging us *actively to desire* poverty, humiliations and insults, to love and desire them 'intensely', indeed to be 'fired up' (*encendido*) with them (Examen 4.45 [102]). In the consideration of the Kingdom, we are encouraged to pray:

I want and desire and it is my deliberate determination ... to imitate you in bearing injuries and all abuse and all poverty of spirit, and actual poverty. (Exx 98)

This is strong language, appealing to the head as well as to the heart. Perhaps resistance to such a prayer is part of the experience of the

³ Joseph de Guibert, *The Jesuits: Their Spiritual Doctrine and Practice*, translated by William J. Young and edited by George E. Ganss (St Louis: Institute of Jesuit Sources, 1986 [1942]), 175.



Christ Carrying the Cross, by Hieronymus Bosch

Second Week; Jesus' disciples alone provide ample precedent. But the intensity of desire encouraged here is undeniable: like the tall nun in Hopkins' 'The Wreck of the *Deutschland*', we are being encouraged to call Christ's cross to us, and christen our 'wild-worst best'.

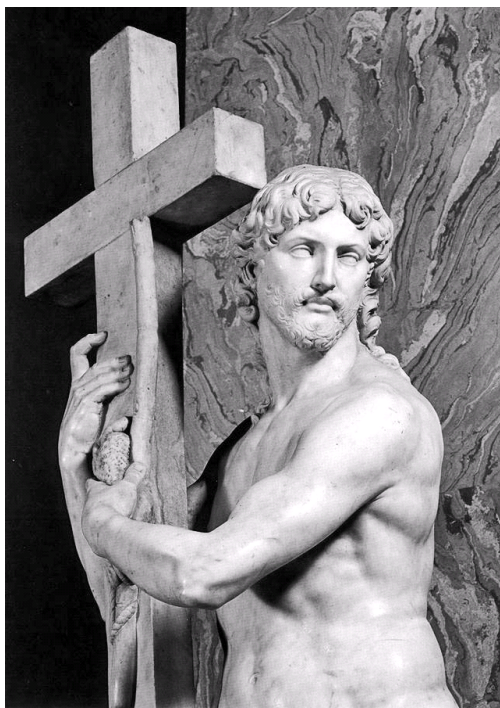
A Proviso

Secondly, this real desire for the negative is nevertheless qualified. In the quotation from the colloquy at the end of the Kingdom consideration, as given immediately above, important things were cut. This wish, this desire, this deliberate determination is to become real 'only if it be your greater service and praise'; I am to desire 'actual poverty' only 'if Your Most Holy Majesty wants to choose and receive me to such a life and state'. Provisos of this kind, sometimes tortuously expressed, occur every time Ignatius mentions his desire for the negative.

A Second Week Grace

Thirdly, this way of identifying with Christ crucified represents a specific devotion proper to the Second Week. Christian tradition contains a wide range of responses to the suffering Christ, and, as Michael Ivens has noted, there are really three spiritualities of the cross in the Exercises. The First Week confronts us with the wonderful exchange: the Christ who, in love unknown, takes the destructive effects of our sinfulness onto himself, so that we can walk forward in his righteousness (Exx 53). The Third Week is somehow quieter, more unitive and contemplative: anguish with Christ in anguish, shatteredness with Christ shattered (*quebranto con Cristo quebrantado*—Exx 203).⁴

However, the concern here in the Second Week is more with how the following of Christ leads us to make particular choices. To put the matter biblically: how are we to respond to Luke's Jesus, as he tells us



The Risen Christ, by Michelangelo

take up our cross every day and follow him (Luke 9:23)? Death here is merely a horizon, in the indefinite future: the concern is about what we do between now and our death, how we let the mystery of death and resurrection shape the choices we make regarding the particular form of our discipleship and guide us through the complexities of our motivations. It is not enough for a Christian morality and spirituality simply to assert that life comes from death. We also need to know how we are to live out that conviction. We need some procedure

⁴ Ivens, *Understanding the Spiritual Exercises*, 149 n.6. Perhaps there is even a Fourth Week devotion to the cross latent in Ignatius' talk of how the risen Christ consoles us (Exx 224).

for negotiating between alternative, even conflicting, accounts of how Christians cope with the choices to be made here and now. It is in this Second Week context that Ignatius suggests to us his complex petitions.

A Moral Problem

Fourthly, the desire for the negative is problematic, logically (after all, what you desire is, as such, a positive), morally and psychologically. The pious imagination easily skips over the point, because devotion to the crucified Christ is such a rooted tradition in Christian spirituality. Nevertheless, to understand Ignatius' petitions properly, we need some account of why and how the invitation to enter into suffering with Christ is distinguishable from irrational masochism. On what basis can we invoke a relationship with Christ as a licence for abandoning common sense?

There are also subtler problems. How can we distinguish the authentic selflessness to which Ignatius is challenging us from a mere mirage masking a deeper egoism, from the *ressentiment* with which Nietzsche classically reproached Christianity? In his discussion of Ignatius' asceticism, the Jesuit psychiatrist W. W. Meissner warns:

... the effort to resolve pride by resorting to humility may only drive ... narcissistic impulses underground, so that they find equivalent satisfaction in the exercise of a humility that can make one feel unconsciously superior to the rest of men—who have not achieved such a high degree of humility!⁵

In the opening chapter of George Eliot's *Middlemarch*, Dorothea Brooke, the chief heroine, is sharing out her late mother's jewels with her more straightforward younger sister Celia, and rather overbearingly insists that Celia take a particularly fine necklace. In the second chapter, Celia, recalling the incident, makes a teasing remark: 'she likes giving things up'. Dorothea's retort, though in context priggish, at once names a necessary distinction—'if that were true, Celia, my giving-up would be self-indulgence, not self-mortification'—while also insisting that an important value remains, one that Christians need to be able to articulate: 'there may be good reasons for choosing not to do what is very agreeable'.

⁵ W. W. Meissner, *Ignatius of Loyola: The Psychology of a Saint* (London: Yale UP, 1992), 104.

Impossible Scenarios

Finally, and perhaps controversially, I would argue that the situation which Ignatius indicates in his various provisos seems to be one that could never occur. The ‘opprobria and injuries’, for which we ask in order ‘to imitate him (Christ) more in them’, are meant to come ‘if only I can suffer them without the sin of any person, or displeasure of His Divine Majesty’ (Exx 147). How can this condition possibly be fulfilled? On any conventional reading of the New Testament, sin had much to do with Jesus’ own humiliation. In envisaging situations of creaturely poverty and humiliation that do not thereby involve sin or dishonour to God, Ignatius’ texts seem to imply a contradiction, at least in normal cases.⁶ Any positive interpretation is likely therefore to involve some creativity in inquiring how Ignatius means what he says, and some corrective reformulation to salvage his proposition (Exx 22).

In what follows, I offer a selective survey how contemporary authors deal with this petition, before suggesting a way in which the best elements in these interpretations can be brought together.

Avoidance

Modern literature on the Exercises often deals with this material by avoiding it; when Ignatius’ Second Week formula is mentioned at all, important elements are frequently neglected.

In 1995, the US Jesuit patristic scholar Brian Daley published an important article on the Third Mode of Humility.⁷ It began with a personal reminiscence from 1966, when he met his first spiritual director after the novitiate, who asked him what he thought was most important in Ignatian spirituality. ‘The Third Degree of Humility, I suppose’, was the pious reply: ‘he nodded, and didn’t seem to disagree’. But the conversation did not continue.

Perhaps in the reticence here there is already a hint of unreality, of avoidance of issues; after all, as US Jesuits in the mid-twentieth century, both Daley and his director were members of a group that had

⁶ Marion Morgan, ‘Now I Am Retired ...’, *The Way*, 45/1 (January 2006), 105–108, writes movingly (108) of how Ignatius’ teaching helps her in caring for an abusive person whose mental health difficulties preclude any easy talk of sin.

⁷ Brian E. Daley, “To Be More Like Christ”: The Background and Implications of “Three Kinds of Humility”, *Studies in the Spirituality of Jesuits*, 27/1 (January 1995), 1–39, here 1–2.

dedicated itself, sometimes heroically, to the upward social mobility through education of those whom it was serving, and thereby inevitably of its own members.⁸ But more significant is Daley's undeniable observation on the Ignatian renewal that has taken place subsequently:

Despite the enormous amount of study and publication that has accompanied the renewal of our practice in making and directing the Exercises since 1965, little or nothing has been written specifically about the place of this text in the rhythm of the wider process ... I know of nothing specifically written on the subject since Vatican II.

We stress the apostolic rather than ascetical; we focus on the 'good news of freedom and justice', and find it difficult to see where humility might fit in.⁹

Daley's observations on the reflective literature seem well made.¹⁰ Whether because of its spiritual demands or the difficulties in its interpretation, the Second Week's theology of the cross appears largely to have vanished from public Ignatian discourse. Even Joseph Veale, for whom this strand in Ignatius' thought was clearly key—in his collected essays he keeps on coming back to it—never articulated fully just why he thought it important, and how the ethical and psychological issues raised by Ignatius' formulations could be addressed.¹¹

Sometimes interpreters fill the space of Ignatius' Second Week petitions with their own theology of the cross. Given the difficulty, even possible incoherence, of Ignatius' formulae, they draw on other, often rich and sensible, accounts of how Jesus' suffering should inform Christian spirituality and ethics. Carl Gustav Jung, for example, saw in

⁸ Note Daley's own observation that Jesuits 'expect our institutions and works to strive for excellence in every possible way ... so much so that ... a deeply felt desire for obscurity, poverty, and a negative reputation ... may seem to many ... a hypocritical pose, even a contradiction of our central spiritual identity' ('To Be More Like Christ', 3). The idiom of Daley's essay reflects the intended Jesuit readership of the journal in which he was publishing, but the substantive points can easily be transposed to the wider group of those who make the Exercises.

⁹ Daley, "To Be More Like Christ", 2–3.

¹⁰ Since Daley wrote, a book-length study has appeared: Stefan Kiechle, *Kreuzesnachfolge: eine theologisch-anthropologische Studie zur ignatianischen Spiritualität* (Würzburg: Echter, 1996), presented more briefly in 'Zum kreuztragenden Herrn gestellt: Aspekte einer Kreuzestheologie bei Ignatius von Loyola', in *Zur größeren Ehre Gottes: Ignatius von Loyola neu entdeckt für die Theologie der Gegenwart*, edited by Thomas Gertler, Stephan Ch. Kessler and Willi Lambert (Freiburg: Herder, 2006), 110–125. See below. Daley's conjecture that the academic silence is reflected by a widespread failure actually to give the Three Kinds of Humility ("To Be More Like Christ", 4) is worth discussion and possibly empirical research.

¹¹ Joseph Veale, *Manifold Gifts: Ignatian Essays on Spirituality* (Oxford: Way Books, 2006), for example 51–56.

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the Second Week a pedagogy for integrating the shadow, the repressed energies within the self.¹² Karl Rahner's retreat conferences on the topic seem simply to twist Ignatius' text into Rahner's own rich account of how all of us, as individuals, are pointed by the Spirit towards particular options; purely objective considerations give way to the 'underivable disposing' of God's love.¹³ A more recent feminist text on the Exercises, treating the 'Three Ways of Being Humble' very briefly, tells us that humility has its pitfalls, but nevertheless that Ignatius' text can open us to 'greater generosity, deeper self-knowledge'. For these authors, Ignatius teaches us that humility does not ultimately depend on personal effort but on openness to God's power, and invites us to make a radical choice 'to give over all of one's life to be with Jesus no matter what the consequence'. His concern is to foster 'a growing capacity for love, freedom and magnanimity rather than subservience'.¹⁴ Important and true things are being said in such writing. But, implicitly, Ignatius' own formulations are being treated simply as inept and outdated ciphers for something better put in other terms. If indeed Ignatius' text contains contradictions, a limited strategy of this kind may be necessary. But such reformulations should be as gentle as possible.

A Radical Critic

Few commentators on the Exercises are prepared directly to criticize such a central feature as the Second Week petition. There is a recent exception, however: the Uruguayan Jesuit liberation theologian, Juan Luis Segundo. Segundo sees Ignatius' text as advocating a mere abstraction of humility, hopelessly detached from the historical reality of Jesus' Kingdom preaching. Such wisdom as there is in the Exercises will be mined only if we radically correct this aspect of Ignatius' thought. Jesus,

... was not the model of poverty in the society of his own day, as is evident from the way he is compared unfavourably to John the Baptist (Matthew 11:18–19). And summing up his life as a series of

¹² Kenneth L. Becker, *Unlikely Companions: C. G. Jung on the Spiritual Exercises of Ignatius of Loyola* (Leominster: Gracewing, 2001), 245–260; see also Becker's 'Beyond Survival: The Two Standards and the Way of Love', *The Way*, 42/3 (July 2003), 125–136.

¹³ See Philip Endean, *Karl Rahner and Ignatian Spirituality* (Oxford: Oxford UP, 2001), 121–123.

¹⁴ Katherine Dyckman, Mary Garvin and Elizabeth Liebert, *The Spiritual Exercises Reclaimed: Uncovering Liberating Possibilities for Women* (New York: Paulist, 2001), 202–204.

insults from adversaries who regard him as a fool is either a plain mistake or a false perspective due to focusing solely on his passion. Jesus's life was more uncomfortable than poor ... and more conflict-ridden than ignominious. Moreover, both features are framed within a purpose or project, as are the pain and suffering of his passion.¹⁵

Segundo speaks of a 'huge christological vacuum in this kind of humility, which seems to succumb to a predilection for suffering or masochism', originating in a 'failure to notice that in the real life of Jesus there is not the slightest indication that suffering was valued for its own sake'. Jesus' death 'is the price for his determination to bring happiness to the poor, sinners and the marginalised members of society'. For Segundo, we need to stop focusing on the person of Jesus exclusively, and focus our energy and affectivity on the reality of the Kingdom which Jesus proclaimed. Such a perspective is omitted from Ignatius' formula 'inexcusably'. If we want to interpret Ignatius positively, we must nevertheless somehow answer the challenge in these angry paragraphs, which perhaps amount to a biblical and liberationist elaboration of the 'moral problem' already noted.

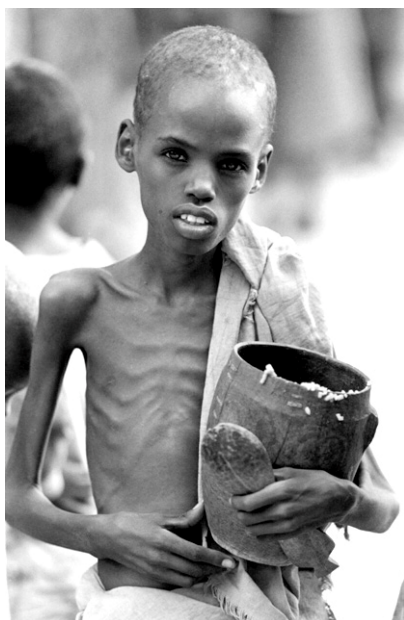
Unitive Love

A more mainstream and positive account of the matter is offered by John English, who interprets the three humilities by considering 'how they would operate in the relationship between a husband and a wife':

In the third mode of humility, they relate to each other in this way: 'I will feel with you, I will suffer with you in your sufferings, I will be joyful with you in your joy'. ... Ignatius proposes suffering as a test of love. ... A married couple in love may want each other to be successful and recognised at work for each other's sake. Yet, they might consider it a greater love to remain with their spouse and support each other in times of failure. In love's paradoxical view, a couple might even desire this situation if only to show their love by staying together in time of insults and disregard.¹⁶

¹⁵ Juan Luis Segundo, *The Christ of the Ignatian Exercises*, translated by John Drury (London: Sheed and Ward, 1982), 100–101.

¹⁶ John J. English, *Spiritual Freedom: From an Experience of the Ignatian Exercises to the Art of Spiritual Guidance*, second edition (Chicago: Loyola UP, 1995 [1973]), 170–171.



As Pascal put it, *le coeur a ses raisons que la raison ne connaît pas*—love has its reasons of which reason is unaware. The third humility is about this level of love.

Love of Christ clearly motivates the Second Week colloquies, and the idea which English evokes is certainly Ignatian: simple unitive closeness to the suffering Christ. But the location of this motif in the Exercises is the Third Week.¹⁷ In the Second Week, the closeness to Christ sought is hedged round with complex qualifications, arising from concerns about how love is realised in active service. What English and

others write in this vein needs at least to be extended; on what we have above, it is hard to see how such love could admit of proviso. But the knowledge and love of Christ fostered in the Second Week are bound up with following him (Exx 104), in a mission that often involves the *relief* of suffering. ‘Just being there’ is an appropriate response to suffering only once the possibilities for relief are exhausted. The Second Week petition surely needs to be linked to the motivational ambiguities likely to arise in a life of active service.

Agere Contra

Another interpretation of the third ‘most perfect’ humility is neatly summarised in W. W. Meissner’s psychological biography of Ignatius: ‘the Ignatian principle of *agere contra*, fundamental to Ignatian asceticism and spirituality, here reaches its apogee’.¹⁸

In the Sixteenth Annotation, Ignatius envisages a situation where our disordered affections are interfering with our discernment. He

¹⁷ English admits this quite frankly: ‘Quite often people fully grasp the third mode of humility only in the Third Week when they are praying on the Passion. Still, Ignatius places it in the Second Week’ (*Spiritual Freedom*, 173).

¹⁸ Meissner, *Ignatius of Loyola*, 103.

advises us to mobilise our spiritual energy against those unworthy impulses in the hope that we might arrive at perfect indifference, perfect disponibility:

... that the Creator and Lord may work more surely in His creature—it is very expedient, if it happens that the soul is attached or inclined to a thing inordinately, that a person should move themselves, putting forth all their strength, to come to the contrary of what they are wrongly drawn to. Thus if they incline to seeking and possessing an office or benefice, not for the honour and glory of God our Lord, nor for the spiritual well-being of souls, but for their own temporal advantage and interests, they ought to excite their feelings to the contrary, being instant in prayers and other spiritual exercises, and asking God our Lord for the contrary, namely, not to want such office or benefice, or any other thing. (Exx 16)

In a note following the Three Classes meditation, Ignatius seems to be interpreting his central petition in the light of this principle:

It is to be noted that when we feel a tendency or repugnance against actual poverty, when we are not indifferent to poverty or riches, it is very helpful, in order to extinguish such a disordered tendency, to ask in the Colloquies (although it be against the flesh) that the Lord should choose one in actual poverty; and that the person want, ask and beg [for it], if only it be the service and praise of His Divine Goodness. (Exx 157)

A vocations promotion pamphlet circulated in the 1970s by what was then the English Jesuit province spoke of Ignatius fostering ‘a trained bias for taking the rough with the smooth’. In this spirit, Jules Toner writes of the Third Humility:

It safeguards the indifference to all but God’s will and God’s glory, which is essential for a trustworthy discernment. Being more inclined to poverty and humility with Christ poor and humiliated ... is a powerful counteractive to any selfish tendencies It frees one to hear and follow God’s call, even if that call should conflict with these tendencies.¹⁹

¹⁹ Jules Toner, *Discerning God’s Will: Ignatius of Loyola’s Teaching on Christian Decision Making* (St Louis: Institute of Jesuit Sources, 1991), 93–94.

In Stefan Kiechle's words, we are cultivating an attitude here, and the attitude itself is an 'exercise', with the aim that we should become indifferent. We take up the exercise for a short time in preparing for the election, and then set it aside—Ignatius warns us repeatedly against overdoing such things.²⁰

The strengths and weaknesses of this more cerebral approach are the reverse of those we noted in connection with English on love. Here we have a link with the Second Week business of election; here too, the proviso in the Ignatian formulation is being given full weight. But if we read the Second Week petition as only an illustration of the Ignatian

**To desire
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agere contra, we are surely marginalising ideas which for Ignatius are spiritually and rhetorically central, especially in the version found in the *Examen*. Ignatius' concern surely goes beyond getting us to accept that life in discipleship of Jesus will sometimes be hard, and offering us a devotional help for getting through difficult periods. He wants us to desire intensely to be with Christ poor, insulted and injured. The conditionality on which this interpretation centres needs somehow to be transfused with passionate love.

The Approach through Narrative

A further approach to the question was pioneered by the Canadian Jesuit Roger Cantin, writing in celebration of the 1956 Ignatian jubilee, and developed by Brian Daley.²¹ Granted the framework within which I have presented the issue, Cantin's key suggestion is that the sense of contradiction in the Ignatian formulae is less marked than at first appears. 'Praise and glory of the Divine Majesty' needs to be understood as the fruit of Ignatian service and ministry.²² The Second Week petition is encouraging a personal identification with the poor and humble Christ, tempered by considerations of what will make Christian witness attractive to others. When other commentators read 'divine glory' in the abstract, as a pious label attachable to just any worthwhile action, Ignatius seems to be saying something very odd: closer imitation of

²⁰ Kiechle, 'Zum kreuztragenden Herrn gestellt', 121, invoking Exx 83, 86.

²¹ Roger Cantin, 'Le troisième degré d'humilité et la gloire de Dieu selon saint Ignace de Loyola', *Sciences ecclésiastiques*, 8 (1956), 237–266. Cantin's article opens with a helpful survey of older approaches.

²² Cantin, 'Le troisième degré', 246–253.

Christ can somehow be a lesser good. Cantin and Daley insist on Ignatius' own usage:

... the question of how the 'glory and praise of the Divine Majesty' is 'served' is ... normally a practical apostolic one, not a question of the metaphysics of spiritual perfection: How can God be better known and loved, in the present concrete historical context?²³

The title given to the three humilities by two of Ignatius' own retreatants, the Ortiz brothers, now appears significant: 'three kinds or degrees of the love of God and of the desire to obey and imitate and serve His Divine Majesty': 'humility' in Ignatius' language indicates a complex attitude involving love, imitation and service.²⁴

So it is that the loving desire to imitate the suffering Christ can be moderated in order not to undermine ministerial credibility. Cantin quotes a saying of Ignatius to Pedro de Ribadeneira regarding the accusations of heresy made against him that neatly expresses the point:

When I was alone (he said), I did not bother about these calumnies and murmurings; but now that I have companions, I prize greatly their reputation and good name, on account of how this touches the honour of God.²⁵

Hence, when we are faced with a choice, the love of Christ should lead us to prefer the more ascetical and unobtrusive option. At the same time, we are prepared to override this preference for the sake of a more fruitful ministry, a greater divine service.

Cantin and Daley are offering what Ignatius called 'positive theology', and setting gently to one side the issues which worry a more 'scholastic' frame of mind. They develop their positions by articulating a wider narrative. Cantin draws richly and convincingly on the sources to present Ignatius the convert first being swept away by the holy folly of love for the crucified Christ, and then learning to temper this

²³ Daley, 'To Be More Like Christ', 29; compare Cantin, 'Le troisième degré', 246–247.

²⁴ MHSJ MI Exx (1969), 635; see Daley, 'To Be More Like Christ', 32.

²⁵ MHSJ MI FN 4, 219; Cantin, 'Le troisième degré', 260. In Cantin's version, which may have gone through several intermediaries, the text has become fuller: 'As long as I was alone, I scorned my enemies' calumnies; far from inspiring fear in me, they were doing me an honour. But I am no longer my own master ... I have companions destined like me to work for the service of souls; their honour and mine are no longer ours, but belong to God, to whose service we are engaged.'

enthusiasm with more pragmatic considerations about apostolic credibility. Daley, addressing a readership more likely to raise critical questions than Cantin's, places this Ignatian story within a broader narrative of Christianity's complex relationship with the Greek philosophical tradition, written in an attractive style that smoothes over the awkward questions about revelation and reason. Such theology does its job by encouraging and persuading, rather than by making sharp distinctions; its aim is 'to move the heart to love and serve God our Lord in everything' (Exx 363). Questions of logic can be pressed too far, and distract people from the love and service that really matter; some things simply have to be taken on faith.²⁶

Perhaps we should leave matters here. Cantin's claims are richly supported by Ignatius' biography, and we know, after all, that Ignatius preferred the 'positive doctors' to the scholastics. Nevertheless, at least some of his followers may need 'scholastic' concerns to be addressed more fully. Moreover, the version of life according to Ignatius' Second Week grace that we find still seems in some ways unsatisfactory. Here is Cantin's account of how the Second Week grace might be lived out:

If we understand the glory of God in the sense of God's Kingdom being realised on earth, or of spiritual fruit being produced within souls, then every day there are thousands of occasions when the Third Degree of Humility can be practised without any harm being done to God's glory. Is there not a just measure of corporal penance, variable according to individuals and circumstances, which can be taken on without its diminishing, or for that matter increasing, our apostolic dedication? And can we not say the same for a certain practice of material poverty, for depriving ourselves of some material comfort, even for some humiliations and attacks on our reputation that we endure in silence?²⁷

Even allowing for the passage of time and cultural differences, some questions still press here. Why should love of Christ be expressed through asceticism and renunciation *at all*? When Daley speaks of 'the tension' in Jesuit tradition between 'the humiliated Christ as saviour of the world' and the need to preach Christ 'in an effective and humanly attractive way', we need some basis for distinguishing between 'tension'

²⁶ So Cantin, 'Le troisième degré', 264; Daley, 'To Be More Like Christ', 20.

²⁷ Cantin, 'Le troisième degré', 262–263, translated idiomatically rather than literally. Compare the more muted version of this position in Daley, 'To Be More Like Christ', 29–30.

and contradiction: a theology that establishes a link between Ignatian love for Christ poor and the commitment to human betterment that Ignatian service involves.²⁸ Can even Cantin's version of 'bearing insults' occur without sin playing a role? Can we hope to engage in the practices that Cantin describes with the passionate commitment associated by Ignatius with the Second Week grace? Can an interior spiritual desire remain alive and real over the long haul if serious ministerial commitments lead us habitually to restrain that desire? Is there not a disjunction between private identity and ministerial role implicit in Cantin's description that is neither psychologically realistic nor spiritually desirable?

A Proposal

Perhaps, then, there is room for a further interpretation. Let me begin by stating a principle. If the gospel is true, then Christ has revealed potentials in the human condition for bringing good out of evil. In terms of the Easter Vigil's *Exsultet*, our *culpa* can become *felix*. In Christ, sin can become a good thing. Moreover, only out of this sin and degradation can the full greatness of the redeemer be displayed.²⁹ It follows that stories of human baseness and degradation provoke a complex reaction. In no way do we want to condone the evil involved. At the same time we can admire, rejoice in, and desire to share the human dispositions, definitively manifested in Christ, through which grace is at work even there. It is *this* Christ whom we want to know and love, and whom we are invited to follow.

We venerate Christ crucified, not because we make a cult of suffering in itself, but because in him, mysteriously, life came from death: even when hidden within poverty, insults and death, his divinity remains active and transformative, untouched by the suffering (Exx 223).³⁰ When we venerate our martyrs, we do not glory in the wickedness which caused them to die; we venerate their living out a reality of grace and faith

²⁸ Daley, "To Be More Like Christ", 37.

²⁹ Cantin, 'Le troisième degré', 264, already speaks of the 'new wisdom' emerging from the Son's mission in the world 'which undoubtedly would not have had its place in the state of original justice and which appears as something marvellously adapted to our condition as fallen beings'.

³⁰ One underlying issue here is the nature of salvation. Kiechle, 'Zum kreuztragenden Herrn gestellt', 123, notes the need to exorcise the image of a 'vengeful father-god demanding his Son's suffering on the cross as a placatory victim so as to assuage the anger he has on account of sin'.

*Man, ere he is aware,
Hath put together a solemnity,
And drest his horse, while he has breath
As yet to spare;
Yet Lord, instruct us so to die,
That all these dyings may be life in death.*

George Herbert, 'Mortification'

beyond human evil, and use their memory to nourish our own ongoing discipleship. The British journalist Mary Craig, writing of how she coped with bringing up two severely disabled children, quotes a prayer that was reputedly found wrapped round the body of a dead child in Ravensbrück, the concentration camp outside Berlin:

O Lord, remember not only the men and women of goodwill, but also those of ill will. But do not only remember all the suffering they have inflicted on us. Remember the fruits we have bought, thanks to this suffering: our comradeship, our loyalty, our humility, our courage, our generosity, the greatness of heart which has come out of all this; and when they come to the judgment, let all the fruits that we have borne be their forgiveness. Amen.³¹

If we live through suffering in dialogue with God, a 'greatness of heart' can emerge, a fruit which can become a token of forgiveness and healing.

My proposal is that we should read Ignatius' complex Second Week petition in the light of this sort of prayer and conviction. At the outset, it has to be said that such a reading goes beyond the letter of Ignatius' text. Ignatius invites us to imagine following Christ in being insulted and humiliated *without* anyone sinning and without there being

³¹ The text was first published in Mary Craig, 'Take Up Your Cross', *The Way*, 13/1 (January 1972), 22–32, here 30, and repeated in her book, *Blessings: An Autobiographical Fragment* (New York: Bantam, 1979), 135. The prayer cannot be sourced further.

dishonour to God. Here the suggestion is that we imagine following Christ in being insulted and humiliated *in abstraction from* the sin and dishonour to God that such situations cannot but involve. We are to imagine real situations of Christ and his followers being confronted by evil, and focus neither on our justifiable reaction of outrage, nor on our worthy projects for relief, but rather on the dispositions enabling the victims to make gospel meaning. We cherish and privilege situations of degradation, not because we perversely link religion with destruction, but because only there is the full extent of Christian hope manifest.³²

Though this reading goes beyond Ignatius, it does so only moderately; moreover it does so at the point where the plain meaning of his text, unless we follow Cantin without reserve, is nonsensical, and where some creative interpretation is necessary. Further, this proposal can, unlike any of the other readings I have surveyed, accommodate all the other key elements in the text. The dispositions being commended are challenging and complex; their realisation may be fragmentary and mysterious; but they are unquestionably attractive—they are worth, almost literally, dying for. At the same time, we are keeping our distance from the inevitably evil context of such dispositions in the way that Ignatius' proviso, in its awkwardness, is trying to do.

Furthermore, the links with the Election that the *agere contra* approach highlights are preserved, though the role of the Second Week petition is now also, and more importantly, to remind us of the full range of Christian hope, as well as counteracting our inordinate attachments. Ignatius encourages us to consider the three modes of humility immediately before an election, 'that a person may get attachment to the true doctrine of Christ our Lord' (Exx 164). Before an important Christian choice we need to have our imaginations and desires stretched to the full 'breadth and length and height and depth' (Ephesians 3:14) of divine love. The recognition that even in the worst possible situations God's power is not defeated, and a desire to live in conformity with that conviction, can, in the context of a challenging life-choice, defuse some fears and open up possibilities. It is not that we are pushing ourselves towards the negative; rather we are reminding ourselves that in suffering

³² The idea here owes something to Karl Rahner's brief 1956 essay, 'On the Experience of Grace', in *Theological Investigations*, volume 3, translated by K.-H. and B. Kruger (London: Darton, Longman and Todd, 1966), 86–90; and in *Karl Rahner: Spiritual Writings*, translated by Philip Endean (Maryknoll: Orbis, 2005), 75–81.

too, and in an especially revelatory way, the grace of God can be manifest. There is no place in Christianity for a spirituality of world-denial; rather, our sense of God's self-gift to the world should extend to the full range of human possibility, to the 'extreme of poverty—*summa pobreza*' leading to the cross, into which Christ is born (Exx 116).³³

The Examen Version

At this point it is worth noting some details from the fuller articulation of the Second Week petition found in the *Examen* for new Jesuit candidates (*Examen* 4.44–46 [101–103]). Here Christ's poverty and insults are set in a context of life-giving generosity. It is 'for our greater spiritual profit' that he is dressed in a livery of insults,

... giving us an example so that in all things possible for us, through his divine grace, we might wish to imitate and follow him, as might be the way that leads human beings to life.

Moreover, what is at stake is not a general ascetical principle to be observed in all circumstances, but rather a possibility held open in a community of graced memory. The language as the passage begins is significant:

Likewise one should very much draw the attention of those being examined (cherishing it and pondering it before our Creator and Lord)

It is only in shared prayer and reverence—cherishing it and pondering it (*encareciéndolo y ponderándolo*)—that this memory is to be recalled. Outside such a context, such talk is liable to promote anxiety and guilt rather than liberation.

We also find here an account of how we can grow into the difficult desires and dispositions which Ignatius is encouraging:

³³ When Stefan Kiechle writes of the Ignatian preference for humility that '... one can legitimately cultivate such a preference only as long as one is not directly engaged with making the Election—for at that point one is asking oneself which alternative will bring the *greater* glory of God' ('Zum kreuztragenden Herrn gestellt', 119, emphasis original), the claim being made is perfectly sensible if we understand 'poverty with Christ poor' as a recommendation always to prefer situations of poverty. But it is that last condition that I am questioning. The Second Week texts cannot be fruitfully read as perverse encouragements to prefer the unpleasant; rather, they remind us of the life-giving power of Christ's suffering as an education in the nature of divine glory.

Where, through our common human weakness and his own wretchedness he does not, in our Lord, find himself in such desires, fired up like this, he should be asked if he finds himself with some *desires* to find himself in them. If he responds yes—he does desire to find himself in such very holy desires—then in order better to reach them in fact, he should be asked if he finds himself resolved and ready to let it happen, and to suffer it with patience through divine grace, whenever such injuries, misrepresentations and insults as are included in this livery of Christ our Lord (or any others) are done to him—whether it be from someone inside the house or Society ... or outside it from any persons whatever in this life—not returning anyone evil for evil, but rather good for evil.

Here, Ignatius calmly admits that Jesuit life will involve injustices, from inside the house as well as outside it; the disposition he encourages does not involve any denial of this reality, but rather abstracts from it, rises above it. And the phrase, ‘find himself in such desires’, shows that the disposition is not an achievement, but rather a gift that one finds one has received. One grows into this gift by trying to live according to the Sermon on the Mount. If you are able to forgive, if you are somehow able to prevent the evil which will certainly be done to you from poisoning your relationships, then you will be growing into the dispositions—‘so salutary and fruitful as far as the salvation of one’s soul is concerned’—that enable life to come from death. What begins as tight-lipped endurance may in time become passionate love.

* * *

More surely remains to be explored in connection with the Ignatian prayer for poverty and humiliations. There is a feminist and liberationist question to be faced. Ignatius was originally presenting his Exercises to comfortable Latin male clerics,



weaning them off the revenues of a benefice and encouraging them to the help of souls. There have to be questions about how Ignatius' text works in a culture where money and vocation are not so closely associated. For many Catholics in English-speaking countries, real poverty is an evil all too present in our family memory, an evil from which our liberation is not yet secure. Moreover, the ideal of renunciation is now widely acknowledged to be conditioned by gender. Perhaps such factors should inform our presentation of the enemy's characteristic strategy in the Two Standards. It may not be that the way to spiritual disaster for everyone goes through riches, through the love of honour and pride, to all other vices (Exx 142).

But once we arrive at the three humilities, the situation seems simpler. If Christianity is true, then there are supremely desirable human qualities, definitively demonstrated by Christ, that are only revealed in situations of sin. Without condoning the sin, we can and should actively desire and pray for those dispositions that enable us to bear suffering, in whatever form it occurs, so that life can come forth. And, especially when preparing to take major decisions, we should cherish and ponder before the Lord our tradition's witness that such transformation is possible.³⁴

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³⁴ The ideas in this essay have been shared orally with several groups in recent years, most recently at a conference on Ignatian spirituality at Regis College, Toronto, in September 2007. I am grateful for many helpful reactions, particularly to Fr Brendan Byrne SJ for pointing out that I needed to be fairer to the positions with which I disagreed.