RECOMMENDATIONS FOR GIVING THE FIRST WEEK OF THE SPIRITUAL EXERCISES

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ONE OF THE MOST RADICAL human challenges is to confront the shadow side of our moral weakness; and yet such a challenge is an essential element of being a Christian. This venture into the shadows occurs when the Spirit allows us to focus to some extent on our own unreliability. Only then does the need become apparent for *metanoia* and, once that need becomes a desire, the way opens for us towards living the gospel.

Sin, however, is too turbulent an area of experience to get involved in without precaution. As confirmation of this, we have the autobiographical account of Ignatius Loyola describing the initial steps in his own conversion. His painful apprentice experiences shaped the final form of the reflections that constitute the First Week of his *Spiritual Exercises*. But this final form by no means made certain of everything. Even if Ignatius offers the sketch of a map with his First Set of 'Rules for Discernment', he freed himself from the assumption that sin demanded exact and sophisticated methods: he called them 'Rules by which to perceive and understand *to some extent* …' (Exx 313). Retreatants will have at their disposal only a series of rough guidelines. Nothing more is possible when dealing with guilt and with indifference towards the gospel.

The task of someone who accompanies a retreatant in the search for the grace of the First Week is not an easy one. There is always something shocking about informing a person that the salvific action of the First Week has to take the form of 'personal shame and confusion' (Exx 48) and 'mounting and intense sorrow and tears for my sins' (Exx 55). The First Week leads to the paradoxical grace of 'happy

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consternation'. The price can be high, sometimes too high, in so far as the experience of sin may lead a retreatant into useless byways.

My aim in what follows is to put forward some recommendations for those who give or accompany the First Week. The form of these remarks will be that of a *Directory*,[1] which is not intended to be exhaustive. The only guarantee I can offer, as I sketch out this directory, is that of my experience gained while accompanying retreatants. My remarks will touch on and mix together questions of Ignatian method and other more profound questions, drawing on theology and on the spiritual pedagogy found in the *Exercises*. They have in common one overarching insight that I share with other retreat-givers: the First Week requires a 'presupposition' from those who give the Exercises. This will be in the same style as the prototypical 'presupposition' that Ignatius put at the start of his text (Exx 22). Ignatius' 'presupposition' is basically very simple. Anyone giving the First Week needs to be in possession of a sound *hamartiology*, or *theory of sin*, one that covers both the experiential understanding and the theology of sin. Only then can the retreat-giver really accompany the retreatant as the latter tries to deal in Christian fashion with his or her shadows. All too frequently we have been over-preoccupied with problems of verbal translation or imagery that occur in the exercises of the First Week—the fall of the angels, the sin of Adam and Eve, the eschatological scenario of hell—and have neglected what is crucial: how to bring home the *meaning* of those features in a way that will interlock with the notion of sin current today, so that in the end the exercitant will *experience* the reality of sin.

To be in possession of a sound ... theory of sin

A Limited Capacity to Deal with Their Shadow Side

'The more light of character he knows them to be, the more he ought to warn and admonish them.' (Exx 14)

This directory has to begin by urging careful attention to the identity and background of those who approach us. It is well known that nowadays the perception of sin is not at its strongest. Like so many other features of life

[1] In the sixteenth century various 'directories' appeared for those giving the Spiritual Exercises; these are conveniently published as *On Giving the Spiritual Exercises: The Early Jesuit Manuscript Directories and the Official Directory of 1599*, translated and edited by Martin E. Palmer (St Louis: Institute of Jesuit Sources, 1996).

today, it seems to have been undergoing a crisis for a considerable time. Cries of alarm were raised some years ago. An issue of the review *Concilium* was dedicated to the concept in an attempt to uncover the roots of the cultural crisis of sin. Its analysis was not encouraging:

> Philosophers and scientists, particularly since Feuerbach, Marx, Nietzsche and Freud, believe that they have at last disposed of the problem of evil and guilt. Attempts continue to be made to reduce the reality of moral evil and the authenticity of the experience of guilt to a matter of converging psychopathological motivations within the context of social evolution, biological behaviour patterns, and so on …. A relative (in the sense of not absolute) interpretation of the guilt experience, which has been part of the Christian faith from the beginning, seems to be spreading. In theology and preaching it is becoming increasingly difficult to speak intelligibly and convincingly about moral evil and guilt on traditional lines.[2]

This phenomenon has had its impact also on those who believe, and it has been widely disseminated. Christianity cannot free itself from a context,

> … in which the notion of sin no longer plays a constructive and vital part. We find ourselves in a world that lacks the words needed to speak of sin, is bereft of places for the forgiveness of sin, and seems to feel no need for either.[3]

At the risk of unjust generalisation, one can say that the younger a retreatant is, the more evident will be the effect of the present cultural crisis on the make-up of his or her religious identity.

This is what gives rise to the 'light[ness] of character' of many retreatants. Those who give the Exercises need to recognise and accept this fact when introducing the First Week. Only in this way, it seems to me, can we undertake one of the usual tasks required of those who accompany during the First Week: the dismantling of those exculpatory mechanisms that form part, often quite unconsciously, of the mental constitution of the retreatant. This is a task that needs patience and has a simple aim: that the person making the Exercises should come to

[2] Johannes B. Metz, editorial, *Concilium*, 6/6, 'Moral Evil under Challenge' (June 1970), 7.
[3] Gerhard Ebeling, *Theologie zwischen reformatorischem Sünderverständnis und heutiger Einstellung zum Bösen*; see also Ebeling, *Wort und Glaube*, volume 3 (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 1975), 197.

accept *that sin exists*. Such a realisation is born only of hard spiritual labour, but it is essential if a person is to learn how to understand reality through the eyes of the gospel.

This truth is no longer commonly accepted, and many retreatants will need help to bring it home. They tend to seek refuge in rationalisations, many of which are not entirely lacking in truth. Today, for example, people are more aware of the conditions under which we have free will. They know the human sciences have argued that the freedom of the will is not a given but something to be gained; that the role of determinism and the limitations on autonomy turn out to be much more influential than was recognised; and that the assumption of an unconditional freedom underpinned by a clear personal voice is no more than a projected image of omnipotence. But once free will is called into question, we can say little about morality. The concept of sin depends upon the possibility of freedom, and if the latter is diminished, the 'bad' is replaced by the 'weak'.

Moreover, many retreatants come to make a retreat already convinced by the criticisms levelled against traditional morality. The label of *sin* that was attached to certain forms of conduct has been removed, as they are no longer treated as matters of responsibility. Morality is not permitted to interfere in what does not concern it. In the past, admittedly, some pastoral exhortations tended to promote a undue sense of guilt. In the process of reforming a proper sense of morality, much that was called 'immoral' must now be regarded as excluded from that category.

In spite of these changes, the warning given in Annotation 14 has ever greater force; we who give the Exercises have all the more reason to 'warn and admonish' those retreatants who come to us with today's baggage. Surely no greater argument is needed than the fundamental gospel message, one that has to accompany anyone along the complicated route of the Exercises. As the Gospels insist, there exists a definite *inertia* against accepting the Kingdom: 'Those who are well have no need of a physician, but those who are sick' (Matthew 9:12). It is the latter for whom we should, primarily, be caring. The Gospel of John makes the situation plain, and offers hope: the world is under the power of sin, but 'the ruler of this world will be driven out' (John 12:31). Jesus is the one who dares to confront evil to generate a new order of things: 'But if it is by the finger of God that I cast out the demons, then the kingdom of God has

Descent to Hell, *by Duccio di Buoninsegna*

come to you' (Luke 11: 20). Jesus, in other words, is the event that opposes the shadow of history and of the human heart, and the 'good news' is that such opposition spells the end of evil.

The New Sense of Sin

'Every good Christian is to be more ready to save their neighbour's proposition than to condemn it.' (Exx 22)

Despite what has just been said, retreat-givers need to bear in mind, it seems to me, that *not every aspect of morality is being called in question*. In each historical period there exists a different sensitivity to what is morally wrong, and that is equally true today. The apparent blindness to sin today admits of nuances; the present cultural moment has not wholly turned its back on human unreliability. Our age is seeing the birth of a *new* sense of sin, and we would be doing ourselves, and the

majority of our retreatants, an injustice if we fail to acknowledge this from the start. The sense of sin is evolving, and the retreat-giver must be conscious of this—and of the consequences.

On the one hand, the crisis over sin particularly affects the notion of personal sin. Naming sin for what it is has been sacrificed in the interests of finding a genetic or systemic (social, political, economic) explanation for moral evil, to the point where people think, 'Sin does exist, but no one knows who actually commits it'.[4] As already noted, people talk less about personal sins, and the sense of such sin has been largely lost—perhaps as a concomitant of an excessive undervaluation of personal choice.

On the other hand, however, there is an increased awareness of social sin. The diminution of sensitivity in one area seems to go hand in hand with a complementary increase in another: *there is a heightened feeling for what is wrong at the social level*. It has been my experience that many retreatants undertake the First Week with the conviction that too much stress has been laid on a person's intimate conviction of sinfulness. They are well aware that much evil has been committed in history, but they tend to locate it not at the level of individual sin but at the level of contextual circumstances. One author has described the situation as follows:

> People today feel flung into the world and subject to anonymous powers and structures; their lives take place amid division, gaping chasms and threats. They experience being overwhelmed by suffering inflicted by evil, rather than as having themselves some responsibility for the existence of that evil …. Joined to a growing sense of evil and a growing pain due to their culpable implication in such pain there seems to be a corresponding decrease in the sense of personal guilt [before God] ….[5]

The corollary for the pastoral praxis of the Exercises is clear: one has to be aware of, and receptive to, this new sense of sin. And fortunately the First Week puts at our disposal means to ensure that we do not overlook the contemporary awareness of social sin. Some will be mentioned later, but the most important deserves to be given prominence now: a meditation on a *suprapersonal* sin, 'the sin of the

[4] John Paul II, apostolic exhortation, *Reconciliation and Penance*, 18.
[5] Michael Sievernich, *Schuld und Sünde in der Theologie der Gegenwart* (Frankfurt: Knecht, 1983), 22.

angels' (Exx 45–54), which Ignatius proposes at the very start of the exercitant's courageous path towards confronting the shadows.

The Decisive Role of the Principle and Foundation

*'The better this meditation is made, the better will be the outcome of all the rest.' (*Dir *109)*

I continue this brief 'Directory' with a suggestion that takes us back to the preambles of the *Spiritual Exercises*. The First Week opens with a recommendation to reflect adequately on the Principle and Foundation. It is stating the obvious to stress this point, but, in practice, both in the past and today, inadequate attention has been paid to it. Without wishing to spend time on the various commentaries,[6] I regard it as important that we, as retreat-givers, ensure that the Principle and Foundation plays its proper role as an essential *preconsideration* before taking the road of reflection on sin that the First Week requires. It has this prior position because it contains the first declaration of the *grace* to be gained in the Exercises. It provides confirmation of the truth that a sound *hamartiology*, a theory of sin, has to begin with a sound treatise on grace.

Indeed, the Principle and Foundation spells out the grace that is the goal of the Exercises. As is well known, Ignatius presents this text as a sort of frame of reference; it is indispensable that the retreatant be in agreement with it, as it forms an essential way of understanding what it is to be human. In these paragraphs, the human person is envisaged as called into existence by and for God, and the consequence for one's existential disposition, 'to make ourselves indifferent to all created things' (Exx 23). What is asked of the retreatant is to take on board this outlook: it is a *promise* of that to which one is called.

In this way, the first step to be taken by the retreatant is to meditate on the *gift*. Only later will the processes begin of clearing the impediments to this gift (First Week) and of acquiring the chance to follow Christ (Second, Third and Fourth Weeks), starting from, or in spite of, those same impediments. The structure of the Exercises requires *the prior presentation of grace*, thanks to which *desire* is

[6] See Francisco J. Ruiz Pérez, *Teología del camino. Una aproximación antropológico-teológica a Ignacio de Loyola* (Bilbao and Santander: Sal Terrae, 2000), 111–116.

engendered in the retreatant, and in this Ignatius is repeating a schema found in biblical theology.[7]

The person giving the Exercises should ensure that the retreatant does not misinterpret the Principle and Foundation as an accusation, but understands it as an announcement of future grace. It is there to arouse enthusiasm and not frustration, and it is only in this way that it will facilitate, in an evangelical spirit, an approach to one's sin. Sin will emerge *in contrast* to a backdrop showing a reality, that of grace, much greater and more certain than any evil—and not the other way round. Within this dynamic process, the role of the preparatory prayer (Exx 46) becomes clear: it serves to reactivate the nucleus of the gift alluded to in the Principle and Foundation, *after which* the retreatant can venture into the arguments concerning sin that form the meditations of the First Week.

Respect for Ignatian Pedagogy with Regard to Sin

'All the Exercises should be given in the prescribed sequence to a person who wishes to derive the maximum benefit from them.' (Dir *15*)

We retreat-givers should encourage one another not to make major changes to the internal logic of the meditations of the First Week. The actual words of the text, which at times seem excessively rough-hewn for present day sensitivity—both personal and theological—should not be allowed to mislead us into facile omissions or parentheses.

The reason for this respect of the text is two-fold: the First Week works on the principle that two types of *overview* are needed, and neither should be omitted or distorted if the Ignatian pedagogy set in place to confront one's shadows is to work.

The first overview concerns how one thinks about sin, one's hamartiology. The Exercises are an invitation to traverse every level of

[7] Alex Lefrank, in his study of the dynamic process embedded in the Exercises, points out, 'To a considerable extent revelation takes place in the Bible in so far as a promise is made to different persons of a future which surpasses the state in which each happens to be'. Thus, a promise is made to Abraham of a land and a posterity (Genesis 12); a promise is made of liberation from Egypt which will consist of the historical development of the people of Israel (Exodus 3); to a people living in exile in Mesopotamia there comes the nostalgia for a return (Jeremiah 31). Many other examples of such 'promises for the future' are to be found in both the Old and the New Testaments: see Alex Lefrank, 'Begeistert—befreit—gerufen—gesandt. Zum Werden einer Berufung', *Korrespondenz zur Spiritualität der Exerzitien*, 58 (1991), 4–14.

Hell, from the* Last Judgment*, by Fra Angelico

the reality of sin, just as much the sins which do not directly affect the retreatant (First Meditation), as those that are fully proper to him or her (Second Meditation). Perhaps one can say that sin has a sort of 'holographic' structure: any point in sin's objective reality relates to and contains all the other levels at which it comes into existence. Every personal sin, when properly seen, has traces of the effects of social and structural sin; and the opposite is also true, as socially and structurally realised evil reflects individual sins. The First Week proposes penetrating into the shadow in such a way that *none* of the levels is left out. It is necessary to meditate not only on the protohistory of sin, the 'first sin, which was that of the angels' and 'the sin of Adam and Eve' (Exx 50–51), but also on its present reality among human beings, 'the particular sin of any one' (Exx 52). After that has been done, the retreatant goes on to examine personal sins in the Second Exercise.

The second overview involves an area that can be called *anthropological*. During the First Week the sequence used goes from meditation (contemplation) to repetition, and then to prayer of the senses (meditation on hell). This sequence is a prototype for the rest of the Exercises, though it occurs with some variations. It relies on a definite anthropological model: the Exercises aim to involve the *whole* retreatant in the prayerful confrontation with sin. In other words, prayer about sin should involve absolutely every level of the human person, both the powers of the soul (in the first two meditations and the

repetition) and the senses (in the meditation on hell).[8] This overview has to stretch as far as the level of feelings and senses. And the rational difficulties that many may have with the thinking on the Four Last Things in the theology of Ignatius' day need not be a bar to retreat-givers insisting on a presentation of the meditation on hell, provided it is brought up to date.

Both of these overviews combine in the 'colloquy' that follows the two repetitions (Exx 63). One can see there how thorough the Ignatian approach to sin is: the two roads that led us to knowledge of the shadows of moral weakness unite into one. Evil must be seen in its historical personal reality ('inner knowledge of my sins'), but within the context of suprapersonal evil ('I will ask for knowledge of the *world*'); and evil must be approached not only as the object of 'inner knowledge', but also as the object of personal feeling—so that one not only rejects evil, but also feel hatred for it.

The modernity of such a way of thinking about sin is truly astonishing, and consequently it also holds astonishing potential, in the first instance for the sort of retreatant to whom we have been accustomed in the past—one who showed no desire to plunge into the consideration of any sin that was foreign to him, and who felt the First Exercise to be too laborious prior to immersion in thought about personal sin. But I feel that the same holds true for the other type of retreatant, the type that is more common today. Such retreatants are quick to spot and denounce the social dimension of sin, but find the Second Exercise, on personal sin, harder to stomach.

The Use of Complementary Means

'According as is more or less useful for them, he can give them some spiritual Exercises suited and adapted to the need of such a soul so acted upon.' (Exx 17)

There are two suggestions I would like to offer to retreat-givers who keep to the pedagogy of the First Week. Both have the same aim: to provide our retreatants with means—'spiritual activities' as Ignatius calls them (Exx 1)—to attain more easily the grace that is being aimed at in the First Week. Both try to neutralise that insensitivity to personal

[8] This point is developed at greater length in Ruiz Pérez, *Teología del camino*, 61–66.

sin that is so widespread in today's culture. In both cases, the theological principles that underlie them can be useful.

Redeeming the Concept of Sins of Omission

In the exercises of the First Week, whenever mention is made of personal sins—'how often I was deserving to be condemned forever because of my so many sins' (Exx 48)—one is clearly justified in counting among these the sins of *omission*. Not infrequently we feel more culpable when we recognise the good that we could have done but have failed to do than when we acknowledge the evil we have actually committed. So it is not surprising that more attention is now being given in theological reflection and pastoral care to such sins of omission, and the effect is being felt in the giving of the Exercises. By calling attention to such sins many find that a door is opened by which access to the shadow areas of personal sin becomes more direct and honest, especially in an age when the ego tends to be excessively indulged. Thus my advice to somebody giving the Exercises is to follow in the spirit of the 'particular and daily examen' (Exx 24–31) and of 'the general examen of conscience' (Exx 32–43), and to introduce retreatants to the category of sins of omission, since this is an area of personal moral failing that has to figure in 'the statement of the sins' (Exx 56).

Admittedly, such attention to what has not been done goes against the normal logic of the examination of conscience, even if it opens up another way of finding 'shame and confusion at myself' (Exx 48). Now the self-accusation comes not from a specific crime or tendency to crime, but on the contrary from the holding back of a tendency to good. The theology behind sins of omission relies ultimately on an anthropology full of hope. We are all of us, in so far as we are *graced creatures*, capable of doing good, so that all times and circumstances are opportunities for salvation. As the retreatant comes to realise the importance of sins of omission, a dislocation becomes apparent: between the gifts received and the thanks given in return; and between what is actually possible and what, in fact, is done. This undermines the retreatant's sense of self-satisfaction and weakens the mechanisms of narcissism.

All times and circumstances are opportunities for salvation

Redeeming Objectivity

My experience with giving the Exercises also encourages me to suggest to other retreat-givers that they try acquainting retreatants with the First Way of Prayer (Exx 238–257). Again I am struck by an aspect that frequently occurs in the mind-set of many who make the Exercises today: they tend to rely so much on their subjective appraisal of the way they act that they will not accept any outside evaluation. Their shadows seize on subjective self-justification as a means of denial. Thanks to the Exercises, such exercitants can be helped to gain an appropriate objectivity: the contrast that will allow them to discover, without evasion, the reality of their evil actions.

Various means exist in the First Week that do good service in this way: thus in the meditation on personal sin, a step-by-step sequence is suggested, allowing one to retrace phases of personal biography—'to bring to memory all the sins of life, looking from year to year, or from period to period' (Exx 56). The retreatant is asked to analyze his or her sins in the concrete circumstances in which they were committed: 'to look at the place and the house where I have lived'; 'the relations I have had with others'; 'the occupation in which I have lived' (Exx 56). Likewise, the *sudden* introduction of the christological theme in the First Week can serve to rein in the subjective tendency: the retreatant is asked to imagine 'Christ our Lord present and placed on the Cross' (Exx 53). No better way could have been found to bring home the truth that, in the final analysis, sin brings death.

But, thanks to the First Way of Prayer, Ignatius applies an even more powerful pedagogical technique with the same aim. A series of models are placed before the retreatant, who is required to utilise each in turn without deviation: the ten commandments; the list of seven deadly sins; the powers of the soul; the five bodily senses (Exx 239, 244, 246, 247). Leaving to one side the anthropological infrastructure which probably underlies all of them, a few words need to be said on the pedagogy that the use of the first two involves, and which will continue to influence how the retreatant acts with regard to the next two.

These models objectify sin because they provide it with names. The retreatant is helped to unmask sins with precision, by identifying each with a name. Human weakness shrouds itself in darkness by avoiding recourse to the *word*. As long as that is lacking, guilt remains vague and intangible. Once it is named, a process of change becomes possible. The

The Seven Deadly Sins, *by Hieronymus Bosch*

beginnings of a cure depend upon this objectification of the evil. That is why Ignatius suggests that retreatants should allow themselves to be questioned within the objective evangelical context of the ten commandments and the deadly sins:

> … according as one finds in himself that he stumble more or less on that Commandment so he ought to detain himself more or less on the consideration and examination of it. And the same is to be observed on the Deadly Sins (Exx 242).

This spiritual exercise consists in allowing oneself to be confronted directly and unambiguously. The First Way of Prayer does not permit the conscience to indulge in delays; the challenge is to reply

spontaneously with a 'yes' or a 'no' when faced with the possible reality of personal evil, without subterfuge and without any indulging in half-truths. The not infrequent reaction of retreatants is one of surprise when they ask themselves, for example, whether there have been occasions in their lives when they might have broken the commandment not to kill; or whether they have been guilty of the sins of gluttony or idleness. In this way, precious time is gained *proceder adelante*, to 'go on in well doing' (Exx 315).[9]

The Theology of Creation and Seeing Our Shadow Side.

'The one who is giving the Exercises should … leave the Creator to act immediately with the creature, and the creature with its Creator and Lord.' (Exx 15)

There is no need to recall how insistently the Ignatian Exercises put before the retreatant the need to be aware of one's status as a creature. It is found in the Principle and Foundation (Exx 23) and at the end in the Contemplation to Attain Love (Exx 230–237). But the same can be seen elsewhere: in the First Week, in particular, in the second exercise, the Meditation on Personal Sin (Exx 55–61). This meditation is shot through with the theology of creation, and it provides proof that for Ignatius it does one good to pray about sin from the viewpoint of our being creatures. For example: in the colloquy assigned at the end of the second exercise, instead of a dialogue with the Crucified, the suggestion is a prayer of thanksgiving, 'giving thanks to God our Lord that He has given me life up to now' (Exx 61), thus a prayer *before God the Creator*.

A further remark needs to be made. In the meditation on personal sin the retreatant is invited to reflect as follows: 'to look at myself as a sore and ulcer, from which have sprung so many sins and so many iniquities and so very vile poison' (Exx 58). Clearly the exercise is intended to lead one to see that one's moral weakness has no excuse. But the essential point is that Ignatius links this acknowledgement of moral weakness with an even deeper realisation: that of one's creaturehood. This can be read between the lines of points 3, 4 and 5 (Exx 58–60), but most clearly in the final, fifth point: 'an exclamation

[9] Ignatius uses the phrase *proceder adelante* on several occasions in the *Exercises* (for example Exx 18, and see Exx 335). [Translator's note.]

wonderingly with increased feeling, going through all creatures, how they have left me in life and preserved me in it' (Exx 60). The retreatant is brought to see how sinfulness is something that can put in danger one's being as a creature. Sin is revealed in its utter negativity: a treason to one's fundamental identity as a creature of God. It is precisely here that the retreatant becomes most conscious of the absolutely destructive character of evil. It seems that the creature can only become aware of the real meaning of evil when *standing before* the God who created this creature: 'to consider what God is, against Whom I have sinned …' (Exx 59). We are creatures first, and sinners only later.

Thus it seems to me that the retreat-giver would do well to spend some time on the theology of creation as a powerful means to help retreatants to face their personal shadows. In this way the retreatant would never feel isolated in the experience of sin, which can so easily become claustrophobic. Those giving the Exercises need to ensure that retreatants do not become cut off from access to the overwhelming truth of their creaturehood; the alternative could be an appalling sense of loneliness when facing personal sin.

Another advantage of such a theology is that it can facilitate a more complete awareness of the *vulnerability* of the creature. In the *Spiritual Exercises* the creature is full of vulnerability because of the ambivalence of weakness: 'my ignorance … my weakness … my iniquity … my malice' (Exx 59). Our vulnerability is so closely linked to our being creatures, and thus can be an occasion of evil, which can transform it into 'a sore and ulcer, from which have sprung so many sins' (Exx 58). All too often, an inability to cope with vulnerability can be found at the starting point for the desperate measures taken by humanity to disown the status of creatures: the tower of Babel is precisely the dream of human intransigence in the face of human reality. And yet the Good News can spring from such vulnerability: when Jesus asks, 'Can any of you by worrying add a single hour to your span of life?' (Matthew 6:27), he is presenting in more realistic terms what he expresses later as a hope-filled affirmation of creaturehood: 'but if God so clothes the grass of the field, which is alive today and tomorrow is thrown into the oven, will he not much more clothe you—you of little faith?' (Matthew 6:30). Being a creature spells out a grateful—and not simply a resigned—poverty; it implies a dependence which produces not paralysis, but power.

A more complete awareness of the vulnerability of the creature

Consolation

So much for this sketch of a directory. I would like to end with one more remark that will serve to conclude and encapsulate the genuine spiritual experience of the First Week. Our retreatants need to be told that, in the context of the Exercises, the experience of shadow is one of *consolation*. Or rather, that it is only within and alongside consolation that the authentic experience of sin comes about. As retreat-givers we need to remind ourselves constantly of the variety of contexts in which Ignatius claims spiritual consolation can arise. Among such varied occasions a place should be found for the sorrow—surprising in its newness—at the realisation of one's own moral deficiency. The First Week promises the retreatant that 'sorrow for one's sins' will emerge mysteriously with 'tears that move to love of its Lord' (Exx 316). If we know how to accompany our retreatants so that they become aware of that grace, then perhaps all that has been said so far can be taken for granted.

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