REPETITION AND REVIEW

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DEEPLY EMBEDDED in our human condition is the experience of repetition. Each day the sun rises, crosses the sky and sets; light follows darkness which in turn is followed again by light; spring anticipates summer which leads through autumn into winter and so back to spring again. These cycles are irreversible and unbreakable. The human race itself, generation by generation, keeps up its own unaltering sequence of birth, life and death. And the individual person, whether he likes it or not, is forced into repetitive rhythms of work and rest, activity and passivity, speech and silence, and so forth. Qoheleth says: 'What was will be again; what has been done will be done again; and there is nothing new under the sun'.[1]

Indeed repetition can be monotonous, boring, enervating, non-productive. But this is not necessarily so. Variety, change and growth can be a part of the repetitive process. Tomorrow's sunrise will be beautiful in a different way from that of today. Nature's reawakening next spring will not be a mere mechanical repetition of last spring. No two babies are the same; the continuation of the human race produces a limitless range of possibilities. Even within the more humdrum repetitive sequences of daily living there is inbuilt change. One speaks of rising to face a new day, but it is not only the day which is new; the 'I' who has to face it is, in a real sense, new also.

These reflections seem to suggest that repetition in the strictest sense may only be possible in the purely mechanical sphere. In nature and in man there is always an element of newness and creativity (even in death), and the more this element is predominant the more godlike does the experience become. 'Late have I loved thee, O beauty so ancient and so new; late have I loved thee'.[2] This is the image in which man is made and our human dignity is diminished if we look on life in minimalist terms such as survival, and completely undermined if we give in to the negative impulse of self-destruction. Hope is the virtue which gives meaning to the repetitive cycles through which we pass, whether it be humanistic hope in the progress of the human race to its ultimate self-perfection, or christian hope that as a new creation we

[1] Qoh 1, 9.
[2] Augustine, *Confessions*, X, 27.

are moving towards that time when all things being made subject to Christ, 'then the Son himself will also be made subordinate to God who made all things subject to him, and thus God will be all in all'.[3]

Since repetition is not only an integral part of our experience but a positive and creative part as well, it is not surprising to find it in that area of human living which we term religious. When Yahweh rescued the hebrew slaves from Egypt through the intervention which we know as the Lord's passover, he did not wish it to be merely a once-for-all event but also one which through 'repetition' would be effective and bear fruit in succeeding generations. This is brought about by the use of memory. 'This day is to be a day of remembrance for you, and you must celebrate it as a feast in Yahweh's honour. For all generations you are to declare it a day of festival, for ever'.[4] The bringing to mind of the passover and the whole Exodus event is not just a pious, nostalgic, backward-looking exercise, but a making present of that event, applying its power to the present generation. The Lord is truly present to his people in the act of remembrance and delivers them from their present slavery (to sin and to other evils). This is what is meant by *anamnesis*.

In the christian context our *anamnesis* takes place above all in the Mass. 'Father, we celebrate the memory of Christ, your Son. We, your people and your ministers, recall his passion, his resurrection from the dead, and his ascension into glory'.[5] Through this making present of Christ's paschal mystery we are enabled personally and profoundly to enter into it, we have a 'holy and perfect sacrifice' to offer, and by receiving Christ's body and blood we are filled 'with every grace and blessing'. This remembrance takes place in the most solemn way each Easter at the highpoint of that repetitive cycle we call the liturgical year; but every eucharistic liturgy inserts us more deeply into the mystery, making us one with him who died to destroy our death and rose to restore our life. We are fulfilling the Lord's command: 'Do this in remembrance of me'.[6]

But there is also a less formal *anamnesis* than the liturgical celebration of passover or eucharist. The believer, be he hebrew or christian, is expected to bring to mind the great deeds of the Lord with praise and thanksgiving, both for his own personal benefit and that of others. The psalmist writes:

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[3] 1 Cor 15, 28.
[4] Exod 12, 14.
[5] Eucharistic Prayer I.
[6] Lk 22, 19.

> I am going to speak to you in parable
> and expound the mysteries of our past.
> What we have heard and known for ourselves,
> and what our ancestors have told us,
> must not be withheld from their descendants,
> but be handed on by us to the next generation;
> that is: the titles of Yahweh, his power
> and the miracles he has done.[7]

The Ephraimites on the contrary are condemned because

> they had forgotten his achievements,
> the marvels he had shown them.[8]

One can see this personal (as opposed to formal, liturgical) recalling of God's mighty deeds as fulfilling a twofold purpose: that of leading into *prayer*, and that of nourishing *tradition*. It is the man of prayer who is capable of being a living link in religious tradition, because he alone is in a position to communicate an experience of God's acts which he has made present to himself by bringing them to mind. Tradition is formed by witnesses rather than by scholars; prophecy is more important than exegesis.

We find the same principles at work in New Testament times. Those who came into personal contact with Jesus remembered, recalled, witnessed. 'But Mary treasured up all these things and pondered over them'.[9] When deciding to fill the place of Judas among the twelve, Peter said:

> Therefore one of those who bore us company all the while we had the Lord Jesus with us, coming and going, from John's ministry of baptism until the day when he was taken up from us — one of those must now join us as a witness to his resurrection.[10]

The composition of the gospels resulted from the experience of the apostles being remembered and reflected on in the early Church. In this essentially prayerful atmosphere,[11] an oral tradition developed which was eventually committed to writing. Through that written word later generations can enter into the original experience of God in Jesus Christ.

Patristic and monastic spirituality was fed by the twin and indeed intertwined sources of liturgy and *lectio divina*. Both, by involving the

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[7] Ps 78, 2-4. [8] Ps 78, 11. [9] Lk 2, 19.
[10] Acts 1, 21-22. [11] Cf Acts 2, 42-47.

whole man, served to imprint the word of God deeply in the personality of the christian. Reading in the middle ages as in antiquity was not done solely or even principally with the eyes. The monks read with their lips, pronouncing what they saw, hearing what is called 'the voices of the pages'.

> This results in more than a visual memory of the written words. What results is a muscular memory of the words pronounced and an aural memory of the words heard. The *meditatio* consists in applying oneself with attention to this exercise in total memorization; it is therefore inseparable from the *lectio*. It is what inscribes, so to speak, the sacred text in the body and in the soul.[12]

The aim is not learning in an intellectual sense, but a savouring and appreciation leading ultimately to wisdom.

> This repeated mastication of the divine words is sometimes described by use of the theme of spiritual nutrition. In this case the vocabulary is borrowed from eating, from digestion, and from the particular form of digestion belonging to ruminants. For this reason, reading and meditation are sometimes described by the very expressive word *ruminatio*.[13]

The constant repetition of the word, its mastication, brings out its full flavour. The word is tasted with the *palatum cordis,* or *in ore cordis*.

The spirituality of the Spiritual Exercises does not represent a break with earlier tradition but rather an organic development of it. William Peters is correct when he says: 'No one understanding the Exercises will substitute thinking about religious truths for listening to God who reveals himself and communicates himself through the sacraments and *through his Word*, that is, the Bible'.[14] The innovative genius of Ignatius expresses itself mainly in his powers of organization and pedagogy. We may dislike speaking about 'methods' of prayer, but nothing is more certain than that the Exercises are a *school of prayer*. The exercitant is led through a series of prayer experiences which spring from and are an insertion into the sources of all the Church's activity: word and sacrament.

Ignatius therefore has assimilated the christian tradition on prayer (specifically the western monastic tradition) and uses what he has

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[12] Leclercq, Jean: *The Love of Learning and the Desire for God* (english trans. Catherine Misralie, New York, 1961), p 90.

[13] *Ibid.*

[14] Peters, William: *The Spiritual Exercises: Exposition and Interpretation* (PASE, 1967), p 9.

learned for his twofold purpose of pedagogy and election. This is what has happened with the principle and practice of repetition. But before looking more closely at the text of the Exercises it will be well to summarize briefly some ignatian presuppositions about what happens in each prayer-exercise. For the exercitant who is diligent and generous, each exercise is a genuine religious experience. God and the exercitant have been in contact and communication one with the other. The word has been spoken, accepted and responded to. For this individual it has been a *chairos,* a significant and opportune moment in his personal salvation history. The experience has been a grace, a favour given by God: as such it has to be treasured and cherished. But the experience is also sign-bearing, challenging, potential: as such it has to be interpreted, understood; and this is discernment.

Ignatius also presupposes that this experience, while containing intellectual elements, will be predominantly affective. 'Nor does the soul's full satisfaction come from wide knowledge so much as from the personal appreciation of and feeling for things'.[15] This is precisely what Benedict and the monastic tradition held, as did the friars who formed the living link between monastic and ignatian spirituality.

> If this pass-over is to be perfect, we must set aside all discursive operations of the intellect and turn the very apex of our soul to God to be entirely transformed in him. This is most mystical and secret. No one knows it but he who has received it. No one receives it but he who has desired it. No one desires it but he who is deeply penetrated by the fire of the holy Spirit, the fire Christ sent on earth. This is why the apostle says that this mystical wisdom is revealed through the holy Spirit.
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> If you want to understand how this happens, ask it of grace, not of learning; ask it of desire, not of understanding; ask it of prayer, not of attentive reading; ask it of the betrothed, not of the teacher; ask it of God, not of man; ask it of darkness, not of radiance.[16]

Prayer is God's work in us, purifying, illuminating, uniting us to himself. We are therefore more passive than active, more moved than moving; our greatest mistake would be to try to remain in control of the prayer experience.

These presuppositions must be kept in mind when we examine the fifth additional direction which treats of the review.

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[15] Exx 2. The translation of the *Spiritual Exercises* used in this paper is that by Thomas Corbishley (London, 1963).

[16] Bonaventure, *Itinerarium Mentis in Deum,* VII.

> After finishing the exercise, I will sit down or walk about for a quarter of an hour, and see how things have gone during the contemplation or meditation. If they have gone badly, I must look for the reason, and when I have found it I will be sorry, so as to do better in future; if things have gone well, I will give thanks to our Lord God and use the same method next time.[17]

It would be easy to give a purely ascetical interpretation to this additional direction, to see it as examining *my* part in the exercise: preparation, attention, effort. Then would follow sorrow for my faults, gratitude for my success, and an appropriate purpose of amendment or perseverance. But this understanding of the review implies a radically different interpretation of the prayer experience itself from that already given. It would see the more important element in prayer as being man's activity rather than God's.

What then is the object of the review? While the ascetical aspect is not to be omitted, the main emphasis is on the non-free movements which the exercitant has experienced during the hour of prayer. It is primarily through such movements, be they of consolation or desolation, that he discovers how God was present to him, was communicating with him, was working in him during his prayer. Instead of being an exercise in self-analysis, it is better described as a heightening of awareness, a concentration of the exercitant's attention on what has been *happening to him* in his prayer. He brings to reflective consciousness what may have been experienced unreflectively. He pauses, stands back from his prayer experience, in order to wonder gratefully at God's deeds, and to interpret and discern if need be. It is 'memory' in the service of the future — either the immediate future (a repetition as the next prayer-exercise) or the indefinite future (discovery of the way in which God is leading him).

It is of great importance that prayer and review be kept separate. When one has spoken about the review to beginners, they almost inevitably find themselves doing the review *while* they are praying. They may need patience before they grow out of this. Review during prayer promotes self-consciousness, inhibits spontaneity, forms a block to receptivity. In ordinary life it would be similar to a person's reflectively examining his relationship with a friend while having an intimate conversation with him.

Both under its ascetical and more 'spiritual' aspects, the review contains elements of prayer. Sorrow and thanksgiving are mentioned in

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[17] Exx 77.

the text; other prayerful attitudes and expressions may occur. Further movements may be experienced or light received on the prayer hour itself or its content. The review is very similar to the ignatian examination of conscience,[18] which is also an exercise in appreciation and discernment and not just an ascetical exercise. In a retreat situation there is scarcely any difference at all apart from the time-element involved: the review is an examen of the preceding hour, the examen is a review of the preceding half-day.

Repetition, as we have seen, is built into christian prayer, liturgical and personal. It can take many forms, and does so in the Exercises. The fact that every hour begins with 'the usual preparatory prayer' is an example. So too is the sequence of preludes, points, colloquy, and always ending with an Our Father. But when we speak of ignatian repetition we usually mean the repetition of an exercise, or of two exercises. Here it is well to introduce a distinction between 'total' repetition and 'selective' repetition. Twice Ignatius asks that an exercise be made again, that on Two Standards and that on Three Classes.[19] But this making of an exercise a second time is not called a repetition. This is clear from the text:

> This exercise is to be made at midnight and again in the early morning. Two repetitions of it should be made at the times for Mass and Vespers, always finishing with the three colloquies with our Lady, the Son and the Father.[20]

Ignatius keeps the word repetition to refer to 'selective' repetition.[21] His instructions for this are:

> I should pay attention to and dwell especially on the points in which I experienced greater comfort or distress or some more marked spiritual effect.[22]
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> Attention should always be paid to the more significant passages, where the retreatant has learnt something or has experienced comfort or distress.[23]

Two conclusions are immediately obvious: the criteria to be used in making a repetition are *subjective*, and these criteria have been applied

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[18] Cf Exx 43. [19] Exx 148, 159. [20] Exx 148.

[21] The only occurrence of the word in another sense is in the phrase *repetición de horas*, time-table. Exx 72.

[22] Exx 62. Corbishley uses the words 'comfort and distress' for the more technical 'consolation and desolation'.

[23] Exx 118.

in the review. The 'points' of the original exercise (objective; given by the director) have now been replaced by the 'points' of one's own personal experience of movements whether positive or negative. And these new 'points' have been brought to one's full awareness by reflecting on the preceding hour of prayer. The review has become the preparation of 'points' for the next exercise.

In the second and third weeks Ignatius asks for two repetitions of the first and second contemplation. In the first week, however, his direction is phrased differently. The fourth exercise of the day is 'A resumption of the third exercise just made'.

> By resumption I mean the process whereby the mind, without any digressing, recalls and considers carefully the matter contemplated in the previous exercises, making the same three colloquies.[24]

At first sight this appears to be based on a more objective criterion than the usual repetition,[25] selectivity being achieved by the absence of any 'digressing' from the matter rather than by one's experience during the third exercise. Understood in this way, the resumption fits strangely and uncomfortably into the sequence of the five exercises. Furthermore, it is meant to be a resumption of the third exercise (sing.) which is a repetition made 'selectively' on the basis of personal experience, so how is one to recall and consider the matter contemplated in the previous exercises (pl.), not all of which presumably will have been used in the repetition?

Some help in solving this dilemma may be found by reflecting on another surprising wording in this paragraph. The first two exercises of the first week are *meditations*, and yet Ignatius asks us to recall the matter *contemplated*. Is Ignatius using the two words as synonyms? Or is William Peters right when he says that ' . . . as soon as there is true consolation, meditation turns into contemplation, even though the subject matter remains the same'? [26] And so,

> When in the resumption the exercitant is asked to wander about (*discurrir, las cosas contempladas*), it can only mean that he should dwell upon those parts where meditation developed into contemplation on account of many interior movements.[27]

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[24] Exx 64. This is a slight adaptation of Corbishley's translation.

[25] Cf François Courel, *Exercises Spirituels, traduits et annotés* (Paris, 1960), p 52, n 1.

[26] Peters, William: *op. cit.*, p 38.

[27] *Ibid.*, p 39.

I suggest that Peters's conclusion is a correct interpretation of what Ignatius wants, irrespective of whether the argument he uses is valid or not. The criteria which Ignatius wishes to be used in the resumption are exactly the same as those for a repetition, or in other words, the resumption is a 'repetition of a repetition'.[28]

The application of the senses is obviously a repetition in a broad sense, however one may understand its essence as prayer. One is applying the five senses to the subject-matter of the first and second contemplations of the day. But it is curious that in the second and third weeks Ignatius does not suggest any criterion of selectivity, whereas in the fourth week he does. Here he says:

> . . . making an application of the senses to the matter of the three exercises of the day, picking out and delaying over the more important sections, and those in which the retreatant has felt more moved and spiritually refreshed.[29]

This is ignatian repetition as we have come to know it. But why is this selectivity confined to fourth week application of the senses? The only reason that I can suggest is that in the second and third weeks the application of the senses follows on two repetitions already made, whereas in the fourth week Ignatius suggests that as a rule it is more appropriate to have four exercises each day rather than five, and goes on to propose a day of three exercises (on different mysteries of the risen life) followed by an application of the senses. There are thus no repetitions apart from the application of the senses.[30] Any further argument on this matter would necessarily lead into the question of the kind of prayer involved in the application of the senses, and that is outside the scope of this paper.

At this stage we might try to pick out some of the reasons why repetition plays such a large role in the Exercises. Taking first their

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[28] This view is supported by the *versio vulgata* (and indeed the earlier *versio prima*) when it translates the autograph's *resumiendo* by *repetitio*. On the other hand the vulgate departs from Ignatius by reverting to 'meditation' (*quae meditatus sum*), although interestingly the *versio prima* retains *contemplatus*.

It can also be argued that by the phrase *discurra assiduamente por la reminiscencia de las cosas contempladas* Ignatius is indicating that the exercitant should confine himself to what is contained in his recollection, memory, of the previous hour, and that this 'recollection' is none other than those experiences of 'greater comfort or distress' (consolation or desolation) which came to his clearer awareness in the previous review.

One final comment on this paragraph: the vulgate translates rather loosely and adds a phrase in apposition to the word *repetitio*. It is *veluti quaedam eorum ruminatio*, where we see a return to the monastic image of chewing on the word of scripture to get its full flavour.

[29] Exx 227; cf 121, 204.

[30] Cf Exx 227.

description as a school of prayer, repetition enables the exercitant to enter more deeply into the mysteries on which he is praying. This experience is not one of insight and understanding such as when one grasps a mathematical truth once for all, and then passes on to grapple with another problem. Rather is it a limitless growth in affective appreciation of a mystery, or still more accurately, of a person revealed through a mystery. In one's first hour of prayer, intellectual curiosity may be playing too large a role; one may remain at a superficial level, interested perhaps but not involved, not committed, not affectively moved. To expose oneself soon again to the same mystery makes it more likely that one will then concentrate on the essentials, simplify one's approach, and allow the mystery to have its effect on one's heart as well as mind.

Repetition of this kind, however, is still not what we have been calling ignatian. For this it is assumed that some movements have been taking place and have been identified during the review. The exercitant then returns to these points of consolation or desolation. That is a valid learning situation because it is through his experience of consolation or desolation that God has been communicating with the exercitant. This verse of scripture, that gesture of Jesus, has spoken to him personally, and he returns to find out what further appreciation and relish God is willing to give him. In this way patterns can emerge in one's prayer; one discovers how God wishes to love one in a unique way. This brings the exercitant to a simplified prayer, as he grows more and more accustomed to be accepting, open, grateful, adoring, loving.

When one approaches the election, repetition is the great clarifying factor. This is especially true when the election is being made in the 'second time',

> When the mind is quite clear, deriving its knowledge from previous experience of comfort or distress, and being versed in the art of discriminating between different spiritual influences.[31]

It is no exaggeration to say that without repetition there is no 'second time' election. The spirits must be given time to work; the exercitant must undergo contrasting experiences in the early stages of election, and when he is emerging towards clarity and eventual decision, the consolation he experiences must be consistent. This consistency will be tested by repetition. Finally, having made the election, confirmation will be sought in further consistent consolation. The same applies to the 'third time' for making an election.[32]

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[31] Exx 176. [32] Cf Exx 183, 188.

But it is often in the case of desolation that the value of repetition can be experienced most dramatically. Let us take a couple of examples. An exercitant is praying on the Principle and Foundation, and his director has suggested that he use the story of Abraham's sacrifice of his son Isaac.[33] But this story repels him; he feels that Abraham is acting in an inhuman, intolerable way; and the God of Abraham — how could anybody believe in such a cruel tyrant? The hour has been full of distress, agitation, revulsion: in a word, desolation. The director listens sympathetically in the interview to this report, and then gently but firmly suggests that a repetition be made. The exercitant, probably unwillingly but at least effectively, obeys. During the next hour the desolation continues, but through it comes an inkling, a glimmer of understanding, a growing suspicion that the desolation springs from something within the exercitant himself — something to do with his being unable to 'make himself indifferent'. Before the hour is over he is praying earnestly for the grace, the gift of indifference. The director listens again, encourages, and sends him back for a second repetition. It may be only now that real understanding of this word of God is given, that the exercitant feels himself indentifying with Abraham, and so he moves into consolation. He has received the grace for which he was praying.

Another exercitant is a strict and upright man, correct in his behaviour, punctilious in his work — but cold. He is asked to pray on the scene where the woman who was a sinner comes to Jesus as he takes a meal in a pharisee's house, washes his feet with her tears, kisses them, wipes them with her hair.[34] It is quite likely that this exercitant will experience unease, distaste, lack of comprehension: again, desolation. During his first repetition he may begin to see that in fact he has far more in common with the pharisee than with the woman. But now he begins to wish that this were not so, because quite clearly Jesus loves the woman more. So he prays for healing, that his heart of stone be replaced by a heart of flesh, that he may feel something of what it is to be loved and to love. In the second repetition the grace is granted; he now kneels beside the woman and does not feel ashamed.

The examples are obviously schematic, but they are not fictitious or unreal. This is the way in which repetition works, it is the way in which Ignatius means it to work. Among the causes of desolation are the blocks within the exercitant which prevent the word of God, the love of God, from getting through and touching the heart. Repetition creates the conditions in which these barriers can be broken down, and the exercitant emerges humbled, chastened, but free.

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[33] Cf Gen 22, 1-19. [34] Cf Lk 7, 36-50.