

# STRUCTURE AND DYNAMIC OF THE SECOND WEEK AS A WHOLE

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**I**F ANYTHING so integrated and intricately wrought as the Spiritual Exercises of St. Ignatius, with their symphonic interweaving and development of themes and images, could be said to have a centre, that centre would be the Second Week. The Second Week is carefully prepared for by all that goes before, by the Principle and Foundation, by the First Week on sin, and then by the Call of Christ the King.

Creation must reflect in its beauty and harmony, in its balance and right order, the beauty and goodness of him from whom it came, and so give rise to conscious praise and service on the part of the human creature. Thus the Principle and Foundation. The First Week showed that as a matter of historical fact this harmony has been shattered, balance and order have broken down. We live in a world characterized by sin. Salvation consists in a new creation, in a new order of beauty and harmony that is to appear out of the chaos, a world worthy once more of him from whom it came, a created reflection of his goodness. Thus the Kingdom.

The Spiritual Exercises have as their purpose to assist in re-fashioning the human creation. Instead of a universe untethered and broken loose we are to have a world brought back to its centre. In this work of restoration human beings are to take an active and conscious part:

... we call Spiritual Exercises every way of preparing and disposing the soul to rid itself of all inordinate attachments, and, after their removal, of seeking and finding the will of God in the disposition of our life for the salvation of our soul (Exx 1).

Thus in the world as we know it, the world of sin and disorder, something has to be rejected and something has to be embraced,

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there has to be 'a plucking up and breaking down, a destroying and overthrowing, a building and a planting'.

This polarity of our human existence is expressed in two great figures, Satan and Christ. A titanic struggle is raging in this world of ours between the forces of disorder and the forces of order, between the powers of darkness and the powers of light. This cosmic struggle provides the dramatic setting for the Second Week. In the Second Week the struggle assumes a concrete historical form. The satanic powers of darkness and disorder have taken on an external and visible shape as the 'world', in the johannine and pauline sense of that word. The powers of order and light have taken visible shape as Jesus of Nazareth, the humble suffering servant of Yahweh. The decision now to put one's life into order, to find God's will, means following and conforming oneself to the historical Jesus of Nazareth. It means a total commitment to this Jesus of Nazareth and a total rejection of the 'world' along with Satan, who is 'the Prince of this world'.

Because the 'world' as representing and embodying inherited disorder is now regarded as the norm, Jesus of Nazareth in whom the harmony and order and beauty of the new creation are embodied will appear strange, bizarre, out of touch with reality. His life ending in the horror of crucifixion will appear squalid, contemptible, a pathetic failure.

Moreover, in this conforming of one's life to that of the historical Jesus there is a 'more' and a less, because of the freedom and openness of human existence. Human beings are to take an active and conscious part in the refashioning of creation, and their free response is involved. In the living of one's life one can be more conformed or less conformed to Christ. This possibility of 'more' or less gave rise to the traditional distinction between the life of the commandments and the life of the evangelical counsels. This distinction Ignatius took for granted. He saw the evangelical counsels as that 'more', or closer conformity with Christ, which is to be looked for in a person entering upon the Second Week, though even here the exercitant cannot simply take it for granted that he will be called to the life of the evangelical counsels. As Ignatius himself says: 'In all things he must be inwardly prepared to follow either the (evangelical) counsels or the commandments.' But if it is the commandments, the exercitant needs to look for clearer signs from heaven that this is so than for following the (evangelical) counsels.<sup>1</sup> Obviously Ignatius's identification of the

'more' and the less with the distinction between the life of the commandments and that of the evangelical counsels, and his undoubted belief that religious life was a 'higher' way, reflect the theological perspective of his age rather than ours. However this does not affect the validity of the basic point that there is to be a search for the 'more', for a greater conformity to Christ and his way.

*In Christ. How?*

Granted this, how in practice is this conforming of one's life to that of Christ to be achieved? The answer is, by prayerful contemplation of Christ's life. As one contemplates the mysteries of Christ's life on earth one will experience what Ignatius calls 'consolations' and 'desolations'. It is through the experiencing of consolation and desolation that the exercitant is enabled to find God's will for him at this particular moment of his life. As he holds in a single focus the life of Christ and the details of his own life he will experience 'consolation'. He will feel drawn into the life of Christ, and so into the life of God, and he will also experience the dynamic of his own life, where it meshes with that of Christ and where it does not.

The earthly life of Jesus of Nazareth has a sacramental quality. Christ is in fact the original sacrament. Christ's life is an outward and visible sign of a hidden and greater reality. The hidden and greater reality can be perceived only with the eye of faith. It needs an inward enlightenment. This is why before each of the contemplations of the Second Week the exercitant is told to ask for 'an intimate knowledge of our Lord, who has become man for me, that I may love him more and follow him more closely.' (Exx 104). To change the image, the earthly life of Christ is a translation of the reality of the divine life into the terms of a specific human life. Created reality was always meant to express and reflect in some way the divine reality, the divine goodness. In Christ this has been achieved perfectly. It remains now for other men and women to put on the likeness of Christ and to become in their turn translations into human terms of the divine goodness. 'For in him all the fullness of God was pleased to dwell.'

It may and should be objected that talk of 'translation' and the imagery of Christ as 'sacrament' may be theologically acceptable but is hardly to be found in the text of the Exercises. There the imagery is quite different. Christ is first seen as a king, then as a

baby, a child growing up, a young man leaving home, then at the Jordan epiphany discovering his deepest identity; after his desert temptations he begins calling his first disciples; 'they follow him'. And from then on the relationship between Christ and his followers is extrinsic. It starts with 'following' (*seguir*) in a literal physical sense of walking with him and in his company, though of course the notion of 'following' Christ in a moral and spiritual sense is also present. This is not altogether surprising because Ignatius is basing himself heavily on the synoptic gospels and on the relationship between Jesus and his followers which is to be found there. Since Ignatius is putting forward the Jesus of history, the Jesus of Nazareth, he could hardly do otherwise. This seems far removed from the idea of Christ's life as a sacramental reality or a translation of divine reality.

The idea of Christ's life as a sacramental reality seems closer to Paul's christology, with its idea of 'mutual indwelling' as the relationship between Christ and his followers.

But even though the vocabulary used by Paul to describe this mutual indwelling, all those pauline prepositions of 'in' and 'with' and 'through', is not to be found in the Spiritual Exercises, the reality of such a relationship is very much to be found there, rather in the way that the Holy Spirit is hardly mentioned by name in the Spiritual Exercises but the whole of the Spiritual Exercises is a most Spirit-filled book. It is dangerous to stick exclusively to the explicit wording of the text. If one did, one would have to say that the Holy Spirit has little or no part in the Spiritual Exercises.

Can it be said however that Ignatius had in mind anything like this pauline notion of relationship to Christ? It can. This identification with Christ is present and urged on the exercitant in a multitude of different ways. The following are among the main ones:

- (a) In the colloquy for the meditation on the Two Standards the exercitant is directed to ask Our Lady to obtain for him 'the grace to be received under Christ's standard, first in the highest spiritual poverty . . . secondly, in bearing insults and wrongs, thereby to imitate him better.'
- (b) The full depth of this 'imitating' of Christ is revealed in the Third Kind of Humility,

. . . whenever the praise and glory of the Divine Majesty would be equally served, in order to imitate and *be in reality more like*

*Christ our Lord*, I desire and choose poverty with Christ poor, rather than riches; insults with Christ, loaded with them, rather than honours; I desire to be accounted as worthless and a fool for Christ, rather than to be esteemed as wise and prudent in this world. So Christ was treated before me (Exx 167).

Here the identification with Christ is total.

(c) There is the repeated use of the *Anima Christi* prayer, a prayer which indicates the kind of union with Christ the exercitant is being encouraged to seek and find. 'Blood of Christ, inebriate me . . . ' ' . . . within thy wounds hide me . . . '. There is both a pauline and a mystical quality about it.

(d) Another indication is the particular grace to be asked for in each of the contemplations, 'an intimate knowledge of the Lord' (*conocimiento interno del Señor*). It is not the external knowledge that can be gained by study, intellectual analysis and exegesis, but an experiential knowledge of the life of Christ, an existential oneness.

(e) This identification with Christ goes to the depths of one's affective being. When Ignatius describes spiritual consolation he must be describing the very orientation of Christ's own inner affective life.

I call it consolation when an interior movement is aroused in the soul, by which it is inflamed with love of its Creator and Lord, and as a consequence can love no creature on the face of the earth for its own sake but only in the Creator of them all (Exx 316).

This is the Principle and Foundation lived out in one's inner affective life, and Jesus of Nazareth is the one who lived out the Principle and Foundation in its entirety, and so became the beginnings of the new creation. Ignatius assumes that the exercitant will experience spiritual consolation of this kind and so share the inner affective life of Christ himself and his orientation to the Father. Ignatius and Paul are one, but Ignatius gives greater emphasis to the external historical events of Jesus's life and assumes that these external events have much to tell us. It is through them that we enter into the inner content and reality of the sacrament and mystery which is Christ.

(f) The pattern of prayer and the ordering of the day as put forward by Ignatius seem to be another indication that assimilation into Christ and the mystery of his life is what is being sought.

The ignatian day of prayer moves from activity to repose, from imaginative and discursive activity to quiet presence, from complexity to simplicity, from active assimilation of the particular mystery to total absorption in the mystery. The movement of prayer is as it were from outside to inside the mystery. The last prayer of the day, the 'Application of the Senses', before supper, is the deepest. It is total presence. The 'senses' mean a kind of knowledge which is immediate, a direct contact with the mystery, immediate presence to the mystery. The Application of the Senses is the confirmation and final stage of the movement of prayer. Direct contact has been made with the inner reality of the mystery. The Christ-life has been touched and evoked.

This identification with Christ brought about by prayerful contemplation of the mysteries of his life would explain another phenomenon attested to from the beginning and ever since—the amazing power of the Spiritual Exercises to touch and transform the lives of those who make them. The contemplation of the dynamic and mystery of Christ's life enables the exercitant to get in touch with, discover, the dynamic and mystery of his own life.

As he contemplates Christ's life he discovers his own deepest self, his truest identity. He comes to see that the orientation of his own life is and must be one with the orientation of Christ's own life. The Spiritual Exercises are effective because they awaken the exercitant to what is already present in the depths of his being, present not by nature but by grace, but still really present. The Exercises do not merely confront the exercitant with the saving truths of the gospel nor do they introduce into the exercitant's life as it were from the outside the truths of the gospel, they light up and evoke and make explicit what the exercitant already in some dim way knows and lives, something repressed perhaps that underlies all his ordinary experiences. Every human being is now Christ-oriented in the very depths of his being, whether this is realized or not. What the contemplations of the Spiritual Exercises do is to make the exercitant more and more aware of this Christ-orientation of his life. If this Christ-orientation were not an already present reality in the life of the exercitant, contemplating the mysteries of Christ's life would have no power to affect or transform his life or bring about an identification with Christ. As it is, the exercitant begins to experience God, the world, other people, himself in the way that Christ experienced all these.

*The Two Standards*

If the exercitant is being drawn more and more into the life-experience of Christ then the great struggle of Christ's life will become the great struggle of the exercitant's and that struggle is the struggle against Satan, the 'Rebel' and 'Father of lies', whose motto is 'I will not serve', and against the externalized visible expression of Satan which is the 'world'. It is the struggle between creaturehood affirmed and creaturehood denied: the struggle between a creaturehood admitted in all its poverty and vulnerability, and creaturehood artificially concealed or built-up on what does not belong to it; between creaturehood affirmed as intrinsically relational and dependent, and creaturehood maintained as autonomous and self-sufficient, between 'I will not serve' and 'I am among you as one who serves'. This is why the meditation on the Two Standards is central to the Second Week.

The creature's flight from its true self is the real temptation, as is the painful sense of contingency that goes with it and acceptance of one's creaturehood with all its fears in Christ's way. A human being is always a potential rebel. We can secretly betray the human creaturehood entrusted to us. We can stifle the truth of our own being. The descent into hell begins in man's sinful flight from himself, his sinful flight from his creaturehood with its painful limitations and uncertainties. To become man means to become 'poor', to acknowledge that one has nothing to boast of before God. To become man means coming before God and acknowledging one's total indigence. It means looking into the abyss of one's own nothingness and not hiding from this.

Satan fears nothing so much as a human creature who acknowledges and remains true to his innate poverty ('humility'). What Satan does is to entice man to strength, to build himself up with what is not really his own, first through material possessions, then through the prestige that comes with these, so that ultimately man is totally in control of his own life and destiny; he can determine the meaning of his own existence. He is self-sufficient; he is invulnerable. Thus he is living a lie. He has become as God ('pride').

What Jesus urges is the very opposite. Acknowledge your creaturehood in all its poverty and indigence. Do not try to shield yourself from this truth. Do not let material possessions blind you, or enable you to develop a false self. Remain vulnerable. That will mean getting hurt by a hostile world ('insults and injuries').

In this way you will always live in the awareness of your own creaturehood and its poverty, and you will come to know the endless goodness of God. When you live out the truth of your creaturehood you will see the rest of creation as gift, expressions of God's providential love. Jesus says—face the truth, and in doing so you will discover something infinitely more wonderful than you ever could by trying to hide from it or run away from it. Strip away all illusions. The truth is your friend. Satan is saying the exact opposite. The truth is hostile. There is no love out there. Surround yourself with illusion. Satan is the 'Father of lies', the master of illusion.

In the struggle going on, where one world is dying and another is coming to birth, there is something to be rejected and something to be accepted, a negative and a positive, something to be torn down and something to be built and planted. In the meditation on the Two Standards Ignatius spells out what this negative and this positive are: 'a knowledge of the deceits of the rebel chief and help to guard myself against them; a knowledge of the true life . . . and the grace to imitate him' (Exx 139). The nature of the titanic struggle is made explicit in the meditation on the Two Standards. The whole world is caught up in the struggle but most men and women seem not to understand what is going on. They suffer the pain and the tension but are unaware of the why and what. Ignorant armies clash by night. Ignatius desires to throw the fullest light on the struggle, the clash, to show these armies to each other. Two leaders, two strategies for happiness, two views of humanity, two value systems.

### *The Election*

The contemplations of the mysteries of Our Lord's life during the Second Week are to lead to ever greater conformity with Christ, to transformation into Christ, to identification with Christ.<sup>2</sup> But this mystical union with Christ is not for its own sake but for service, to find and accomplish God's will for the exercitant in the particular circumstances of his life, either in a particular state of life if this has not already been decided, otherwise in the renewal of such a state of life. The contemplations of the life of Christ are not merely a disconnected set of devout contemplations on the gospels. There is a thrust, a dynamic, both in their ordering and their selection. They have as their purpose to present the exercitant with a choice which will transform his life and in which he will



find in peace God's will for him. The exercitant is called upon to choose the best way for him, according to the grace given to him by God, to imitate his Lord either by following the way of the counsels or by following the way of the commandments.

The Election process is fully integrated into the Second Week. 'While continuing to contemplate his life, let us begin to investigate and ask in what kind of life or in what state His Divine Majesty wishes to make use of us' (Exx 135).

This process had already been prepared for in the infancy contemplations and in the strange inversion of those two contemplations: 'The life of our Lord from the age of twelve to the age of thirty' and 'Jesus goes up to the temple at the age of twelve'. For Ignatius these two contemplations bear a weight of meaning that is not immediately obvious. They stand for two possible states of life, that of the commandments and that of the counsels or evangelical perfection, a distinction which is at the heart of the Election. When Jesus goes up to the temple at the age of twelve Ignatius sees this as an 'election' by Jesus 'to devote himself to the exclusive service of his heavenly Father' (Exx 135). At this point the exercitant finds himself confronted for the first time with the possibility of imitating his eternal Lord more 'closely' and the decisive work of choosing a state of life (or renewing such a state) begins. The 'election' in the temple is repeated in Christ's departure from Nazareth to begin the real messianic task of fighting against Satan (the temptations in the desert). In between comes Jesus's baptism in the Jordan (the revelation of his true identity and the Two Standards).

Discovery of identity precedes choice. Choice is an expression of identity, of who I am. As the exercitant contemplates the mysteries of Christ's life he comes to know his own truest identity, his Christ-identity, and so is enabled to make an authentic choice, a choice which expresses his authentic self. As the exercitant 'puts on' Christ, he becomes most truly himself. That is why the discernment of spirits is central to the Election. It is not the beauty or subtlety or originality of the exercitant's thoughts that matter but his consolations and desolations. It is consolation and desolation that tell him where his heart lies, where his deepest self is engaged. It is the exercitant's affective life which reveals who he really is, the real dynamic or drive of his being. The more the exercitant can enter into Christ's own experience of God, of life, of other people, the more perfect will his choice or decision be. It was the

spiritual genius of Ignatius to see the link between discernment of spirits and the making of an Election.

However, at the time of the Election the exercitant is not just to direct his attention to his affective state. He is to go on contemplating the mysteries of Christ's life. This safeguards the whole process. This sustained contemplation of the mysteries of Our Lord's life ensures in an amazing way that justice is done to both the objective and subjective elements of an Election. The second Annotation emphasizes the objective. ' . . . (the director) should narrate accurately the facts of the contemplation or meditation. Let him adhere to the points . . . ' (Exx 2). The exercitant's subjectivity too is given its full part to play. What Ignatius calls the 'fruit' of contemplating a mystery is left unspecified. In each contemplation the following words or their equivalent are found: 'Then I will reflect on myself that I may reap some fruit'. So much depends on where the exercitant is in his life in regard to Christ—and therefore in regard to his deepest self.

The same openness to subjectivity is to be found in the Colloquy (Exx 199).

In the colloquy, one should talk over motives and present petitions according to circumstances. Thus he may be tempted or he may enjoy consolation, may desire to have this virtue or another, may want to dispose himself in this or that way, may seek to grieve or rejoice according to the matter that he is contemplating. Finally he should ask what he more earnestly desires with regard to some particular interests . . .

Ignatius has great confidence in subjectivity because he knows that it is now a graced subjectivity, and the objective word of God is always there as a check.

Another reality check put forward in the Election process is the meditation on 'Three Classes of Men', set for the end of the day on the Two Standards. It is to help the exercitant check out his real oneness or lack of oneness with Christ. So many exercitants find themselves in the second class, those who are trying to manipulate God so that 'God is to come to what they desire' (Exx 154). They refuse to let God be God. They lack that total submission to God which is perfect creaturehood, perfect worship. To this extent they are not at one with Christ, who lived out his human creaturehood perfectly. 'I do always those things that please

the Father'; 'Not my will . . . ' To the extent that they do not share in Christ's radical creaturehood and therefore are not in touch with their own radical creaturehood any choice they make will be less than perfect.

All this was admirably expressed in his *Spiritual Journal* by Jerome Nadal, that faithful interpreter of the mind of Ignatius.

Be alert to welcome and express in action the oneness with Christ which the Spirit of the Lord bestows as a free gift and also his power, so that in the Spirit you feel yourself to be understanding things with his own understanding, to be willing things with his own power of willing, to be remembering things with his own power of remembering, and yourself to be existing, living, acting to the very depths of your being not in yourself but in Christ.<sup>3</sup>

### Conclusion

The Second Week is to do with the King and his Kingdom, a universal Kingdom, what Paul calls the 'new creation', established in Christ, a new world centred on God, a world of goodness, holiness, love, justice and peace,—a new humanity, of which Christ is the founder and exemplar, the prototype and inspiration. There is mysticism in the Spiritual Exercises. The exercitant is called to share in the mystical experience of Jesus himself, but it is never a mysticism for its own sake. It is a mysticism for service, a mysticism which is always seeking to express itself in active service, a mysticism which is always searching for the particular will of God. It was the spiritual genius of Ignatius to point out a way of finding God's particular will.<sup>4</sup>

### NOTES

I will assume all through that the exercitant is male. The reason is merely simplicity and economy of expression.

<sup>1</sup> *Monumenta Historica Societatis Jesu* II.2 pp 71—73.

<sup>2</sup> For an alternative view of election see William A. M. Peters SJ, *The Spiritual Exercises of St. Ignatius* (Rome, 1980, 4th edition).

<sup>3</sup> *Monumenta Historica Societatis Jesu* Epistolae P Nadal IV p 697.

<sup>4</sup> Grateful acknowledgement to the following:

Rahner, H., SJ: *Ignatius the theologian* (London, 1968).

Futrell, J. C., SJ: *Making of an apostolic community of love* (Institute of Jesuit Sources, St. Louis, 1970).

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