

THEOLOGY OF THE CROSS AND THE THIRD WEEK

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A RESIDUAL Christian consciousness in the British public frequently expresses itself at the traditional festivals of Christmas and Good Friday. Congregations at carol services and Midnight Mass, or at the Three Hours service and Solemn Liturgy of Good Friday are swelled by many people who do not darken the doors of any Church during the remainder of the year. Apart from nostalgia and perhaps a response to the poetry of such festivals there seems to be an instinctive recognition that these two occasions touch the human condition in a special way. A birth and a death—Incarnation and Passion—both offer some kind of hope in a ‘darkened world’ which still speaks to the desire of an ‘unchurched’ society that life be more than the obvious events and struggles of daily living.

In a sense Christmas and Good Friday, Incarnation and Cross, are two poles from which to view the meaning of the good news of Jesus Christ. Too often, sadly, they have been seen as alternative perspectives rather than as complementary. There is some truth in the suggestion that since the sixteenth century much Catholic spirituality has placed greatest emphasis on the Incarnation while much Protestant spirituality has centred around the Cross. Not a few people have found in the Spiritual Exercises of St Ignatius, for example, an archetype of incarnational spirituality that highlights the value of everyday human experience and the process of more and more ‘finding God in all things’—reaching its climax as it were in the Contemplation to Attain the Love of God. And yet we know that to stop there would be to miss other significant emphases in the dynamic of the Exercises—the struggle and even suffering on the road to inward and outward freedom and to discipleship (being with Christ poor and participating in his mission).

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The Incarnation and the Cross can only be understood in terms of each other. This is true both of theology in general and of the specific experience of the Exercises. The Third Week reveals more deeply what is implied by the option of God in the contemplation of the Incarnation. Theologically, to view the Incarnation from the standpoint of the Cross reveals a different perspective on the nature of God's engagement with human experience and indeed on the *nature of God*. Again, to view the Cross from the perspective of the Incarnation and Jesus's life as a whole situates the Passion within a wider context and thus moves us away from a sense that the Cross symbolizes merely arbitrary and meaningless suffering. The Cross is the inevitable consequence of God's engagement with a world of sin (not merely the sins of individuals but a 'sinful world') and specifically of the mission of Jesus in obedience to the Father.

If some approaches to the spirituality of St Ignatius tend to emphasize the incarnational element, others highlight the importance Ignatius places on the experience of the *individual*, the uniqueness of each person's journey. There are, indeed, many indicators in the pages of the *Exercises* from the Introductory Observations (or Annotations) onwards to support this view. However, even in Ignatius's own terms, it is arguable that this is no excuse for a purely individualistic interpretation of the Exercises. It has been pointed out, for example, that one element in the dynamic of the Exercises is a movement from the general to the particular, from the cosmic to the individual. The individual's meditations and contemplations, while asking him or her to focus on personal experience, are therefore situated within a wider context from the start. For example, the meditations on sin in the First Week move us in a narrowing process from the 'cosmic' nature of sin (angels) to the specific sinfulness of humanity (our first parents) to the sin of individual humans (the one who went to hell) and only finally to *my* sin in the second exercise. In the first contemplation of the Second Week—on the Incarnation—we are invited to see the world and all its people for ourselves and also through the eyes of God in Trinity. The pain of the world therefore forms a kind of backdrop to the week as a whole. It would be anachronistic however to pretend that the Exercises explicitly address the contemporary concern for social consciousness. The increased awareness of the socio-political dimensions of spirituality, while a legitimate development of and within the 'tradition', nevertheless represents

a real maturing of Christian consciousness in an area to which inadequate attention was given in the past. Recent theological reflection, often provoked and aided by the insights of other disciplines, has produced a renewed understanding of grace and human nature that provides a firmer underpinning for a 'social spirituality'.

The search for a less individualistic spirituality and for a greater 'social awareness' are obviously closely related and much work is being done along these lines in the context of the Exercises. Yet it remains a fact that, on the whole, our understanding of the Third Week is relatively untouched by attempts to integrate faith and justice. This is strange as it is precisely the recovery of a theology of the Cross that offers some of the clearest perspectives for a 'social spirituality'. Put simply, the various contemporary theologies of the Cross would all emphasize, in their different ways, that to view the Passion in purely 'vertical' terms without the 'horizontal' dimension would be to empty the Cross of ultimate meaning. Yet in the text of the *Exercises* we cannot ignore the fact that the emphasis appears to be on what Christ suffered for me, making the Third Week intensely personal, perhaps the most personal part of the experience of the Exercises. Part of the answer, of course, may be in how we see the relationship between the Third Week and what has gone before in the Exercises—particularly in the central Second Week contemplations on the following of Christ and the Election. Equally however, we may have to face the fact that in certain crucial respects Ignatius's perspective is different from our own. Unless we adopt a crude 'textual fundamentalism' this will surely raise important questions about the relationship between the contemporary perspectives (the director's and the retreatant's) and that of the text of the *Exercises* and the effect this will have on our desire to respect the dynamic of the Exercises as a context for the working of God's grace in the retreatant.

Theology and the Exercises

As a starting point I want to make two assertions. Firstly, Ignatius's experience at Manresa was not entirely free of conditioning. Religious experience is precisely experienced *as religious* and further as explicitly Christian because of the cultural and religious conditions within which the experience takes place. There is no dimension of 'pure experience' beyond or separate from the particular presuppositions of the one experiencing. So Christians and

Hindus, for example, do not have *precisely* the same experience even if many of the attendant phenomena may be parallel. Secondly, it cannot seriously be suggested that Ignatius's subsequent theological education played no role at all in the formulation of the text of the *Exercises*. Incidentally I do not think, in the light of the Presupposition (Exx 22), that we can maintain that Ignatius saw the theological position of retreatants as entirely irrelevant.

It is fair to say that one was not particularly aware of the 'theology' of the Exercises twenty years ago. Arguably this was because they used language with which we were familiar in sermons and religious knowledge classes. Doing the Exercises today can often raise more problems. This cannot be reduced to a suggestion that more of us are on 'theological head-trips' than in the past! Rather the 'theological markers' have changed substantially since Vatican II. Everyone approaching the Exercises has at least an implicit theological standpoint and this, along with many other factors of course, will affect the way the Exercises are appropriated. There is a dialogue therefore between the horizons of the retreatant and those of the Exercises. How are we to respond to this? Are we to seek to reconcile the theology of Ignatius with our own in order to make the Exercises less jarring on the nerves? Or are we to adopt an uncritical stance to the theological perspectives of the Exercises? Are we to say that theology is entirely irrelevant when it comes to giving or making the Exercises? Basically I would argue that we have to accept both Ignatius's insights and our own so that a new understanding is reached. But at the end of the day our use of the Exercises must not simply reflect where Ignatius was but where we are—we have to interpret in the light of our own historical context a text that was written in another.

In this sense our task is not simply to reconstruct the *meaning* of the text—the subjective intention of Ignatius. If this were the case then other 'world-views' or different/new knowledge would constitute a problem standing in the way of a *correct* understanding of the Exercises. We would need rigorously to reconstruct the historical situation of Ignatius and the Exercises and thus arrive at the true meaning. A different, and I believe more fruitful, approach is to seek an interpretation of the Exercises as it points to realities in our own time. The possibilities of the Exercises can be evoked in a new way because of the new religious/cultural context in which it finds itself. In other words, the conditioning of our own situation is part of the process of discovering meaning.

Any text always says more than appears on the surface and this 'more' emerges in the very process of interpreting. The text of the *Exercises* comes alive in the present, it is not merely an antique from the past to be admired. If we did not believe this we would not be spending so much energy giving retreats! In this sense our interest as givers of the Exercises must go beyond the legitimate ones of a historian of spirituality. The Exercises, as given today, continue to dialogue with the present and thus offer new meaning and have their proper effect as Ignatius intended. Any reading of the Exercises, therefore, is a rereading based on the concrete situation in which we exist. However this does not mean that the process is entirely governed by our particular *a priori* conclusions. We can reach the core of the Exercises, the following of Jesus in his concerns, without staying within the limitations of Ignatius's understanding of this and we can allow this core to challenge the presuppositions that we too undoubtedly have.

The Cross in contemporary perspective

To turn immediately to 'the Cross in contemporary perspective' may seem to miss out another important level—the understanding of the Cross in Ignatius's own theology and as it is presented in the Exercises. It would be possible, of course, to analyze the theological and devotional inheritance of Ignatius—particularly perhaps through the *Meditations on the Life of Christ* of pseudo-Bonaventure, the *Life of Christ* of Ludolph of Saxony and the *Imitation of Christ*, all of which are now generally regarded as direct or indirect influences on Ignatius. Part of my excuse is lack of space. However there is another reason. While some of Ignatius's theological presuppositions are explicit in the Exercises (for example his presentation of the Principle and Foundation, his understanding of sin and hell and his treatment of the gospels) it is also true that the broad theological conception underlying the Exercises is *implicit*. It should be noted that the Exercises are not a spiritual treatise but are practical exercises with a practical end in view (or as Sobrino would have it, 'praxis-oriented'). If Ignatius's understanding of Jesus and our following of him are of primary importance, this will appear most clearly in the kind of response he hopes for from the retreatant. Addressed specifically to the Third Week: if we wish to grasp Ignatius's understanding of the Cross we need to look at the attitudes that the experience of the Exercises are

meant to inculcate in the period before the Third Week and how this Week fits into the overall pattern.

What I propose to do, therefore, is to highlight some of the most significant elements of the contemporary 'recovery' of a rich theology of the Cross and then to ask what these can contribute to our understanding of the Third Week. In a relatively short paper such as this both elements can be no more than impressionistic. Until fairly recently, theological reflection on the Cross was infrequent and when it happened it rarely showed the Cross (and thus a God who did not simply become incarnate but who is a 'crucified God') as something which embodies the particularity of Christian faith. The tradition we inherited tended to elaborate a mystique of suffering and sorrow. In reaction some recent theology and spirituality responded with an emphasis on the Resurrection as the paradigm of liberty and joy which, it was felt, have been understressed in a traditional piety of the Cross. Interestingly, the recovery of the Cross as a central theological fact has frequently been associated with theologies concerned with social change (for example Moltmann and Sobrino). For these the Resurrection remains the paradigm of liberation but the Cross is seen no longer as *purely* suffering. The viability of the Resurrection is involved intimately with the experience of the Cross; without the Cross the Resurrection is in danger of becoming pure utopianism. All theologians engaged with this recovery of the Cross have tried to overcome two obstacles to grasping the profundity of the Cross: its isolation from the concrete history of the human Jesus, and its isolation from our understanding of God as God.

A number of recent thinkers have suggested that this 'reconstruction' of the theology of God, of our understanding of Jesus and of human existence, arises largely from a major shift in the twentieth century in the way we can grasp the world and Christ's work of redemption. Several factors have undermined the world-view that we have inherited and thus mark a decisive and distinctive break with much theology of the past. These can be associated with four symbolic figures:

Copernicus—humankind is no longer to be seen as the absolute centre of the cosmos.

Darwin—the evolution of humankind is seen to be merely *one* of life's processes, neither separate from nor superior to the others.

Freud—the discovery of a vast inner psychological world calls in question the much vaunted rationality and objectivity of human values—now seen to be related to inner drives, repressions and anxieties.

Marx—traditional conceptions of ‘society’ come under fire from the analysis of the class struggle and the alienation of the individual in industrial society.

These four factors have entered into the thinking of contemporary men and women to a profound degree, often in an unreflected way.

A theology of the Cross in this context replaces the certainties and self-reliance of an over-confident Christianity with a theology that arises from the experience of powerlessness and weakness. Equally the ‘sin of the world’ has arguably never been so obvious as it is since the Holocaust and in the context of nuclear threat and the acute and media-communicated hunger and poverty of much of the world. This further undermines our confidence in the power of human beings to solve their own problems and points to a radical need for salvation from this condition—not merely the *forgiveness of sins* but the *eradication of sin itself*. Attention once again has to be given to the nature of hope—of hoping against hope. Only those who have experienced the Cross in a radical way can really formulate such a Christian hope. For Christians believe that God has intervened decisively in human history and come in weakness not power. God in Jesus Christ redeems the ‘hells’ of human experience. From the Cross of Jesus comes the power of the Spirit to liberate all humanity from every condition of slavery. Current theologies of the Cross would therefore make our christology (the nature of Jesus Christ) the cornerstone of theology, see the heart of christology in the Cross, and see the very being of God as revealed in this death. Thus the Cross becomes the revelation *both* of the nature of God and of a world in need of redemption. Such writers as Moltmann and von Balthasar emphasize more strongly the relationship between the inner life of God and the historical Cross, while liberation theologians relate the Cross to the struggle for liberation and justice (redemption of, rather than from, the world). I would like now to focus briefly on three of the central themes of contemporary thinking on the Cross.

A crucified God

To love means to be vulnerable since a person suffers in the sufferings of the beloved. In freely creating humanity out of love,

God is made vulnerable. Both Moltmann and von Balthasar speak of Jesus's experience of the silence and absence of God on the Cross. He reaches the depths of human experience as alienated from God—essentially the experience of the sinner. Von Balthasar relates Christ's abandonment on the Cross to the inner life of the Trinity. The being of God is structured in and by selfless love. To speak of God as the changeless one has a core of truth but can easily lead to misunderstanding—making God into a being who is not affected by what happens and whose essential condition is *apathy* or painlessness and non-suffering. In contrast contemporary theological reflection on the Cross seeks to overcome the real difficulty presented by this traditional 'apathetic' theology of God as immutable, impassable and so essentially uninvolved. The *pathos* or suffering of God is stressed for, as Bonhoeffer suggests, 'only a suffering God can help'. An unbalanced apathetic approach is felt to distort a properly biblical notion of God who loves, desires, is angry and jealous. Jesus on the Cross is not therefore an invulnerable God—rather the Cross is the vulnerability of God: revealing the extent of love by letting us know the extent of God's suffering because of us. Put another way, the Cross is the fulfilment of the prohibition against idols or false images of God whose transcendence is now reformulated in terms of suffering love rather than remote power.

A world in need of redemption

If the Cross forces us to re-examine our notions of God, so it must force us to question a distorted view of redemption. Firstly, the Cross was not accidental, merely God's surprised response to an unexpected Fall. As one writer comments, there must have been a 'calvary in the heart of God' before there was a calvary in Jerusalem. If we say, therefore, that the nature of God is to be a suffering God we must accept that while the Cross of Jesus was a unique once-for-all event there is nonetheless a prolonged sharing by God in human pain. The 'passionate engagement' by God has an eternal quality that implies an extension of the Passion of God into the very fabric of the human family. If the Cross is a symbol of the pain of God, the voice of this pain is the poor, oppressed and the weak. In gospel terms this point is made most forcefully in the Last Judgment parable of Matthew 25. In the Cross Father and Son both suffer in mutual surrender and from this surrender the Spirit is released as the power of God in the world raising the

poor and God-forsaken. All this contrasts with the power of the world, for the power of the crucified one is established in a moment of absolute self-abandonment.

The Cross of Christ undermines all attempts to spiritualize the meaning of salvation. The theology of the Cross is one of contradiction, conflict and non-conformity, protest against all idolatry whether religious, social or political. Those who walk in the way of the Cross through lives of self-surrender become weak in the eyes of the world but capable of being freed and filled with a power the world does not possess. Faith is rooted in the paradox that God works his liberation through those who recognize their own weakness. Liberation is, therefore, first of all being freed from the yoke of self-reliance. That is why the poor are already the privileged of God and why they can evangelize the rich/self-sufficient. To know God means to abide with God in the Passion and so knowing God is related to our own experience of evil in the world. Contemplation is not cosy isolation but is rooted in the engagement with this world that necessarily follows from a true following of the way of Christ. In the Cross God takes on the pain of humanity and of our history. The paradox is that through involvement with the most negative side of human history, a death in failure, God opens up for history a new hope.

Jesus's Cross is the consequence of his life

Our true following of Jesus and our true contemplation of God involve the Cross. This leads me to a final theme of contemporary theology of the Cross: that the Passion is not the passive suffering of an uncomprehended fate but that Christ's suffering arose from his actions, from his preaching of the nearness of the Kingdom, from his free attitude towards the Law and from his companionship with sinners. Moltmann puts this strongly: 'Jesus did not suffer passively from the world in which he lived but incited it against himself by his message and the life he lived'. So those who seek to follow Jesus do not become imitators of his sufferings until and unless they accept his mission. Again Moltmann: 'he suffered on account of the liberating word of God and died on account of his liberating fellowship with those who were not free'. Apostolic suffering and death therefore mean a participation in Jesus's mission. The very idea of consciously following Jesus arises from a sense of conflict between Kingdom values and those of the world. The Cross cannot therefore leave us indifferent or detached; it

demands commitment and engagement and 'taking sides'. The 'Cross' as a term for the suffering of those who follow Jesus takes its meaning *solely* from the Cross of Christ which is the consequence of mission not of natural or social or unavoidable suffering. The suffering with Christ has to be taken on freely, to be taken up by the absoluteness of our response to his call. The suffering of the Cross is the suffering of following and as such is particular and specific. The Cross in the Christian context is explained and defined by mission.

Again, the Cross is not arbitrary, rather it is the outcome of God's basic option in the Incarnation. The Cross is the fate of God become human in a world of conflict and sin. If the Cross is the outcome of Jesus's historical path, the spirituality of the Passion cannot be reduced to pious meditation but must consist in following the path of Christ in our concrete situation. It involves imitating the attitude of Jesus who immersed himself in a concrete world and took a stand against the sinfulness that gave it its configuration. A true spirituality of the Cross therefore rules out any identification with the Cross by intention only. Identification must take place on *a concrete way of the Cross*. If we do not go through that process then the cross to which we offer our acceptance may not be the Cross of Jesus.

The Cross and the Third Week

(a) To an extent the theme of the *vulnerable God* who inevitably becomes the 'crucified God' is implicit in the whole process of the Exercises from the Contemplation on the Incarnation onwards. The option of God in Jesus for the world of humanity is made in the Incarnation and it is this option, to enter the powerlessness of the human condition, that is expressed in cumulative terms throughout the Second Week contemplations on the Jesus of history.

The self-emptying of God in Jesus is also underlined in the Call of the King ('to follow me in suffering', Exx 95) and in the Two Standards (the way of poverty, contempt and humility, Exx 146). Thus when we reach the contemplations of the Third Week it is this option of God that reaches its climax and it is a deepening awareness of *this* God that will hopefully be one of the fruits of this stage of the Exercises. The Third Week is the final act in that destruction of divine idols that is implied in the Principle and Foundation. The image of the vulnerable, self-forgetting God is

underlined in the Third Week in contemplating Jesus's definitive movement out of himself, his definitive self-forgetfulness. The image of the God of power and might is destroyed in the option for powerlessness of the fifth point of the first contemplation (Exx 196). The 'movement-out-of-self', the 'being-totally-for-others' that is the very definition of God so beloved of theologians of the Cross is underlined by Ignatius's continuous emphasis on Jesus's suffering being *for me*. God's option in Jesus is *for me*, for the world, not for suffering in itself. It is striking that retreatants often seem to experience an absence of affectivity in the Third Week. Asking for 'sorrow with Christ' then is not a question of pleasing emotion, cathartic tears, the 'sorrow that makes me feel good'. Rather it is an experience of the desolation of Christ, the desolation of God.

(b) The second theme of contemporary theologies of the Cross is that Jesus's Cross is not accidental or arbitrary but is *a consequence of his life and mission*. This fits in very strikingly, it seems to me, with the way that the Third Week finds its proper context not only in the Second Week contemplations and the Election but in all that has gone before. It is possible to see the theology of the Cross as central to the Exercises as a whole. Even the consideration of sin in the First Week is somehow in the light of the Cross. If the fundamental sin, the 'cosmic' sin (that of the angels) is 'pride' (Exx 50) then this pride is the contradiction of that self-forgetfulness which is the nature of God and the way of the Cross—and thus the only way of responding to God in Jesus. The colloquy with Jesus on the Cross (Exx 53) as a central feature of the First Week demands as response not only sorrow for my sins and awareness of a God of mercy but, importantly, the beginning of a call to follow symbolized in the triple question 'What have I done . . . am doing . . . will do?'

The Cross as necessarily involved in the concrete following of Jesus in mission is central to the whole of the Second Week. It may be said that the climax is the desire 'to be received under his standard' in the colloquy of the meditation on the Two Standards (Exx 147). This is the only appropriate response to the call of Christ the King. Thus the acceptance of poverty, insults and humility *is* the Cross—that suffering involved in following Jesus in concrete mission. The decisive grounding for following/being with Jesus in mission (to be deepened by contemplation of the mysteries of Jesus's 'historical' life in the Second Week) lies in the

Call of the King to 'follow me in suffering' (Exx 95) and the prayer to 'imitate Christ in bearing all wrongs and all abuse and all poverty' (Exx 98). This is the key to the subsequent contemplations where Ignatius desires that the retreatant be saturated, as it were, with the attitude of Christ. But this saturation is not only a matter of emotional union. It is an adherence to Jesus made concrete in discipleship. And this discipleship is itself expressed by a willingness to engage in *concrete* action and *concrete* commitment to a *concrete* world—as Jesus was so engaged and committed. To reach this kind of response demands, as the Two Standards makes starkly clear, that we 'take sides' and make options. It is continually hammered home that such a choice is costly. From the very start it is the road of the Cross. The response reaches its climax in the Election or fundamental decision for Christ and his mission. It is a decision in the end to be with Christ who triumphed through the Cross and restored the world to the Father only through the Cross. A point of *krisis* or choice is inevitably reached if the Second Week contemplations have really touched the depths of a person. And once the option for Christ has been made it propels us forward inevitably from the Election to the sharing of the Cross of Jesus in our own specific battle with the forces of evil in our own historical situation.

The Third Week, the being with Christ in his Passion, is therefore intimately connected to the point of decision that has been reached. I do not mean to say, of course, that the Election is necessarily a question of a radical redirecting of life-choices in every or even most cases. The question 'what shall I do for Christ?' is answered by the realization that it is to suffer with Christ. But what the retreatant is called to is *not* to choose the Cross or suffering in isolation but, in the light of all that has gone before, *to choose Jesus*. It is the option of the Second Week made explicit. The Third Week therefore is not a question of devout and pious meditation but is subordinated to the fundamental choice that has been made. For some, the reality of the process of choice may in fact only strike home in the Third Week, but if the contemplation of the Passion does not clearly relate to the following of Christ in mission and a fundamental option it has lost its force. The sorrow, compassion and shame for which we pray (Exx 193) are not ends in themselves but rather to help the retreatant 'not to be deaf to his call' (Exx 91). The poverty, humility and insults of the Cross point us back to the choice of the Two Standards and are now

seen more clearly to be the ultimate mediations of discipleship. In the light of the Cross they can no longer be seen simply as 'spiritualized' values but rather concrete options: we are truly to reject honour and turn our back on power; poverty and rejection are historical experiences. Jesus did not take on the Cross solely that he might shoulder the limitations of the human condition in some abstract sense. Rather he took on a conflict-ridden historical situation. Thus, with Jesus, the retreatant is also called to situate him/herself in a specific situation, a conflict-ridden world, as Jesus did. And it is in doing this that the suffering, the poverty and the insults come.

(c) The third theme of contemporary theologies of the Cross is a re-examination of what is understood by *a world in need of redemption*. The voice of the pain of God is the suffering of humanity and of human history. In the Cross God takes on this pain. I have already suggested that the contemplations of the Third Week focus on Jesus's definitive movement out of himself, his definitive self-forgetfulness. Equally it can be said that the Third Week is a climax in the retreatant's process of moving out of self towards Jesus. But if the Jesus towards whom we move is he who in the Cross is most definitively the 'one for others', then our self-forgetfulness is *simultaneously* a movement to Christ in compassion and a sharing in his compassion for a broken humanity. To assert the 'vertical' dimension of the Passion contemplation without the 'horizontal' would be to empty the Cross we contemplate of its ultimate meaning. Therefore the grace of the Third Week involves compassion, *with* Christ, *for* the world. Suffering with Christ also means sharing in the universal meaning of his suffering.

If, as I have suggested, the Cross reveals that the true nature of God is to love totally, and if we are created in the image of this God, then the call to respond to this God in Jesus is in order to fulfil our nature in selfless love. Contemplating the Cross should create in us the willingness to die on a cross for our fellows. The freedom of the Third Week is not, therefore, merely a deepening of the freedom from personal sins of the First Week but is also a freeing from that centring on self that prevents us from loving as we desire and as the call of Jesus demands.

Individualism can falsify the contemplation of Christ's death because it will turn us back into ourselves and contradict the movement out of self towards Christ who suffers in a continual conflict with the 'powers of darkness' in our world. Even the

Official Directory of the Spiritual Exercises (chapter xxxv,10) suggests that an appropriate attitude for the Third Week is zeal for souls 'whom God prized so highly, loved so affectionately, redeemed at so great a price'.

The Cross carries on it the full weight of human sinfulness which issues in unmerited suffering, division and conflict, the barriers of injustice. It is not merely for the 'forgiveness of sins' in the sense of pardoning personal, individual sins, but it is also the ultimate destruction of the deadness of human history. In the Cross are broken down all the barriers created in our historical, actual world by every kind of sin. On the Cross Jesus becomes in himself 'the peace between us' (Eph 2,14), creating a solidarity within all humanity. Insofar as a retreatant is able to move beyond seeing the Cross of Jesus merely as the death of one innocent person to seeing it as representing and gathering into itself the countless crosses on which men and women continue to suffer in powerlessness, his or her entering into the mystery of Christ and his call will deepen immeasurably.

FURTHER READING

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