CONTEMPLATION OF THE GOSPELS, IGNATIUS LOYOLA, AND THE CONTEMPORARY CHRISTIAN

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THE QUESTION to which we address ourselves is of particular concern to those who give or make the Spiritual Exercises of St. Ignatius Loyola in our age.[1] Yet, I venture to suggest, it is a problem of more general, if not universal, interest to any twentieth-century Christian conscious of the profound differences separating his own world view from that of the Evangelists or, for that matter, from the *Weltanschauung* of medieval and Renaissance man. The Christian of today feels compelled to ask the very relevant question, "Why contemplate the earthly history of Jesus of Nazareth?"

Avowedly, modern man experiences real difficulty when asked to recall scenes from a life lived twenty centuries ago, in cultural and historical circumstances foreign to himself, his problems, the world in which he finds himself. At best, such a spiritual exercise appears to be an effort of the devout memory or of the pious imagination. Not a few Christians who have attempted to make the Spiritual Exercises have found the experience baffling, uncongenial, ineffectual. It has seemed to them a laborious attempt to situate the "imitation of Christ" (presented all too often in a quite moralistic fashion) in the original context of Jesus' own earthly existence. The frustrating struggle to reconstruct the past in this way may well appear to the intelligent, twentieth-century exercitant—even where the history of Jesus is concerned—an exercise in futility. How is it profitable, or necessary, or even possible?

Why not as well consider the life of Socrates presented to us in the dialogues of Plato? The query is not altogether cynical or irrelevant. The virtues and nobility of character exhibited by that great philosopher are for the most part worthy of "imitation" by any Christian;

[1] Originally written as a contribution to a forthcoming German commentary on the *Spiritual Exercises* to be published by the editors of *Geist und Leben*, the essay has been completely reworked for presentation to THEOLOGICAL STUDIES.

and the literary presentation of Plato is undoubtedly superior in many respects to the writing of Mark or Matthew, even of John or Luke. We shall return presently to this question of the life of Socrates, as it will help our comprehension of the value of contemplating the Gospel narratives.

Actually, the question we are considering is twofold, and it requires a twofold answer. In the first place, there is the very basic problem: What benefit can accrue to the Christian of today from the contemplation of the mysteries of Jesus' earthly life, when the Christ who exists now is none other than the exalted Lord? Secondly, why should the Gospel accounts of Jesus' public ministry and His earthly career—even granting their inspired character—be deemed a *locus privilegiatus* through which the modern believer can enjoy a genuine religious experience, and so be led to enter a deeper personal relationship with the *Kyrios*, to whom he has already by faith and baptism committed himself and his life?

Medieval and Modern Piety

To appreciate the difficulty which the modern mentality frequently feels in attempting to make the Spiritual Exercises of St. Ignatius, it will help to recall certain characteristics of that medieval piety, seemingly congenial in large measure to the author of the *Spiritual Exercises*, which are alien to the man of today. The point is of some significance, since, if the *Spiritual Exercises* are to have the desired impact upon the twentieth-century man of the Church, particularly upon the postconciliar Catholic mind, it is crucial that such an exercitant be given an understanding of the purpose, an appreciation of the value, of the Ignatian contemplation. For this it is necessary that this method of prayer, so characteristic of Ignatian spirituality, be presented without those vestigial remnants of medieval piety occasionally discernible in the text of the *Spiritual Exercises*.[2]

[2] In a letter to the international Congress on the Spiritual Exercises held at Loyola, Spain, in August 1966, the Very Reverend Pedro Arrupe, General of the Society of Jesus, expressed a similar view: "Plus hodie quam anteacto tempore studium Exercitiorum Sancti Ignatii urget. Nostri est diversas methodos lapsu temporis introductas recognoscere, defectus admissos examinare et authenticam vim infundere quam multis in locis amisisse Exercitia videntur. Adde quod necessarium est ea cum actione pastorali coordinare et in eis illas tendentias actuales integrare quae cum eorum natura sunt congruentes. Quae omnia illud exigunt cognoscere quod in methodo ignatiana praecipuum et perenne est ac modum invenire quo Exercitia actuali generationi sunt applicanda."

Medieval man was gifted with a highly developed imagination, since he was, broadly speaking, the product of a culture which antedated the invention of printing. The generality of medieval Christians contemplated the mysteries of faith as they found them portrayed in the sculpture, stained glass, frescoes, even the architecture of the great shrines and cathedrals with which they lived surrounded. These "bibles" of the common people depicted the earthly history of Jesus replete with many details not found in the austere, somewhat jejune accounts of the Gospels. The Middle Ages did, of course, produce lives of Christ like that of Ludolph the Carthusian, which fed the imagination as well as the piety of the converted Iñigo de Loyola. In consequence, medieval piety may be fairly described as largely engrossed with the "historical details" (all or most of them the creation of a fertile, if pious, imagination) of Jesus' earthly life. One thinks immediately of the Christmas crib, the contribution of a St. Francis of Assisi, or of those revelations of the Passion, replete with such gruesome details, found in writings like those of St. Bridget of Sweden. This same spirit is to a degree discernible in St. Ignatius himself, who gladly bribed his Muslim guide to permit him a second look at the stone on the Mount of Olives, said to bear the imprint of the foot of the ascending Christ.

Nor is the little book of the *Spiritual Exercises* entirely free from the creative ingenuity which characterized medieval piety. In the contemplation on the Incarnation the exercitant is bid attend to "what the three divine Persons are saying, viz.: 'Let us work out the redemption of the human race . . . ' " (107).[8] Likewise, there is the gratuitous introduction of "a servant girl" into the contemplation of the Nativity (111, 114). Here, in addition, the retreatant is asked to "account myself a poor and unworthy servant, looking at and contemplating them and tending them in their necessities as though I were present there . . ." (114). There is also the reference to the Magi as "the three kings" (162), a legendary development not found in the Gospel text. There is, finally, the familiar directive, recurring like a refrain in so many second preludes, which encourages the free use of the imagination with regard to "the road from Nazareth to Bethlehem" (112),

[8] The numbers in parentheses are references to the text of the *Spiritual Exercises*, most readily available to English readers in Louis J. Puhl, S.J., *The Spiritual Exercises of St. Ignatius: A New Translation* (Westminster, Md., 1965).

"the supper room" (192), "the arrangements of the holy sepulchre, and the place or house of our Lady" (220).

All of this, as I have said, is alien, if not distasteful, to our modern mentality. I believe it may be said that our present-day respect for the biblical narratives themselves and our concern to grasp the intention of the Evangelists in presenting Jesus' earthly history as they do, make it impossible, indeed undesirable, for us to attempt to carry out *ad litteram* the instructions of St. Ignatius in our contemplations of the Gospel scenes. More important still, the injunctions of the magisterium of the Church not only permit but encourage this procedure. Some twenty-five years ago Pius XII in *Divino afflante Spiritu* directed our attention to the text of Scripture, and especially to the discovery of its literal sense, which he called "the genuine sense of the sacred books,"[4] while granting that "not every spiritual sense is excluded from Sacred Scripture." He insisted strongly upon recovering "what the writer meant to say" as "the supreme law of interpretation."[5] The recent conciliar Constitution on Divine Revelation, *Dei verbum*, urged that "all, especially religious," should "gladly put themselves in touch with the sacred text itself" (no. 25).[6] *Perfectae caritatis*, Vatican II's Decree on the Appropriate Renewal of the Religious Life, has declared that "the fundamental norm of the religious life is a following of Christ as proposed by the gospel" (no. 2).[7]

Ignatian Contemplation

Before an attempt is made to answer the questions we have proposed about the contemplation of the Gospel narratives, it may not be out of place to recall how prominently this form of prayer figures in two of the most influential documents in the history of Christian spirituality, the *Spiritual Exercises* of St. Ignatius and the *Regula monachorum* ascribed to St. Benedict.

In the *Spiritual Exercises* the contemplation is distinguished from meditation: the meditation is an exercise proper only to the first week, while the contemplation is characteristic of the rest of the thirty days of the Exercises. Two significant exercises of the second week constitute

[4] *Acta apostolicae sedis* 35 (1943) 310. [5] *Ibid.*, p. 311.
[6] Cf. Walter M. Abbott, S.J. (ed.), *The Documents of Vatican II* (New York, 1966) p. 127. [7] *Ibid.*, p. 468.

the only exception to this latter point: the two meditations called "Two Standards" (136–48) and "Three Classes of Men" (149–57). In the mind of St. Ignatius the meditation appears to have as its object certain realities of faith (original sin, hell, the contemporary struggle between the risen Christ and the powers of evil in "Two Standards") which may be termed "metahistorical." The contemplation, by contrast, is orientated to the *mysteries* contained in the earthly history of Jesus. Thus, in the fourth week there is no contemplation on the Resurrection, but only on the postresurrection appearances.

It must be confessed (at least by the present writer) that a certain ambiguity remains in the Ignatian distinction between meditation and contemplation. It comes as a distinct surprise to find the final exercise, in which neither Christ nor the mysteries of His earthly life are ever mentioned, denominated as the "Contemplation for Attaining Love" (230–37); and perhaps "contemplation" is employed here only in an analogous sense. Moreover, a certain fluidity in Ignatius' terminology is perceptible in the note to the "mysteries of the life of Christ our Lord" appended to the four weeks, which speaks of "meditating and contemplating them" (261). Whether or not any completely satisfactory solution can be given to this problem,[8] it is clear that St. Ignatius relied mainly upon the contemplation of the earthly history of Jesus for the effectiveness of his carefully constructed program of Spiritual Exercises. This form of Christian prayer unquestionably constitutes the wellspring of Ignatian spirituality.

Lectio divina

In the eyes of St. Benedict *lectio divina*, the meditative reading of the Scriptures, constitutes, together with manual labor[9] and the *opus Dei* (choral recitation of the Divine Office),[10] one of the principal activities

[8] The most recent attempt to do so will be found in William A. M. Peters, S.J., *The Spiritual Exercises of St. Ignatius: Exposition and Interpretation* (Jersey City, 1968). With reference to the ambiguous passage just mentioned, Fr. Peters says: "The word 'to meditate' appears scarcely defensible.... The difficulty disappears as soon as it is realized that, whereas contemplation is the form of prayer for the exercitant of the long retreat, there is no reason why he should not *meditate* upon the life of Christ afterward" (p. 193). Cf. also pp. 37–40 for a discussion of the differences between these two types of prayer.

[9] Cf. Dom Philibert Schmitz (ed.), *Sancti Benedicti Regula monachorum* (Maredsous, 1955) chap. 48, p. 109. [10] *Ibid.*, chap. 43, p. 104.

of the monastic life. The conception of *lectio divina* found in the *Regula monachorum* illustrates the traditional Christian belief in the creative dynamism of the Scriptures, among which the Gospels hold the place of honor.[11] This important monastic exercise is understood to demand the full, active attention and co-operation of the monk.[12] Its salient feature is presented by the significant phrase *meditare aut legere*; hence it is the prayerful reading of the Bible by the Christian. Yet it is not only or primarily an intellectual exercise; for the Bible addresses itself to the whole man, not merely to the top of his head.

"Whatever was written of old," says St. Paul, "was written for our instruction, that by patience and the *consolation* of the Scriptures we might have hope" (Rom 15:4). "All Scripture is divinely inspired and spiritually advantageous for teaching, reproof, correcting error, formation in righteousness, so that the man of God may be equipped properly and effectively prepared for every good work" (2 Tim 4:16–17).[13] Accordingly, *lectio divina* is associated by St. Benedict with *compunctio cordis*,[14] the ongoing process of *metanoia* (cf. Acts 2:37–38), which is the purpose of the Christian gospel. *Lectio divina* is aimed at producing a religious experience in the Christian reader: it has an essentially *heilsgeschichtlich* quality. In other words, it is a prayerful exercise calculated to terminate in a "saving event," which is to be experienced by the Christian reader. Such a view reposes fundamentally upon the belief that the most significant kind of truth contained in the Bible is "saving truth": "the truth which God has willed to put into the sacred books for the sake of our salvation."[15]

It is interesting to observe that this ancient Benedictine practice of *lectio divina* was recently warmly recommended to the Society of Jesus by the General Congregation of that order in its decree on prayer. "*Lectio divina*, a practice dating back to the earliest days of religious life in the Church, supposes that the reader surrenders to God who is speaking and granting him a change of heart under the action of the two-edged sword of Scripture continually challenging to conversion."[16]

[11] *Ibid.*, *Prologus*, p. 43; chap. 11, p. 74.

[13] *Ibid.*, chap. 48, where *lectio divina* is contrasted with *otiositas*.

[12] Cf. R. A. F. MacKenzie, S.J., "The Scriptural Foundations of the Christian Life," *Proceedings of the Society of Catholic College Teachers of Sacred Doctrine* 9 (1963) 39–46.

[14] *Regula monachorum*, chap. 49. [15] Cf. *Dei verbum*, no. 11 (*Documents*, p. 119).

[16] Cf. Donald R. Campion, S.J. (ed.), *Documents of the Thirty-First General Congregation* (Woodstock, Md., 1967) p. 42.

In the first part of this study we shall seek to discover what basis there is in reality for the Ignatian and Benedictine conviction that the contemplation of the mysteries of Jesus' earthly history in the Gospel narratives is not only possible but highly efficacious for the Christian of any era. We shall do this chiefly by examining the implications contained in an ancient credal formula which has come down to us from the apostolic age. In a second part of this essay we shall attempt to explain how this contemplation of the Gospels can be successfully carried out, i.e., how it may be considered to result in a truly "saving event."

I

"JESUS IS LORD!"

A Christian may be quite simply described (as Karl Rahner has somewhere asserted) as a man who has accepted Christ. To borrow from the language of modern psychology, the Christian—to be a Christian and not merely bear the name—must be able to "relate to" Jesus Christ. To be meaningful and operative in his Christian existence, his act of faith must be a wholehearted commitment of his total self to the Lord Jesus. Faith is the *engagement* of the whole man to the person of Christ: it is nothing if it is not actually a profound interpersonal relationship with Him who through death and resurrection has acceded to universal power as the Master of history, the Lord of the universe.

This was, beyond any doubt, the conviction of the first-century Christians whose faith we in the twentieth century claim to share. These first disciples expressed their paschal faith through a formula that remains at once the most primitive and most concise credo which has come down to us: *Iēsous Kyrios* (Jesus is Lord!). In a highly imaginative, yet deeply theological manner, the unknown author of a liturgical hymn,[17] cited by Paul in writing to the Philippians, presents the collaboration of all creatures in the divine work of the redemption as a kind of cosmic liturgy (Phil 2:9–11):

> Therefore did God in turn immeasurably exalt Him,
> and graciously bestow on Him the Name

[17] Cf. D. M. Stanley, *The Apostolic Church in the New Testament* (Westminster, Md., 1965) pp. 104–6.

outweighing every other name:

that everyone at Jesus' Name[18]
should bow adoring: those in heaven,
on earth, in the infernal regions;

and every tongue take up the cry,
"Jesus is Lord!"—
thus glorifying God His Father.

This hymn, of Palestinian origin, was probably familiar to the Philippian community from the celebration of the Eucharistic liturgy. It witnesses to the fact that the understanding of the cosmic proportions of Jesus' lordship was already part of apostolic tradition. It also reveals how important this article of faith was for the significance of the liturgy of the Church. The central act of Christian worship, where the Church is most consciously herself, is the acknowledgement that "Jesus is Lord!" It is, moreover, her awareness of this article of faith that distinguishes the Church from "the world," which does not know that Jesus is Lord, and so gives the Church her sense of mission in history, to proclaim this salutary truth in the gospel.

Paul reminds the Corinthian community that this act of faith can only be made with the assistance of the Holy Spirit. "No one can say 'Jesus is Lord!' except through the influence of the Holy Spirit" (1 Cor 12:3). In fact, this brief creed sums up, for Paul, the essential message of the apostolic kerygma and defines the role of those to whom the ministry of preaching is confided by the Church. "For we do not proclaim ourselves, but Jesus Christ as Lord, and ourselves as your slaves with respect to Jesus" (2 Cor 4:5).

In writing to the Roman church Paul insists upon the necessity for salvation of the public profession of this little formula, which epitomizes Christian belief. "For if you confess with your mouth 'Jesus is Lord!' and you believe in your innermost self that God raised Him from death, you will be saved" (Rom 10:9). Somewhat later Paul will declare to the Colossians that this formulation of Christian belief provides the pattern for Christian living, reminding them of its traditional character. "Therefore, since you have accepted the Messiah Jesus as Lord

[18] "Jesus' Name," i.e., *Kyrios*, bestowed upon Him by the Father at His glorification. As the allusion to Is 45:22–24 (cf. Is 52:13–15; 53:10–12) indicates, it is an expression of His divinity.

from tradition, live your lives in union with Him" (Col 2:6). This last statement is of particular interest to us here, inasmuch as it indicates how profoundly this conception of the exalted Christ influenced the attitudes of the apostolic Church. Accordingly, it is necessary to reflect upon the various dimensions of meaning it contained for the first Christians.

It is sometimes stated that the primitive Christians were completely obsessed with the expectation of Jesus' second coming, an event moreover which they (erroneously, as the passing of two thousand years has shown) thought to be imminent. While it must be granted that the expectation of a proximate parousia figured prominently in the thinking of the apostolic age, the fact remains that these first- and second-generation Christians displayed, on the evidence of the formula of faith which we have just considered, a greater and more absorbing interest: the serene preoccupation with the *contemporary Christ*, who, they firmly believed, as Lord of history effectively directed the destinies of His Church as well as of the entire universe. The significance of this central tenet of the faith of the apostolic Church lies in her confident and optimistic conviction that Jesus Christ through His exaltation to the Father's right hand has not been removed to some mythical existence beyond the furthest galaxy, but is *actually more dynamically present* in the world than ever He was when He walked the hills of Galilee. Far from implying a withdrawal from the contemporary scene or a shadowy evanescence in the mists of some mythical apotheosis, Jesus' ascension meant to the early Church a mysterious, invisible, but nonetheless real and powerful re-entry into the ongoing historical process. This is the most fundamental meaning of the ancient formula of faith "Jesus is Lord!"

This unshakable belief of the apostolic Church explains a noteworthy feature of the entire *NT*, an outlook particularly prominent in the theological attitude of the four Evangelists. Search as you will, you will discover in their books no nostalgia for "the good old days." As a result of the coming of the Holy Spirit, Jesus' first disciples had no desire, made no attempt, to live in the past, or to turn back the clock by wishing to return to the privileged intimacy with Jesus which they had enjoyed during the years of His public ministry. Their newly-given Christian faith directed their attention towards the glorified

Lord Jesus, who now stood revealed to them as the very incarnation of *aggiornamento*, forever up to date, continually abreast of the happenings of this world. Indeed, as they well realized, He "went before" them (cf. Mt 28:7) constantly; and their most imperative duty was to run to catch up to Him who in glory presents the astonishing spectacle of "the last Adam," the first-redeemed man, the last word in human perfection—and hence the final goal of redeemed humanity.

The risen Christ was, in the second place, revealed to them through their paschal faith as the Son of God who had freely chosen to remain human for all eternity. He was proclaimed in the apostolic kerygma as having, through His death and resurrection, become the paragon of human perfection, the image of God in flesh and blood, the model according to which every human being must be remolded, and so made conformable. For, as Paul reminds us, it is the declared design of the Father that we "should be shaped over in the image of His Son, that He [the Son] might become the eldest of a large family of brothers" (Rom 8:29).

But how is this transfiguration of the Christian, this remodeling of humanity in the image of the risen Christ, to be effected? St. Paul, enucleating the teaching of Jesus Himself, assures us that "flesh and blood cannot inherit the kingdom of God" (1 Cor 15:50; 6:13). Man, to be redeemed, must in the totality of his person, on the material no less than on the spiritual side, be transformed by participation in the paschal mystery, revealed to the apostolic Church as already embodied in the exalted Lord Jesus. This amazing truth is for Paul the message of hope to mankind in despair of salvation, *the* mystery divinely revealed in Jesus Christ: "we shall all be changed!" (1 Cor 15:51; 1 Th 4:15–17). Yet such a necessary and marvelous transformation, we are assured, does not destroy our human nature, does not dehumanize us by dissolving the material aspect of our personality. On the contrary, Paul confidently asserts that the "omega point" of man's destiny, the Lord of history, who has chosen to remain human forever, is to be found, not in retreat from this world, but in the monotonous daily round of human experiences, where He confronts the Christian personally in his own existential situation. This constitutes for Paul the basic reason for his view that every human being must endeavor to find Christ by persevering with constancy in his own station in life. "I am

convinced then of this, that it is a good thing (because of the present time of stress) that a man remain as he is" (1 Cor 7:26). For, as a consequence of the death and resurrection of Christ, the whole of history has received a totally new orientation, and things can never be the same again: "the fashion of this world is passing off the stage" (1 Cor 7:31). In this sense it is profoundly true that "the Lord is near" (Phil 4:5), His re-entry into our world is a contemporary reality, thus providing the Christian with that supernatural reassurance, that inner sense of security (*to epieikes*), which must, by the living out of the Christian life as a radiantly human life, "become known to all men."

What specific help did the apostolic Church offer the believer in order to aid him in the necessary business of participating in the paschal mystery by which alone he is to be redeemed? She provided the Christian with two essential means of assistance: the sacraments and "the Word of this salvation" (Acts 13:26), the gospel. Since we are not concerned at the moment with the first of these, suffice it to say here that the sacraments are simply a series of most basic human experiences, now elevated to the status of grace-bearing events, by the fact that Christ, to redeem man, has Himself passed through and so transfigured the most significant activities of human life (like being born, eating, suffering, dying). The contemplation of the Scriptures, however, also possesses an inalienable character as saving event—the object of our present investigation.

The gospel, the fundamental message of the Christian Church, assumed already in apostolic times three important forms. It was, in the first place, proclaimed to "those outside" the Christian community in order to produce *metanoia*, that radical religious reorientation of man which is conversion to the Christian faith. As such, it is denominated in the *NT* as *kērygma*, the "heralding" of redemption in Jesus Christ (1 Cor 1:21), or *euangelion*, the "good news" of salvation (1 Cor 4:15). It was created by "the Twelve" (who had evolved into the apostolic college in the Christian Church) out of the teaching of Jesus and their own personal experience of the most significant events of Jesus' public ministry, passion, death, and resurrection (Acts 1:21). Thus the apostles fulfilled their office as "witnesses of His resurrection" (Acts 1:22) to those who had not yet received the gift of Christian faith.

The second stage in the formulation of the gospel is represented by

"the *didachē* (teaching) of the apostles" (Acts 2:42), delivered *within* the Christian community, in order to provide those who already accepted Christ with a deeper insight into the meaning of the paschal mystery (Acts 4:33). This message, communicated "from faith to faith" (Rom 1:17), i.e., by believers to believers, consisted essentially (as has already been noted) of the good news that "Jesus is Lord!" For it is precisely her keen awareness of this lordship of the exalted Christ which best distinguishes the Church from "the world," which by definition is ignorant of the truth that "Jesus is Lord!" This same sensitivity of Christian faith to the dynamic, saving truth that the glorified Jesus is Master of history provided the apostolic Church with her missionary *élan*, driving her to "go and make disciples of all the nations" (Mt 28:19).

It is, of course, the third and final form of the Christian gospel which constitutes the special object of our present concern: the articulation and formulation of the apostolic *didachē* in the four written Gospels and in the other books of the *NT*. With the genesis of this sacred body of Christian inspired literature we shall presently deal. For the moment, we wish to draw attention to one characteristic of the canonical Gospels which may well appear to contradict what was asserted earlier regarding the lack of nostalgia on the part of the apostolic college for the earthly life of Jesus, "the days of His flesh" (Heb 5:7). It is surely obvious to anyone who has even a nodding acquaintance with the Gospels that by far the greater portion of these narratives is devoted to accounts of the public ministry of Jesus, "beginning from Galilee . . . in the country of the Jews and in Jerusalem . . . " (Acts 10:37–39).

Why then, if it be true (as it assuredly is) that the apostles had no desire to return to that apparently idyllic existence during the years when they had followed Jesus personally, witnessed His miracles, heard His teaching, do our Evangelists devote almost all their written works to the recording of "what Jesus began to do and to teach" (Acts 1:1)? The answer lies undoubtedly in their conviction that it was precisely through the prayerful assimilation of Jesus' earthly history that the Christian must be led to a personal participation in the paschal mystery. Mark states the principle thus (and he is echoed faithfully by the three other Evangelists): "If a man decides to come after me, he must say 'no' to himself, shoulder his cross and follow me" (Mk

8:34). To be a genuine disciple of Jesus, the Christian must repeat in his own life—and expressly at the cost of his own ego, as Mark immediately adds in the passage just cited—the redeeming experiences of Jesus' own mortal existence. Since a correct and profound comprehension of the implications of this crucial principle is basic to the living of the Christian life in every age and culture, we must now reflect upon its meaning at some length.

There is one other dimension of meaning discoverable in the credal formula "Jesus is Lord!" which yet remains to be considered. We shall do so now, because it explains the conundrum adverted to above, namely, the seemingly disproportionate space and attention devoted to the public ministry of Jesus by men like the Evangelists, who at the same time did not regard this period as a vanished "golden age" to which they longed to return.

The author of the Apocalypse hints at the solution of this problem when he presents the exalted Lord Jesus as Master of history by means of the symbol of a lamb "standing as though slain" (Ap 5:6). It is one of the most moving moments in the entire book, a dramatic presentation, in the apocalyptic key, of the gospel. The seer is granted a vision of heaven, which he represents to his reader as the throne-room of an ancient Near Eastern court (Ap 4:1—5:14). God the Father, as divine monarch of the entire universe, is seated upon a throne, holding in His right hand a scroll sealed with seven seals. Not improbably, the scroll is intended to symbolize the *OT* "Scriptures," which our author believes to contain the key to the interpretation of the future history of this world. There is some consternation amongst the heavenly senate when no one can be found "worthy to open the scroll by breaking its seals" (Ap 5:2). The Christian prophet himself bursts into tears of grief, "because no one was found worthy to open the scroll or to read it" (Ap 5:4), until he is reassured by one of the heavenly retinue of elders. The unexpected appearance of the exalted Christ is greeted with a joyous "new song" by the court of heaven (Ap 5:9 ff.).

It is thus, by means of such brilliant imagery, that our author seeks to impress his reader with the all-important truth that the exalted Christ has not merely chosen to remain man throughout eternity, but has also elected to wear in glory the badges of His sacred passion. Stated in somewhat more prosaic fashion, the message of this grandiose

vision is that Jesus Christ, become Master of history through His earthly life, death, and resurrection, *is what He now is* in virtue of His past existence upon earth.[19] If he depicts the Lord Jesus as eternally adorned with the stigmata of His sacred passion, the seer has thereby called our attention to this significant theological truth by selecting the one most striking event in Jesus' mortal life: His passion and death. What our author clearly implies, however, is that all the mysteries of Jesus' earthly history, from the cradle to the grave, have been mysteriously endowed in His glorified humanity with a totally new and enduring *actuality*. The saving mysteries of the incarnation, birth, childhood, and public life of Jesus Christ, with His temptations, triumphs, frustrations, and disillusionment, retain in Him, as He now exists, a perennial, dynamic reality which remains ever contemporary with the ongoing process of history. The seer of Patmos had already suggested this same truth in the inaugural vision with which his book opens, where he represented the risen Christ as declaring "I was dead, but remember, I am alive forevermore!" (Ap 1:18). Here we discover the Christian answer to the question of modern man, "Why contemplate the earthly history of Jesus?", alluded to earlier in this essay.

The passages from the Apocalypse exemplify the profound differences that distinguish the contemplation of the earthly life of Jesus Christ from any consideration of the life of Socrates.[20] For Socrates is dead, and the example of his life, however noble, is in large measure a matter of past history. However, it will not weaken but rather assist our argument if we recall that Socrates still survives in some very true sense, and his past survives in that survival. Do we not owe to Socrates' celebrated pupil and principal biographer the classical argument for the immortality of the soul?

[19] That is to say, the modality of the lordship of the risen Christ has been determined by the mysteries of His earthly history. A consequence of this, as will be seen presently, is that these mysteries provide the Christian with a means of approach to the Lord Jesus. Or, conversely, it is through these mysteries that Christ now exerts, through the operation of His Spirit, His influence upon the life of the Christian.

[20] The most palpable and decisive difference, of course, springs from the fact that Jesus is the incarnate Son of God, whose earthly life moreover was primarily a mission from the Father, in order to reveal that God whom "no man has ever seen" (Jn 1:18) through these very mysteries of His earthly career. Here, however, we are principally concerned with the contrast between the present reality of Jesus' human experiences as such and those of the dead Socrates (or any other human being who has died).

Two points may serve to underscore the difference of which we speak. Firstly, it is the conviction of the authors of the *NT* that the general resurrection (inaugurated indeed by Jesus' own resurrection) has not yet taken place, but awaits the consummation of this world's history. Accordingly, Socrates' past (i.e., the set of human experiences which constituted it) has not gone forward into that new life with God, as has the sacred humanity of Jesus Christ. In the second place, the writings of Plato are not inspired: they lack that unique quality which makes our Gospels a privileged locus of the special presence of the Spirit of the risen Christ. Consequently, Socrates' past survives in a manner very different from that of the exalted Lord Jesus. The example of his life is transmitted to us by means of the literary genius of Plato, not through the Spirit-filled testimony of the Evangelists, whose witness of apostolic faith is the foundation of the belief of the twentieth-century Christian. They attest the truth that Jesus Christ is "alive forevermore!" That is to say, Jesus has not simply returned to this life. He has gone forward to a totally new life with God His Father—and this in the entirety of His human nature with the whole gamut of His historical experiences. Thus all the mysteries of His life upon earth have been given a new reality in Him who has become Master of history.

This truth of our Christian faith has enormous consequences for that kind of Christian prayer, which constitutes the warp and woof of the *Spiritual Exercises*, created by St. Ignatius: the *contemplatio*. It reminds us that the contemplation of the Gospel scenes is no mere exercise in imagination, no mere effort at reconstruction or recall (as with the modern historian) of events whose reality lies solely in the past. The events of Jesus' life, His words and teaching, are endowed perpetually with a contemporaneity or actuality in the risen Christ such as the experiences of no other human being (with the exception of our Lady) are known to possess. The point is of such paramount importance that it may be useful to restate it in another way.

The problem continually confronting the Christian in any age (as has already been said) is one of relating himself in most personal fashion to the risen Lord Jesus. At first sight the difficulty involved in such an enterprise may well appear insuperable. How can I, in my present existence, involved as I am in the universal human predicament of

selfishness, captivation by evil, insecurity, and resistance to the evolutionary process of my own transfiguration in the paschal mystery (the effects of original sin), ever hope to relate myself to Christ, who is so far above and beyond my reach? How can I make more real and personal my commitment of faith to Him who now appears as "the last Adam," the fulness of human perfection?

We may illustrate the serious nature of the problem by a modern parable. Suppose a young woman falls in love with an atomic physicist, although she has not the talent, interest, or possibility of relating to him on his own level of scientific achievement, which enables him to relate easily to his own colleagues. It is surely obvious that the only way such a woman can relate to such a man, and so lead a successful married life with him, is on some level other than that of atomic physics. In short, she must relate to him in love not on his level, but on her own.

The relationship of the Christian to the exalted Christ is somewhat analogous. I can only relate in faith to Jesus Christ on that level of the spiritual life at which I now find myself. Hence the profound significance of the contemplation of the mysteries of Jesus' earthly history. It is through these human experiences, which befell the Word Incarnate "in the days of His flesh," that I am offered the possibility of relating myself to Him who is my Saviour. Happily, as my Christian faith tells me, these mysteries do not merely belong to the past as past; they are in fact an integral part of His present, glorified existence, and so are contemporary in a very real sense with my own life.

A proper understanding of the implications of this aspect of the present status of the risen Christ provides an answer to a question that has been sometimes agitated in recent years.[21] The question may be thus formulated: "Can I pray to Jesus *now*, as He *was* during His mortal life?" To be specific, is it possible to pray to the infant Jesus, the Jesus of the temptations, when I am fully aware that Christ now exists only as the exalted Lord?

In the light of the principle we have been discussing, I believe it is possible to answer this question, once it is properly formulated. The exalted Christ is what He now is precisely in virtue of these mysteries.

[21] Cf. Robert F. Harvanek, S.J. (ed.), *Contemporary Thought and the Spiritual Exercises of St. Ignatius Loyola* (Chicago, 1963) pp. 33–34, 71–74, 77.

By that statement is meant that Christ would not be the Lord of history in the way in which He actually is, were it not for the experiences of His earthly life. To say this, moreover, is to say more than is implied in the familiar proverb "the boy is father to the man." There is a sense in which any of us are what we are in large measure as a result of our own past. Jesus Christ risen with His sacred humanity provides the ground of existence for these mysteries in a far more real and dynamic manner. The seer of Patmos asserts this by presenting Him as "a lamb standing as though slain" (Ap 5:6). The author of Hebrews underscores the same truth by his declaration of faith in "Jesus Christ yesterday and today the same—and so forever" (Heb 13:8).

I can, then, relate to the exalted Lord in, e.g., His experience of temptation, because that experience retains its actuality in Him as He now exists. Indeed, since I can only relate to Him on that spiritual level at which I now find myself, whether in temptation, or in suffering, or in apostolic activity, etc., it is to these mysteries that my prayer, to be effective, is of necessity to be orientated. For if I am ultimately to be redeemed by accepting my own death, in all its concrete circumstances, from the hand of the Father (as Jesus Himself did in order to effect the redemption of mankind), I must throughout my life be assimilated gradually more and more to Jesus Christ, in whom the paschal mystery is now completely realized. This means that the Christian life is a graduated process in which, over and over again, I am "elected" by God in Christ with my own free co-operation.[22]

It is this basic truth which St. Ignatius understood so deeply, a truth which governed, more than mere logic or psychology, the structuring of the *Spiritual Exercises*. This little book is most basically a precious recipe for advancing step by step in the "imitation of Christ," i.e., the gradual realization, in a most personal manner, of the grace of Christian baptism. As I grow spiritually, I must constantly relate

[22] The Election constitutes, in my opinion, an essential part of the Spiritual Exercises. This becomes clear once it is understood that it possessed for St. Ignatius a profoundly biblical sense (cf. Is 43:1–7), i.e., it is primarily God's election of myself in Christ. Thus it is not merely an ethical act of man's free will, depending largely upon effective psychology; it depends fundamentally upon the divine goodness and initiative, to which I am led to respond with "the obedience of faith" (Rom 1:5). For its nature as a continuing process cf. D. M. Stanley, S.J., *A Modern Scriptural Approach to the Spiritual Exercises* (Chicago 1967) p. 77.

myself to Christ in the various mysteries of His human history, through which He Himself advanced to be "constituted Son of God in power by resurrection from death, in accordance with the Spirit of holiness" (Rom 1:4). The sacraments are the most effective aid the Christian possesses in this participation in the paschal mystery, as Paul so clearly saw. "Those of us who have been baptized into Christ Jesus [i.e., the risen Christ] have been baptized into His death" (Rom 6:3). Baptism is the sacramental experience of Jesus' "death," if by that term we understand the whole gamut of our Lord's personal experience of human mortality, all the mysteries of His earthly history.[23] It is baptism, then, that "authenticates" that series of basic human experiences through which I am gradually transfigured in the image of my Lord.

But while baptism and all the sacraments are truly effective in a way that transcends all personal human effort (*ex opere operato*, as theologians assert), still my transformation in the paschal mystery, because it is the very personal work of my own redemption, must become for me a profoundly personal experience. It can never be conceived as an automatic process, whereby I am redeemed unwittingly or unwillingly. If it be true that I am to be redeemed by Christ, it is also true that I am, in the very process of my own redemption, to act as a "redeemer." It is for this reason above all that I must relate to the Lord Jesus in the mysteries of His earthly history. Among the various ways in which I may accomplish this, the manner par excellence for the Christian, as St. Ignatius was so well aware, remains the contemplation (or meditation) of that earthly history presented to me in the Gospels.[24]

This means surely that the contemplation of God's Word in Scripture must truly be for me a saving event (*Heilsgeschehen*). The event-quality of this supremely significant spiritual exercise must be properly understood and appreciated if it is to be efficacious in my Christian life. Accordingly, it is to a discussion of the event-character of this Christian contemplation that we wish to devote the second part of this little

[23] For Paul, the work of our redemption was accomplished through Jesus' death and resurrection. Yet elsewhere in the *NT* (and notably in the fourth Gospel), the Incarnation and the mysteries of Jesus' earthly life are considered part of this saving process.

[24] Hence I must develop some awareness of this presentation by the Evangelists, and not content myself with imagining how the event might have occurred. By attending to the very personal way in which each sacred writer has narrated the event, I begin to grasp his individual approach to Christ, his "spirituality."

study. How can the Ignatian *contemplatio* result in a *Heilsgeschehen*? What approach to the Gospels must be adopted in order to effect such a saving experience with the grace of Christ? Before we discuss the technique which through faith leads to my participation in such a saving event, we must recall the manner in which our inspired authors (and we shall confine ourselves mainly to the Evangelists) came to compose the Gospels.

II

CREATION OF THE GOSPELS AND OF THE NEW TESTAMENT

We may begin with a general description of the process which led to the creation of our sacred literature in the *OT* as well as in the *NT*. This will be seen upon analysis to consist of three principal moments: (1) *experience* of God's working from within history (and this involves the *reaction of faith* on the part of the individual or the collectivity, vouchsafed such a privileged revelation); (2) a period of *theological reflection*, animated by faith, upon the data thus revealed; and (3) the *formulation of the experience* with its concomitant reflection, in an attempt to communicate this revelation in writing to the present and particularly future generations of believers.

Since the religion of Israel and especially Christianity itself make the claim to be historical religions, the faith of both necessarily took its rise from an event, the sign or medium of God's self-revelation from within the historical process. This primordial event, moreover, was experienced by a nucleus of the future People of God: in the first instance, a group of runaway Hebrew slaves fleeing from their Egyptian taskmasters; in the second, "the Eleven," the first disciples, "with the women and Mary, the mother of Jesus, and His brothers" (Acts 1:14). The event which created Israel as God's "acquisition" was the Exodus (by which term is to be understood the escape from Egypt through the Red Sea, the Sinai covenant, the wandering in the desert, the entry into the promised land). The event in the history of the Church corresponding to the Exodus is Pentecost (which here signifies the entire paschal mystery at the climax of the earthly history of Jesus, His passion, exaltation, and sending of the Spirit). No collectivity of human beings becomes a people without a sense of its destiny, an awareness of the direction of its history. Israel acquired this self-consciousness by

the Exodus; the Church was given it through the Lord Jesus' gift of His Spirit.

An integral part of this basic experience of God's action in history is, of course, the gift of faith, which becomes the criterion par excellence for interpreting the experience and accepting the divine revelation communicated by God's loving, free choice of this people. In the light of this divinely given insight into their own historical experiences, not only was the significance of the past clarified, but each successive crisis in the life of the people could be confronted and comprehended and surmounted. For Yahweh's purpose relative to Israel was continually manifested through the centuries, until during the Babylonian exile her prophets and priests (filled with the dynamic hope of a final intervention of their God in their history) were able to undertake the collection, codification, and interpretation of Israel's traditions, ritual, and laws. It was then that the *OT*, as we know it, began to be written—the resultant of Israel's experience of God's action in her national history and her conviction that, through tragedy and triumph, "God had visited His people." What gives Israel's national literature its unique character is the fact that it is a national history written not to glorify the nation but the nation's God. And the fact that this national literature was written at all is proof of the authors' conviction that their insight into the divine meaning of this history contained a God-given message intended for future generations of their own people—indeed, possibly of the whole of mankind. At the origin of these writers' labors lay the firm belief, however vaguely grasped, that their work was inspired by the God who had graciously disclosed to them His mysterious operations in history.

To say that Pentecost is the decisive happening which led to the recording of Christian sacred history in the *NT* may well seem surprising, since the coming of the Holy Spirit had been preceded by the apostles' experience of the earthly life of Jesus during His public ministry, passion, and glorification. Yet it was Pentecost that dispelled the ambiguity and mystery which had enshrouded the precious experiences of the Twelve during Jesus' earthly existence.[25] They had indeed

[25] Of all the Evangelists it is Mark who has been most deeply impressed with this facet of the life and mission of Jesus; and he has repeatedly stressed the paradoxical character of "the messianic secret," the mystery surrounding the person of Jesus.

witnessed His miracles, followed Him with love and loyalty, preserved their fellowship even after His departure from them. Yet throughout this entire privileged period they did not know who He actually was: the Son of God incarnate. "After Jesus had risen from the dead, and when His divinity was clearly perceived, the faith of the disciples, far from blotting out the remembrance of the events that had happened, rather consolidated it, since their faith was based on what Jesus had done and taught." [26] The pentecostal revelation brought these disciples of Jesus the realization, through Christian faith, of their own new identity as the new Israel. It marked also the inauguration of the apostolic practice of the Christian sacraments. It gave rise to the creation of the *kērygma*, the gospel, by the apostolic college.

Yet this primitive proclamation, to judge by the authentic samples or résumés of the apostolic preaching preserved in Acts, was far from complete. It omitted certain important doctrinal affirmations, e.g., the Incarnation, pre-existence of Christ, His priestly character, the sacrificial significance of His death and resurrection. Deeper theological reflection was required, as well as further effort at articulating the Christian message. Hence it is no accident that the first contribution to the *NT* was made by Paul in the form of a series of letters in which his great religious genius struggled to give theological expression to his profound insight into the Christian mystery, with the aid of "the Scriptures" and his acquaintance with Hellenistic culture. It was only after and as a result of Paul's contribution, particularly to the Christian understanding of the paschal mystery, that our Gospels could be written. For the Gospels, despite their apparent artlessness, are unquestionably the supreme literary and Christological achievement of the apostolic age.

The sacred authors, for the benefit of the churches, took this earliest body of instruction, which had been handed on orally at first and then in writing...and set it down in the four Gospels. In doing this, each of them followed a method suitable to the special purpose which he had in view.... For, out of the material which they had received, the sacred authors selected especially those items which were adapted to the varied circumstances of the faithful as well as to the end which they themselves wished to attain; these they recounted in a manner consonant with those circumstances and with that end.... The results of recent study have made it

[26] "Instructio de historica Evangeliorum veritate," *Acta apostolicae sedis* 56 (1964) 714.

clear that the teachings and the life of Jesus were not simply recounted for the mere purpose of being kept in remembrance, but were "preached" in such a way as to furnish the Church with the foundation on which to build up faith and morals. . . .[27]

The preceding, somewhat hasty description of the three main stages through which the Bible came into existence can now serve to illustrate the sense in which the modern Christian contemplation of the mysteries of Jesus' earthly life can, in fact ought to, be effectively carried out. This contemplation or meditation must terminate in an *event*, a saving event, which is meant to happen to the Christian in prayer. For only thus can he be transfigured progressively by the paschal mystery already incarnate in the risen Christ. Indeed, only by the personal assimilation of these mysteries from the mortal life of Jesus Christ can the believer relate (at his own present level of Christian existence) to his Redeemer. For if his redemption is to become, as it necessarily must, his own most personal achievement in Christ, the efficacious action of the sacraments in his life must be accompanied by his wholehearted, conscious, and deliberate self-commitment to Him who is Lord of history, and hence Master of the individual Christian's life. This is the basic reason for the extraordinarily striking assertion of the Second Vatican Council in *Dei verbum*:

The Church has always venerated the divine Scriptures just as she venerates the body of the Lord, since from the table of both the word of God and of the body of Christ she unceasingly receives and offers to the faithful the bread of life, especially in the sacred liturgy. . . . Therefore, like the Christian religion itself, all the preaching of the Church must be nourished and ruled by sacred Scripture.[28]

How should the Ignatian *contemplatio* of the mysteries of our Lord's earthly life be carried out? Given the stated purpose of this spiritual exercise, i.e., to acquire "an interior knowledge of our Lord, who for me is made man, that I may the more love him and follow him" (104), it becomes evident that the method to be employed is actually the reverse of the process through which our Gospels came into existence. For that knowledge which St. Ignatius describes as "interior" is a truly experiential knowledge absorbing the Christian totally in the innermost part of his being. It is not merely intellectual—"notional

[27] *Ibid.*, p. 715. [28] *Dei verbum*, no. 21 (*Documents*, p. 125).

knowledge," in Cardinal Newman's phrase—but "real knowledge," possessing an essential event-quality.

Accordingly, the believer must begin with the sacred text of the Gospel narrative, since that is by its inspired character the privileged locus of the action of the Spirit of the exalted Lord Jesus. If He is now present in this world, as the Christian faith asserts, by a dynamic involvement in the contemporary historical process, He is present in a unique way in the Gospels, just as He is uniquely present in the Eucharist. As the Jesuit biblical scholar Roderick MacKenzie has observed, "in this respect (as in others) an illuminating comparison can be drawn between the Scriptures and the Eucharist. . . . The Eucharist is not something that the Church herself instituted; it too is a gift from her Spouse, a divine creation. . . . It too is a means and manifestation of Christ's presence among his members. Thus both Scripture and Eucharist are part of the Church's divinely bestowed equipment for carrying on the Saviour's work of redemption. . . ."[29]

In order, then, to collaborate in the saving event which is the intended goal of the Ignatian *contemplatio*, the Christian of the twentieth century must begin with the sacred text itself, the inspired expression of the religious experience of the Evangelist, the result of his personal confrontation (and that of the apostolic Church, whose special witness he is) with the exalted Lord Jesus. To realize effectively here and now a similar confrontation, the modern believer must labor to grasp the significance of the words in which the Gospel scene is couched, appreciating the literary form of the narrative, penetrating the figures of speech, the peculiarities of idiom, perceiving (above all) the particular purpose or Christological import of the passage. To the best of his abilities he must make his own the conviction of Pius XII that "it is absolutely necessary for the interpreter to go back in spirit to those remote centuries of the East. . . ."[30] For such an enterprise, far from leading to mere sciolism, is a necessary preparation for the personal encounter with the glorified Christ.

Here it may not be unhelpful to recall the valuable lesson which the

[29] R. A. F. MacKenzie, S.J., *Introduction to the New Testament* (2nd ed.; Collegeville, Minn., 1965) p. 52.

[30] *Acta apostolicae sedis* 35 (1943) 314–15.

practitioners of the method of Gospel study known as *Formgeschichte* have taught us, viz., that the words and deeds of Jesus were formulated by our Evangelists not with a view to producing an impersonal, colorless, "objective" account, but to provide something much more valuable. Moreover, their authority reposes primarily not upon the accuracy or fidelity of the memories of "the original eyewitnesses" (Lk 1:2), but rather upon their Spirit-filled insight into the meaning of the sayings and doings of Jesus. The Gospels do not simply give the brute facts about our Lord; they record His words and actions as understood, selected, interpreted, and *lived* by these privileged witnesses to the faith of the apostolic Church. It is highly important to remember that the "life setting" (*Sitz im Leben*) of the Gospel accounts was the daily life of the first and second generations of Christians, and not the historical context in which the events originally occurred. Thus these sacred narratives put us in touch with the living faith of the Church in the first century of her existence, and with her daily life lived by the gospel.

A proper appreciation of this saving character of the truth exhibited by the Gospels will provide invaluable aid in the second step towards the *Heilsgeschehen* which is the goal of the *contemplatio*, that is, the modern Christian's personal theological reflection upon the text. For the revelation of the mysteries of Jesus' earthly life, which the text contains, is communicated together with the precious religious experience by the apostolic Church of these very mysteries. Because the sacred text conveys this revelation about Jesus of Nazareth incarnated in the reaction of faith of its sacred author (and of the Christian community that stands behind him), it is capable of producing a similar reaction of faith in the twentieth-century believer.

How does one conduct theological reflection upon a narrative in the Gospels? The technique may be reduced to one simple, searching question: "What is the Lord Jesus attempting to say *to me now* through this particular text of the Gospel?" If I can plumb the depths of meaning in the words of the Evangelist to the best of my ability and with the power of my faith, I shall assimilate them to myself—or better, I shall be disposed to be assimilated or conformed to the mystery which I am contemplating.

The final step in the exercise of contemplation is the religious experi-

ence, the saving event. One might best describe it by saying that the mystery must happen for me, to me.[31] It is thus in the *OT* that the sixth-century author of Deuteronomy described the event-character of the ritual proclamation of Yahweh's covenant to his own contemporaries many centuries after Israel's great initial experience at Sinai. It is instructive to note how the author phrases this covenant renewal: "Yahweh our God made a covenant *with us* at Horeb. It was not with our ancestors that Yahweh made this covenant, but *with ourselves who are all here alive today*" (Dt 5:2–3). Similarly, when I reflect upon the parable of the Good Samaritan (Lk 10:30 ff.), I must consider Jesus' final words as addressed to myself in my contemporary situation: "Go, and do likewise yourself!" (v. 37).

The creator of this saving event, in which my contemplation is designed to terminate, is the Spirit of the risen Christ, who through His intimate presence in the believer makes the mystery happen for him. St. Paul has described this Christian religious experience in two striking passages, where he speaks, not of any mystical phenomenon, but of the prayer-life of every sincere Christian. The first text occurs in Rom 8:15–16: "Those who are led by the Spirit of God are God's sons. For you have not received the mentality of slavery (forcing you back) again into fear; you have received the mentality proper to your adoption as sons, thanks to which we cry '*Abba*' (dear Father!)." The other Pauline passage (Gal 4:6) is frequently mistranslated, with the result that its meaning is lost: "The proof that you are sons is that God has sent the Spirit of His Son into our hearts crying '*Abba*' (dear Father!)." Thus for St. Paul the *Heilsgeschehen* of which we are speaking is an experiential awareness of our relationship as sons and daughters to God as Father. Indeed, for the Apostle the whole orientation of the Christian existence is towards an ever profounder consciousness of this special relationship. St. Ignatius himself seems to have the same conception in mind when he stresses the necessity for the Jesuit of

[31] The process is described in a very ancient Christian text in speaking of our Lord's nativity: "He it is who is from the beginning, who appears as new and is discovered to be ancient, yet continually born anew in the hearts of the saints" (*Epistle to Diognetus* 11, 4). The same idea is found in the text of the *Spiritual Exercises*: the colloquy of the contemplation on the Incarnation speaks of "our Lord thus newly incarnate" (109), while that on the Nativity directs the exercitant "to see . . . the child Jesus from the time He is born" (114), "in order that after such toils . . . He may die on the cross, and all this for me . . ." (116).

cultivating what he calls *familiaritas cum Deo in oratione.* The phrase is properly understood as the acquiring of a "sense of family," God's family, through prayer. And (as it would appear from the frequency with which Ignatius recommends the *contemplatio* in his *Spiritual Exercises*), it is chiefly by the contemplation of the earthly mysteries of Jesus' life that this "sense of family" can best be cultivated and made more actual to oneself.

How real and personal this Christian awareness of such divine adoptive sonship was to the mind of St. Paul may be gauged by recalling that the Aramaic term *Abba* was a term of such familiarity (it was used in Palestinian families of Jesus' day by children towards their father) that no Jew dared use this form of address in prayer to God.[32] When, as he customarily did, the Jew prayed to God as Father, he said "Our Father, the One in heaven"—precisely the Matthean version of the Lord's Prayer (Mt 6:9). It is highly significant that during Jesus' earthly life, only He is represented in the Gospels (Mk 14:36) as addressing God in this familiar way.

It remains to suggest some explanation of how our contemplation of the mysteries of Jesus' earthly history is truly efficacious in assisting us to advance in this consciousness of our relationship as sons to the heavenly Father. The answer quite simply is that it was through these very events that Jesus Himself deepened His sense of His unique filial relationship to the Father. For it was through His experience of those events in His own earthly life that our Lord's human nature was gradually transformed by the paschal mystery, which reached its culmination in His death and resurrection. This statement may sound somewhat strange to us, until we recall Paul's startling assertion that Jesus Christ was "constituted Son of God in power by resurrection from death in accordance with His Spirit of holiness" (Rom 1:4). There is, then, a very real sense in which this sonship of the incarnate Son was fully realized only at the climax of His earthly career.

As stated earlier, the exalted Christ is what He now is in virtue of His past. These very mysteries of His earthly life effectively determine His status as Lord of history, and so retain in the contemporary Christ their actuality and contemporaneity. But this exaltation of the Lord Jesus as Master of history means, according to the faith of the primitive

[32] Cf. Joachim Jeremias, *The Lord's Prayer* (Philadelphia, 1964) pp. 19–21.

Church, His deeper involvement in the historical process. That is to say, the glorified Christ is dynamically present to me in the present age, effecting my transfiguration as a Christian in the paschal mystery, molding me in His own image (Rom 8:29). Moreover, it is through these various mysteries of His earthly existence (perpetually real and actual in Himself) that He can "touch" me in the innermost recesses of my being, imparting to me the grace-filled capability of relating to Him in these very mysteries. For it is my Christian destiny, the real possibility of which was conferred by my baptism, to become, through my own death (accepted in filial obedience from the hand of the Father) and resurrection, a son of God in the unique Son of God (*filius in Filio*). It is ever to this eschatological sonship that the presence of the Spirit of God within me leads, as St. Paul well knew. "Not only that, but we ourselves who possess the first fruits of the Spirit articulate our yearning in the inmost depths of our being, as we await expectantly our adoptive sonship, the redemption of our bodies" (Rom 8:23). St. Luke repeats the theme by means of his version of Jesus' words to the Sadducees in the controversy over the general resurrection: "They cannot die any more, since they are like angels; and they are sons of God, since they are sons of the resurrection" (Lk 20:36).