

THE PROBLEM OF THE FIFTH WEEK

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J. R. R. TOLKIEN'S *THE SILMARILLION* opens with a creation myth, known as 'The Music of the Ainur'.¹ The creator, the One, creates angelic beings called Ainur, the Holy Ones, and gives them a theme to make a Great Music together. They sing and the sound goes out into the void. 'Behold your music!' he tells them, adding seeing to hearing: they see a new world made visible before them. But there is a sobering moment when the Holy Ones enter this new world:

They were at first astounded and at a loss, for it was as if naught was yet made which they had seen in vision, and all was but on point to begin and yet unshaped, and it was dark. For the Great Music had been but the growth and flowering of thought ... and the Vision only a foreshowing; but now they had entered in at the beginning of Time, and they perceived that the World had been but foreshadowed and foresung, and they must achieve it.²

There are a great music and a vision of a new world, but nothing is yet made real; there are a foreshadowing and a foresinging, but nothing is yet achieved.

I find this disconcerting moment in Tolkien's creation myth a good starting point for what we are considering in this issue of *The Way*. For it helps to name what I and many others, I believe, have experienced at the end of the Spiritual Exercises, or indeed of any Ignatian retreat. You get to the end of the retreat, and as you pack your bags and prepare for the journey home, the question arises: *What next?* You make some resolutions about prayer and doing the Examen. You return to the 'real' world and life happens. And you find yourself like the Holy Ones in Tolkien's creation myth. For you have been invited into a great music and a vision of a new world, but it turns out that the vision was only a foreshowing and all is as yet unshaped, only on the point of

¹ J. R. R. Tolkien, *The Silmarillion* (London: HarperCollins, 1999 [1977]), 15.

² Tolkien, *Silmarillion*, 20.

beginning. And you, like the angelic creatures of Tolkien's imagination, are at a loss.

We meet here what can be called 'the problem of the Fifth Week'. The phrase 'Fifth Week' has been in use at least since the 1970s, as evidenced by the title of a book by the Jesuit William O'Malley.³ If the First Week of the Spiritual Exercises is about what we are created for and how we miss the mark with sin; the Second is about the life of Jesus; the Third and Fourth about the passion, death and resurrection he underwent; then the Fifth Week is the rest of a person's life. O'Malley's book, being about Jesuit vocation, is a collection of biographies of different Jesuit lives, different 'Fifth Weeks', of martyrs, teachers, parish priests and spiritual directors.

The Fifth Week need not be about Jesuit lives specifically, but about any life shaped by the Spiritual Exercises. People from all backgrounds make the Exercises: laypeople, priests and religious, young and old. For many, the Exercises feel like an entry into a new way of seeing, relating and living. But how, once out of the Four Weeks, does one live in a way faithful to the gift? How does one continue what has been begun?

It is tempting to dismiss what I am calling the problem of the Fifth Week by interpreting it as a problem of the Four Weeks. The Spiritual Exercises are a transformative experience: the person who leaves the retreat is not the same as the one who entered it (or is more truly him- or herself than before). Having changed, the one who has made the Exercises just *will* live differently. And if not? Well, perhaps the Exercises were not made well, or not by the right person.

This evasion of the problem of the Fifth Week is, I suggest, too quick, too easy. Anthony De Mello, in *Awareness*, tells the story of a religious sister who leaves her community to make a retreat. On this occasion, so the narrative goes, she receives a very deep grace. She senses a change within herself. It is noticeable to everyone. It is visible in her face, her eyes, her body, the way she works and relates. But then she goes back to her old community, who say, 'Oh well, she seems a little more spirited, but just wait, she'll be depressed again'. And within a few weeks she is as depressed as before. And they all say, 'See, we told you so; she had not changed'.⁴

³ See William J. O'Malley, *The Fifth Week*, 2nd edn (Chicago: Loyola, 1998 [1976]).

⁴ Anthony De Mello, *Awareness: A De Mello Spirituality Conference in His Own Words*, edited by J. Francis Stroud (New York: Random House, 1992), 116.



The Parable of the Barren Fig Tree, by Abel Grimmer, 1611

I find this a haunting story. De Mello tells it to illustrate how we can undermine the graces others receive through our prejudices, and lack of love and hope for each other. But the story also illustrates something for every Christian, namely, that it is not enough to be given a grace. If the grace is to bear fruit, the new seed needs to be planted in good soil and mulched, watered and cultivated (see Luke 13:6–9). But how? This problem is not automatically solved by giving the Four Weeks better, or to better-suited people, but only by finding a way to live the gift received.

Not all experts in the Spiritual Exercises are comfortable with the language of the ‘Fifth Week’. For some, those who have made the Exercises can find themselves in their prayer in any one of the Weeks. For example, someone accompanying a dying parent may be located in the Third Week; and another, facing his or her own waywardness in the Christian life, may be in the First Week. For others, life after the Exercises is simply a continuation of the Fourth Week. One goes on, through the Contemplation to Attain Love, finding God in all things, living according to the Spirit of the Risen Christ.

I have no objection to these approaches, but I do nevertheless want to draw attention to the distinctive spiritual character of life after the Exercises which, for me, justifies the expression ‘Fifth Week’. In the Gospels, we find that there are two basic tasks of the Christian life.⁵

⁵ I draw this insight from the work of the moral theologian Santiago Ramirez (1891–1967).

The first is to hear and believe the word of God: to allow oneself to be turned around by the Good News of Jesus Christ. The second, however, is to live the Word out. Jesus teaches that it is quite possible to succeed in the first task but, alas, go on to fail in the second.

The one who hears the word and keeps it builds his house on rock; the one who hears it but does not keep it builds his house on sand (Luke 6:46–49). Now, the Four Weeks of the Spiritual Exercises are, one might say, a way of hearing the Word of God; the Fifth Week, in contrast, is about keeping or living the Word that has been heard. ‘Blessed ... are those who hear the word of God *and* obey it.’ (Luke 11:28) So there are two distinct but related tasks: hearing and obeying. To these correspond the two distinct spiritual tasks of receiving the Spiritual Exercises and living them out. In the Ignatian literature we have a lot on the first task; this issue of *The Way* focuses on the second: the living out of the Exercises.

My background in theological ethics also convinces me that the term ‘Fifth Week’ is necessary. Today many theologians are attracted by an ancient approach to ethics, one that is focused not exclusively on particular moral issues but on questions about what it means to

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live a good life. This leads to a style of theological ethics that bears a strong affinity with spirituality, since both are concerned with discipleship of Christ, or life as a journey towards union with God.⁶ Indeed, ethics and spirituality need each other. Ethics without spirituality lacks an animating principle, and spirituality without ethics lacks backbone.

Spirituality and ethics, as I conceive them, then, meet especially in the Fifth Week, in the task of living out the Good News. For, at its deepest root, the problem of the Fifth Week is not a problem specific to Ignatian spirituality, but to Christian living: how, having heard and been transformed by the Good News, to live it out.

An Image

There is an image that I suggest can serve as a kind of lodestar to navigate the topic of the Fifth Week. It is not my image but one I inherit from the respected scholars of Jesuit spirituality. Despite its importance,

⁶ For an outstanding example, see William C. Spohn, *Go and Do Likewise: Jesus and Ethics* (New York: Continuum, 1999). See also my discussion of Thomas Aquinas’ understanding of the ethical part of theology as ‘about the motion of the rational creature into God’ (*Summa theologiae*, 1. q. 2, pr.): Nicholas Austin, *Aquinas on Virtue: A Causal Reading* (Washington, DC: Georgetown U, 2017), 78.

it has not been widely shared outside a Jesuit context, not even with the majority of the Ignatian family. The reason for this reticence is not that the Jesuits want to keep this treasure to themselves but rather that they have not wanted to impose something that belongs properly to Jesuit life on those with other vocations. This caution is well meaning but may be excessive.

It is common to distinguish Ignatian and Jesuit spirituality, because it is correctly recognised that the Jesuit way of life is only one way of living the Ignatian charism. Today the Exercises are made by female and male religious from different congregations, by diocesan priests and, overwhelmingly, by laypeople. Ignatian spirituality therefore has relevance to many different walks of life. Jesuit spirituality, on the other hand, while also fed by the Exercises, is about the vows of poverty, chastity, obedience; it is about belonging to the missionary body that is the Society of Jesus; it is about a specific set of ministries of the Word, including priestly ministries. The reluctance to share insights from Jesuit spirituality rather than Ignatian spirituality comes from a good place: the desire not to impose on others what belongs only to vowed, apostolic religious life.

Yet I would argue that the Spiritual Exercises, by themselves, are insufficient as a basis, not just for Jesuit but even for Ignatian spirituality. One indication of this is the way we tend to divide up the Ignatian sources. The central text of Ignatian spirituality is, no doubt, the *Spiritual Exercises*; this can be supplemented by other texts such as the *Autobiography*, the *Spiritual Diary* and the letters, especially those that offer spiritual counsel. The source texts of Jesuit spirituality, so the normal story goes, include, as well as these texts, at least three others: the *Deliberation of the First Fathers*, the *Formula of the Institute* and the *Jesuit Constitutions*.

The *Deliberation of the First Fathers* of 1538 records the discernment of Ignatius and the first companions that resulted in the intention to form a religious order. The *Formula of the Institute* is a document, included in differing versions in the papal bulls of 1540 and 1550, that established the Society of Jesus: it sets out briefly and vividly the way of life to which Ignatius and the early companions felt called. The *Constitutions of the Society of Jesus*, written by Ignatius and his secretary Juan Alfonso de Polanco, sets out this way of religious life in more detail. What do these texts add that is not already found in the *Spiritual Exercises*? I would say they add a guide to one way of living out the

Exercises in the Fifth Week, at least for Jesuits. And this is why they may be relevant, at least indirectly, not only to Jesuit spirituality but also to Ignatian spirituality.⁷

I claim, then, that Ignatian spirituality needs a guide to living the Fifth Week, not only in a Jesuit way, but in multiple ways adapted to the wonderful variety of possibilities offered by the Ignatian spirit. Some wisdom can be taken from the *Spiritual Exercises* themselves, but there is much that Ignatian spirituality in its different forms can learn from the *Deliberation*, the *Formula* and the *Constitutions* about how the Ignatian spirit can be lived out in the Fifth Week. Nor is it all one-way: no doubt Jesuits can and do learn more about their own charism by seeing how the Ignatian spirit is lived by those in quite different walks of life.

What, then, is the image from Jesuit spirituality that I mentioned, which I suggest may have broad relevance not only for Jesuits but also for anyone who has done the *Spiritual Exercises*? Its origins lie in a book, published in 1974, by the French Jesuit Dominique Bertrand.⁸ He asks why the *Constitutions* are needed: why not simply make do with the *Spiritual Exercises*? His reply is that *the spirit needs a body*. That is the image: a spirit in search of a body. The spirit of the Exercises, Bertrand suggests, needs to be incarnated, made flesh, embodied. First, it needs to find flesh in concrete persons and their lives. Second, this spirit also needs to be embodied in a community. As Brian O'Leary puts it, 'The charism (which is spirit) needs a body (which is flesh and blood, inculturated and historical)'—or, more poetically, 'the spirit cries out to be enfleshed'.⁹

This image of a spirit in search of a body is a fecund one, as we strive to live in the Fifth Week. The spirit of the Exercises needs to be incarnated in a way of life and in a community. What does that look like? How does that happen? That is the topic.¹⁰ Here I try to sketch the broad outlines of an answer, focusing on embodiment within a particular way of life. Embodiment of the Ignatian spirit in a community or institution is a second aspect of this question, one to be addressed, I hope, at a later date.

⁷ For an elaboration of the use of the documents in Ignatian spirituality, see Paul Nicholson's article below, 73–79.

⁸ Dominique Bertrand, *Un corps pour l'esprit. Essai sur l'expérience communautaire d'après les Constitutions de la Compagnie de Jésus* (Paris: Desclée de Brouwer, 1974).

⁹ Brian O'Leary, *Sent into the Lord's Vineyard: Explorations in the Jesuit Constitutions* (Oxford: Way Books, 2012), 22–23.

¹⁰ For an excellent book-length treatment, see Margaret Blackie, *Rooted in Love: Integrating Ignatian Spirituality into Daily Life* (Oxford: Way Books, 2014).

‘En todo, amar y servir’

The Spiritual Exercises are precisely that: exercises. Just as an athlete trains to prepare the body to run, so a Christian does spiritual exercises to prepare the soul for the race of discipleship. ‘For, just as taking a walk, traveling on foot, and running are physical exercises, so is the name of spiritual exercises given to any means of preparing and disposing our soul’ (Exx 1). The Exercises, I would say, are what the medieval scholastic philosophers and theologians would have called an ‘intermediate end’: while valuable in themselves, they also point towards a greater end and fulfilment beyond.

Where in the Exercises do we find this forward orientation beyond themselves? The short answer is that every spiritual exercise, whether a consideration, a meditation or a contemplation, prepares the way and readies the soul for the Fifth Week. All of its exercises are, to use Tolkien’s words, foreshadowings, foreshowings, foresingings of what is yet to be attained, realised, embodied. Yet there are two exercises that stand out in bridging from the Four Weeks to the Fifth. The first is the Election, by which exercitants may choose a specific way of living their service of the Lord (Exx 169–189); the second is the final exercise, the Contemplation to Attain Love, or the *Contemplatio* for short (Exx 230–237).¹¹ I shall focus my remarks on the *Contemplatio*.¹²

The grace we ask for in the *Contemplatio* is that having come to a sense in the round of all the gifts we have received, we may love and serve the ‘Divine Majesty’ in everything (Exx 233). The phrase in the Spanish text of the Exercises (the ‘Autograph’) is today set to a popular Taizé-like chant: *En todo, amar y servir*. One might say, then, that this is the song that is going round in one’s head as one leaves the Four Weeks of the Exercises. It is, one hopes, the soundtrack for the Fifth Week, that is, the rest of one’s life: in all, to love and to serve God.

I venture a broad-brush generalisation: that in the history of Ignatian spirituality, there have been—and still are—two ways of interpreting this grace, or at least two different accents. One reading emphasizes *amar*, loving God; the other *servir*, serving God. I begin with the *servir* option: interpreting the Fifth Week through the lens of serving God in all things.

¹¹ For classic commentary, see Michael Buckley, ‘The Contemplation to Attain Love’, *The Way Supplement*, 45 (1975), 92–104.

¹² The two are closely related, since one prays in the *Contemplatio* to love and serve God in all things, and the Election can be seen as the discerned choice of one particular way of doing just that.

Serving God, Serving Others

For many years, the classic reference for Jesuit spirituality was a book by Joseph de Guibert, a French Jesuit who died in 1942. After his death, his magisterial work on the spirituality of the Society of Jesus was published.¹³ In it, he famously distinguishes a ‘mysticism of service’ from a ‘mysticism of nuptial union’. In Ignatius’ writings, according to de Guibert, one finds an absence of the language of the mystical marriage between Christ and the soul so characteristic of Theresa of Ávila or John of the Cross. ‘On the contrary, what pervades all Ignatius’s relations with the Divine Persons and with Christ is the humble and loving attitude of the servant.’¹⁴ Ignatius’ spirituality, for de Guibert, is not one of loving embrace but of service.

Later scholars have taken de Guibert’s suggestion seriously. John O’ Malley puts it this way: ‘The isolation of the concept of “service” as



Christ in the House of Martha and Mary, by
El Greco, 1600

a key to understanding the spirituality of Loyola and his followers throws into plausible focus a great deal of the history and tradition of the [Jesuit] order’.¹⁵ What light, then, can this ‘mysticism of service’ shed on the Fifth Week?

Service is two-sided for Ignatius. It primarily means the service of God: everything is to be ordered towards the praise, reverence and service of God (Exx 23). There is no need to run through all the texts. It suffices to pick out one that is particularly enlightening: the famous Fifth Annotation.

¹³ Joseph de Guibert, *The Jesuits: Their Spiritual Doctrine and Practice. A Historical Study*, translated by William J. Young (St Louis: Institute of Jesuit Sources, 1964).

¹⁴ de Guibert, *Jesuits*, 56.

¹⁵ John W. O’Malley, review of *The Jesuits: Their Spiritual Doctrine and Practice* by Joseph de Guibert, *Renaissance News*, 18/2 (1965), 144–145, here 144.

The persons who make the Exercises will benefit greatly by entering upon them with great spirit and generosity [*con grande ánimo e liberalidad*] toward their Creator and Lord, and by offering all their desires and freedom to him so that His Divine Majesty can make use of their persons and of all they possess in whatsoever way is in accord with his most holy will. (Exx 5)

This is the spirit of the Exercises, the spirit of the *magis*, which not only begins the Exercises but is found on every page throughout and, especially, at the culmination, in the 'Take, Lord, and receive' of the *Contemplatio* (Exx 234).

How exactly do we serve God? In Ignatian spirituality, the instinctive answer is that we serve God by serving our neighbour. Admittedly, there are souls, such as members of contemplative religious congregations, who serve God primarily by prayer. Ignatius himself had a great regard for the Carthusian vocation. But for the majority of those who make the Exercises, prayer spills out into a life of practical ministry; contemplation overflows into action.

What does this look like in the Society of Jesus? The language used by Ignatius and the early companions is that the purpose of the Society is to serve the faith and to help souls. By 1550, the early Jesuits had come up with this list of practices of service: first, ministries of the Word of God, such as preaching and lectures; second, ministries of the interiorisation of the Word, such as giving the Spiritual Exercises, catechizing, hearing confessions and administering the sacraments; and third, ministries of giving witness to the Word, by reconciling the estranged, serving those in prisons or hospitals, or any other works of charity, for the glory of God and the common good.¹⁶ That is already quite a diverse list of ways of helping our neighbour. Over the centuries it has grown. By General Congregation 32 in 1975, the Society had expanded its definition of its own purpose: 'To promote justice, to proclaim the faith and to lead others to a personal encounter with Christ are the three inseparable elements that make up the whole of our apostolate'.¹⁷ Today, Jesuit mission adds to the original lists practices such as the promotion of justice, dialogue with other religious and cultures, and care for our common home.

For those other than Jesuits, service of neighbour also takes a variety of forms. It will look different, for example, for a married person

¹⁶ For this way of summarising the early Jesuit ministries, see O'Leary, *Sent into the Lord's Vineyard*, 94.

¹⁷ GC 32, decree 4, 'The Service of Faith and the Promotion of Justice'.

or a single layperson from how it will look for a Jesuit or a religious sister of the Congregation of Jesus. But whatever form it takes, a Fifth Week is naturally a life focused primarily not on oneself and one's own well-being but on serving God by living for the good of others.

In saying that Ignatian spirituality is a spirituality of service, it is important not to reduce it merely to a moral programme: *We ought to serve others*. This is true, but does not get to the deeper Ignatian dynamic. A life of service to others, in Ignatian spirituality, is not only an ethic but also a spirituality. The Ignatian service of others is a spirituality because, in an Ignatian life, it is a way of being united with God. This is why de Guibert rightly refers to the spirituality of the Society of Jesus not only as a 'service' but as a '*mysticism of service*'.¹⁸

There are two especially important Ignatian terms that express this mysticism of service: one is 'mission'; the other is 'instrument'. Ignatian mission would be an entire topic in its own right. I focus here on the second term: 'instrument'.

The Human Instrument

Ignatius wants us to aim to be well-disposed instruments in the hand of Christ our Lord. We just saw that in the Fifth Annotation: those making the Exercises offer God their whole selves 'so that His Divine Majesty can make use of their persons'. And it is a key image in the *Constitutions*, where the Society of Jesus, and those Jesuits who compose it, are referred to as a 'human instrument', united with God and wielded by the hand of Christ (*Constitutions*, X.2 [813]).

This image may not at first hearing sound too promising. As Aaron Pidel has recently pointed out, in our culture of autonomy we instinctively resist language that suggests we ought to be used by anyone, let alone a divine being.¹⁹ Pidel explains, however, that in the medieval theology that Ignatius inherited, an instrument is not a merely passive tool, but an agent, one that works in tandem with a higher agent to produce a nobler effect than it could alone.

A classic example is that of a harp in the hands of a skilled musician.²⁰ By itself a harp can only produce noise—for example if it is dropped.

¹⁸ de Guibert, *Jesuits*, 50.

¹⁹ Aaron Pidel, 'A Neglected Aspect of Ignatian Spirituality: Becoming God's Instruments', *America*, 232/3 (13 February 2025).

²⁰ Reginald Lynch, 'Cajetan's Harp: Sacraments and the Life of Grace in Light of Perfective Instrumentality', *The Thomist*, 78/1 (2014), 65–106.

But when plucked by a gifted artist, the harp genuinely produces, not mere noise, but music. A harp produces music, therefore, not alone, but in tandem. This is the glory of being a harp: it is a cooperator, a co-agent, with its own contribution to make. In medieval theology the sacraments are instruments in this sense. Water, for example, by itself cannot cause grace but can genuinely channel grace in the sacrament of baptism.

For Ignatius, then, being an instrument united to God does not degrade human beings into mere tools, things to be used, puppets dangling from the hands of a divine puppeteer in the sky; rather, it elevates them, unites them to God's action, making them capable of transmitting God's grace in the world. Moreover, a person serving God is not merely an instrument united to God's action but, Ignatius says, a *human* instrument, that is, an instrument with freedom and choice. God works through a human instrument in a way suited to human nature, not bypassing human liberty but operating through it.²¹ This is why, in the *Contemplatio*, the exercitant is invited to pray, 'Take, Lord, receive, all my liberty': not so that God may take our freedom away, but may work in it. This happens through a relationship of charity or friendship with God, as in Ignatius' Meditation on the Two Standards: whereas the enemy of our human nature sends out demons 'to set up snares and chains', Christ our Lord sends out his 'servants and friends' (Exx 141–142; 146). Ignatian cooperation with God is not being 'used' in the negative sense, without consent; Ignatian cooperation is the cooperation of friends.

It is easy for most to recognise that God has worked in their lives through loving, wise, compassionate people. The challenge is to personalise this insight, to apply it to oneself by recognising that *God can work through me for others*. This is what the Four Weeks of the Spiritual Exercises are about: tuning up the human harp, as it were, fitting it to Christ's hand, so that in our Fifth Week he can play the music of his Good News through us in the world.

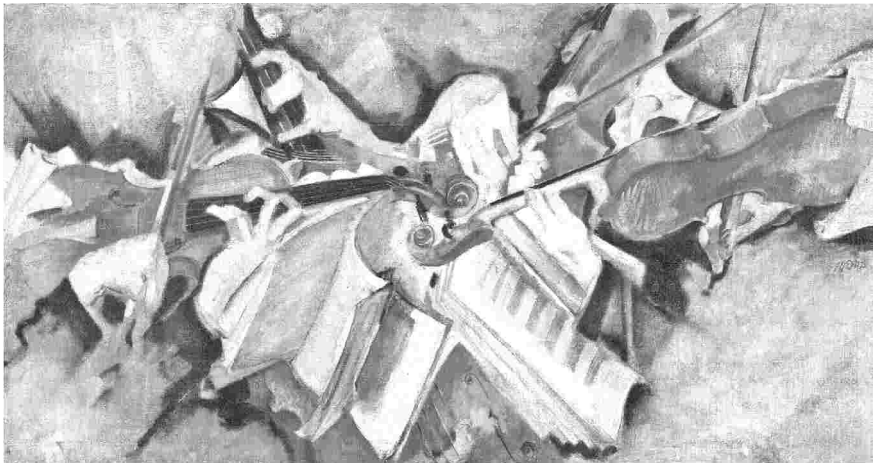
A sense of one's own weakness and fragility can become a barrier to this spirituality of being a willing instrument fitted to Christ's hand.

²¹ Biblical sources for this spirituality of free cooperation include John 14:8–14. See also 1 Corinthians 15: 10: 'But by the grace of God I am what I am, and his grace toward me has not been in vain. On the contrary, I worked harder than any of them—though it was not I, but the grace of God that is with me.' Important theological background to the Ignatian spirituality of cooperation is found in Thomas Aquinas, *Summa theologiae*, 1.2 q. 113, a. 3 corpus. Aquinas says: 'God moves all things according to the mode proper to each' and so moves humans according to their nature as beings of free choice. Indeed, God 'moves the free choice to accept the gift of grace'. A human action can be simultaneously free and moved by God. Grace and free human action are not in competition, not opponents in a 'zero-sum' game.

However, for Ignatius, it is not sinful pride to recognise that one can be an instrument of God when the glory is given to the one who originates, empowers and sustains this service.²² Ignatius urges Jesuits to pray that God may dispose those for whom we work 'to receive his grace through the weak instruments of this least Society' (*Constitutions*, VII.4.3 [638]). The Lord knows how to work even through imperfect means.

Ignacio Boné Pina once shared an image that I believe can help with this Ignatian spirituality of instrumentality.²³ It comes from a 2012 film entitled, *A Late Quartet*, starring Christopher Walken. The movie is about an elite New York string quartet. The cellist, played by Walken, is the senior figure who announces to his colleagues that the next concert will be his last, as he has been diagnosed with Parkinson's disease. The group is to play Beethoven's Opus 131, a late quartet. The challenge in performing this extraordinary piece is that its seven movements are to be played without break. Walken's character explains that, inevitably, the instruments begin to go out of tune during the performance. What can the musicians do? It would not be right to stop and retune. Somehow, they have to adjust mid-flow to their own instruments and those of their colleagues.

In the film, the late quartet is a metaphor for the relationships among the instrumentalists, which begin to go out of tune. For example, the



String Quartet, by Max Oppenheimer, 1948

²² See Ignatius's letter to Teresa Rejadell of 1536, in *Personal Writings*, 130–132.

²³ Ignacio shared this during the tertianship programme 2013–2014 at Cardoner House, Dublin.

second violinist becomes fed up with literally playing second fiddle and asks to replace his wife as first violinist. Their relationship begins to fall apart, as do those of others. Will the performance go ahead, and will the quartet survive these challenges? In the Fifth Week, as in *A Late Quartet*, we cannot always stop to retune our instruments. The point is not to aim to be perfectly well-tuned. We can do our best to be ready but inevitably we, too, go out of tune. But Christ has the power and sheer skill to play effectively even through 'weak instruments'. *En todo, amar y servir*.

Loving God

There is much to be said for the classical viewpoint, that Ignatian spirituality is a mysticism of cooperation, of instrumentality, of service, not of nuptial union. But it may not be the whole truth.²⁴

The Jesuit moral theologian Edward Vacek has drawn attention to a phenomenon in the modern Church, which he calls the 'Eclipse of the Love of God'.²⁵ This eclipse is often noticeable when a preacher expands on the two great commandments. The first great commandment is to love the Lord your God with all your heart, mind and strength; the second is to love your neighbour as yourself (Matthew 22:37–39). How, though, does one fulfil the first commandment? How does one love the Lord? The answer most commonly given is that one loves the Lord by loving one's neighbour.

This response no doubt has its truth. If done as a way of serving and loving God, service of one's neighbour can be a way of loving God. 'Truly I tell you, just as you did it to one of the least of these who are members of my family, you did it to me.' (Matthew 25:40b) But notice what has just happened: the love of God has been eclipsed, because the first great commandment was collapsed into the second *without remainder*. And this is a loss because it neglects the importance of a direct relationship with God. As Vacek puts it provocatively, just as taking the rubbish out for sick neighbours is no replacement for developing a relationship with them, so too doing good works is not a complete substitute for loving God directly. Vacek explains:

²⁴ See the critique of de Guibert in Michael J. Buckley, 'Ecclesial Mysticism in the Spiritual Exercises of Ignatius', *Theological Studies*, 56/3 (1995), 441–463.

²⁵ Edward C. Vacek, 'The Eclipse of Love for God', *America*, 174/8 (9 March 1996), 13–16. This article summarises the more sustained argument of Edward C. Vacek, *Love, Human and Divine: The Heart of Christian Ethics* (Washington, DC: Georgetown U, 1996).

I want to argue that love of creatures is not enough We are essentially relational beings. We are stunted when our relational potentials are unfulfilled. We have a native desire for God, and our hearts will shrivel up unless they beat for God. Hence, in order to become fully who we are, we must be growing in love for God.²⁶

This apposite warning about the contemporary tendency to eclipse the love of God by reducing it to neighbour-love, and the recognition that we need to love God immediately and directly, are of foremost importance to spirituality. A spirituality of service, such as de Guibert describes, always risks becoming a kind of activism, focused primarily on what we do with our lives rather than the prior question of our relationship with God. Such a spirituality would then be an avoidance of intimacy with God, encouraging workaholism or care without respite for the carer. The love of God is eclipsed by an exclusive focus on the love of neighbour, and our hearts may shrivel.

An alternative way of looking at the Four Weeks of the Exercises, then, is that they are primarily not preparation for service but first a school of prayer, of intimacy with God, to be deepened in the Fifth Week. This is suggested especially in Annotation 15, which encourages the one handing on the Exercises ‘to allow the Creator to deal immediately with the creature and the creature with its Creator and Lord’ (Exx 15). This direct relationship suffuses all the Exercises. In the Four Weeks, we learn how to stand in the gaze of God gazing at us with love (Exx 75); express our deepest desires to God (Exx 48); learn an intimate knowledge of Jesus Christ our Lord who became human out of love for each of us (Exx 104); converse with Christ face to face as a friend talks with a friend (Exx 54); and learn to discern the action of the Spirit in our hearts and our world (Exx 234–237; 313–336). The soul may even be led, at times, ‘to be inflamed with love of its Creator and Lord. As a result it can love no created thing on the face of the earth in itself, but only in the Creator of them all.’ (Exx 316) Throughout the Exercises, there is a priority given to loving God directly.

This recognition points to an alternative interpretation of the grace of the *Contemplatio*, as not so much that of cooperative union, as the union of intimacy and love. The Four Weeks are a school of intimacy with the Lord and the main task of the Fifth Week is simply to continue to fan the flame of this relationship, through the ups and downs of life.

²⁶ Vacek, ‘Eclipse of Love for God’, 14.

Service will come, but it will flow out of the relationship with the Lord. Representatives of this tradition include Bernard Lonergan and, in a different way, more recent spiritual writers such as William Barry and Peter Hannan.²⁷

Too often Ignatian, and especially Jesuit, spirituality has focused exclusively on the Third Point of the *Contemplatio*: ‘consider how God labors and works for me in all the creatures on the face of the earth’. It has eclipsed the Second Point, to, ‘consider how God dwells in creatures ... how in this way he dwells also in myself’ (Exx 235). A myopic focus on a God who labours—in wilful ignorance of a God who dwells—is a recipe for a spirituality of activism and burnout. The labouring God needs to be counterbalanced by attention to a God who dwells, who remains, who relates to us directly, not only practically but with intimate love. ‘Come and see’, Jesus tells the prospective disciples who ask him where he is staying; ‘and they remained with him that day’ (John 1:39).

Living the Offering

So where does this leave us? *En todo, amar y servir*. One interpretation emphasizes *amar*, loving God; another interpretation accents *servir*, serving God. In Ignatius, the two are not separated but conjoined. *En todo, amar y servir*. In all things, *both* to love *and* to serve.

I do not pretend to be able to offer a full answer about how to integrate love and service within Ignatian spirituality. To understand that is no doubt the fruit of a lifetime of living the Exercises in the Fifth Week. But it is easy to see that the integration of the two is desirable as well as authentically Ignatian. For the two complement each other; they offer counterbalance, preserving each other from going off the rails. Without love of God, service risks becoming instrumental and workaholic; without service, love of God risks becoming self-centred and sentimental. It can be a fruitful exercise in its own right to review moments in one’s experience when the two come together, where one becomes contemplative also in action.

²⁷ See William A. Barry, *With an Everlasting Love: Developing an Intimate Relationship with God* (Mahwah: Paulist, 1999); and Peter Hannan, *The Quiet Revolution: Rediscovering Adult Faith in the Modern World* (Dublin: Columba, 2010). Gordon Rixon comments: ‘While it can be obviously argued that neither a mysticism of service through love nor a mysticism of transforming union are mutually exclusive, Lonergan’s discussion of the Spiritual Exercises makes a clear option for the priority of union and assimilation as the principles from which service might consequently flow’ (Gordon Rixon, ‘Bernard Lonergan and Mysticism’, *Theological Studies*, 62/3 [2001], 479–497, here 487).

That the spirituality proper to the Fifth Week is a spirituality of both love and service is suggested, not merely by the grace of the *Contemplatio*, but by the culminating offering of this Exercise in the *Suscipe*, the 'Take, Lord, receive'. Contemplating God's gifts and God's desire to give even Godself to us, we are led to make an offering of ourselves to God. As Saint Robert Southwell sounds it, in the defiant key of a martyr, 'God is my gift, himself he freely gave me./ God's gift am I and none but God shall have me.'²⁸ That self-gift in response to God's self-gift is the core of the *Contemplatio*, the core of the Exercises. Is this gift of self the intimacy of love, or is it the gift of service? It is both.

Note, however, that this Fifth Week grace and task, that of loving and serving God in all things, resists reduction to some aspect or other of the Four Weeks, even the *Suscipe* of the *Contemplatio*. The reason is quite simple: to live out the *Suscipe* is a grace and action distinct from the making of that offering in the Exercises. This is evident from the parallel with the formula of vows a novice makes at the end of his novitiate, asking that, 'just as you gave me the grace to desire and offer this, so you will also bestow abundant grace to fulfil it' (*Constitutions*, III. 1.3 [247]). What one asks at the end of the Exercises in the *Contemplatio* is a Fifth Week grace: not only to *make* an offering, but to *live* that offering, that is, to love and serve in all things. 'Not everyone who says to me, "Lord, Lord", will enter the kingdom of heaven, but only the one who does the will of my Father in heaven' (Matthew 7:21).

The spirit cries out to be enfleshed. What the Four Weeks of the Exercises give us is a spirit of contemplating, loving and serving God in all activities. This spirit is made flesh in the Fifth Week in an embodied spirituality of cooperative and loving union. These are not two separate spiritualities, one of service and one of love, but an integrated spirituality of love and service. *En todo, amar y servir*.

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²⁸ Robert Southwell, 'The Nativity of Christe', in *Collected Poems*, edited by Peter Davidson and Anne Sweeney (Manchester: Carcanet, 2007), 7.