

## All My Liberty

### Chapter 6: Modes of Humility

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The expression “Degrees of Humility” does not occur in either the Spanish autograph or the recognized versions of the original text. The Spanish uses the term *maneras* or types of humility; the various Latin translations use Species or Modes. There is more than subtlety behind these synonyms. By definition, degree implies a quantitative difference, whereas mode and species are qualitative.

Accordingly, the second mode differs from the first, and the third from the first two, not only in having more humility but in being humility of a qualitatively higher kind. In other words, to rise from a lower to a higher type of humility (in the Ignatian sense) means not merely to accumulate more of what we already possess, but to enter into an essentially superior form of moral disposition. Since the term “Degrees of Humility” is commonly acceptable, there is no problem in using it; as there is also some advantage in knowing the proper meaning which the Exercises attach to this name.

#### Ascetical Theme

The purpose of the meditation on the Three Modes of Humility is still better to prepare the exercitant for a good Election. By contrast with the Three Classes, the Modes represent the last preparatory stage before the actual Election. Where the function of the Classes was primarily negative, to remove inordinate affection for the creatures, the Modes are strictly positive, to test and inspire the will for complete dedication to the service of God. In

the words of St. Ignatius, “Before any one enters on the Election, that he may be *well affected* towards the teaching of Christ our Lord, it will be profitable to consider and examine the following modes of humility.”

As conceived by the Exercises, humility is the proper disposition that a human will should assume in relation to the divine, and may reach one of three levels of union with the will of God, in ascending order of sublimity.

The first type of humility means that quality of submission to the Divine Majesty which makes the will ready to sacrifice any created good, even life itself, rather than disobey a commandment of God binding under mortal sin. In terms of indifference, it requires habitual detachment at least from those creatures which may not be enjoyed without loss of sanctifying grace.

The second type of humility is essentially higher. It presupposes the first and goes beyond it with a readiness to sacrifice anything rather than offend God by venial sin. Like the first, it also requires detachment from creatures, and not only from those which are sinful but to a certain extent also from such as may legitimately be used without sin. To practice the second mode, I should be no more “inclined to have riches rather than poverty, to seek honor rather than dishonor, to desire a long life rather than a short life, provided in either alternative I would promote equally the service of God and the salvation of my soul.” St. Ignatius’ doctrine here is in full accord with the teaching of ascetical theology, that our fallen human nature requires not a few practices which are not strictly obligatory, hence of counsel, if we are to avoid mortal sin, and a *fortiori* venial offenses against God. According to Suarez, “It is impossible even

for a lay person to be firmly resolved never to sin mortally unless he does some works of supererogation and has an explicit or at least virtual intention to perform them.” [1]

Assuming the first and second modes of humility to be already attained, if the will remains not merely indifferent to poverty or riches, honor or dishonor, but positively desires and chooses by preference poverty and dishonor in imitation of Christ, “this is the most perfect kind of humility.” As explained by St. Ignatius in a little-known *Directory* written by himself, the fundamental difference between the second and the third modes lies in the attitude of will towards poverty and humiliations, with all their implications. If the will is ready to accept them, but equally ready to embrace the opposite, we have the second mode; if it is not only willing to accept but actually prefers poverty and humiliations, we have the third. “If it is possible,” Ignatius directs, “the exercitant should rise to the third grade of humility, in which, as far as he can, he is more inclined to what is more conformed to the evangelical counsels and the example of Christ our Lord, if the service of God be equal.” [2] But if he inclines less to the counsels, as exemplified in the poverty and humiliation of Christ, at least he should be detached from riches and honors according to the second mode.

The author of the Exercises identifies the value of a retreat with a person’s willingness to accept the evangelical counsels. He instructs the director professedly to “dispose the retreatant to desire the counsels rather than the precepts, if this be for the greater service of God.” Consequently, “whoever has not reached the indifference of the second degree,” which implies at least a passive

acceptance of certain counsels, “should not be encouraged to make the election and will more profitably be given other exercises until he acquires this indifference.” [3]

## Theological Problem

St. Ignatius twice uses the term “equal” to explain the service or glory given to God by the practice of humility. He describes the second mode as indifference to poverty, riches, and the like, “provided only in either alternative I would promote equally the service of God our Lord and the salvation of my soul.” In the third mode, I prefer poverty to riches, “supposing equal praise and glory to the Divine Majesty.” However, the concept of “equal” is basically the same in both cases.

In the second mode, I evidently cannot remain indifferent to poverty or riches if I know that God would be better served and my salvation more assured by accepting riches instead of poverty. The moment I am faced with the prospect of any sin unless I choose one or the other, poverty or riches, honor or dishonor, I do not hesitate in choosing that which involves no offense against God. But given a situation where no sin (even venial) is involved, and in that sense as regards their essence my salvation and God’s service are equally advanced through riches or poverty—I remain indifferent, i.e., equally disposed to accept poverty or riches, honor or dishonor. The condition, however, is always that God’s service and my salvation would not be better promoted in a given instance if I preferred poverty to riches or vice versa.

The third mode of humility transcends mere indifference and actually prefers poverty and humiliation. This is an habitual disposition of

will. Even so, I cannot prefer poverty, dishonor and contempt in any concrete circumstance if I know that God would be more glorified by the acceptance of riches and honor, as would be the case if the choice of poverty and humiliation involved sin or hindered the active apostolate. But “supposing equal praise and glory to the Divine Majesty,” i.e., no question of sin or apostolic injury whether I prefer poverty or riches, honor or dishonor, then, in order “better to imitate Christ our Lord and be in reality more like Him, I desire and choose poverty with Christ poor, rather than riches; insults with Christ loaded with them, rather than honors; I desire to be accounted as worthless and a fool for Christ, rather than to be esteemed as wise and prudent in this world.”

In the second and third modes, therefore, we have one element constant and the other variable. The constant is expressed by St. Ignatius’ formula of “equal service of God,” and means fidelity to the essential precepts of the Gospel and the good of souls. If this were absent, there would be unequal service of God, no matter how indifferent a person were to creatures or even preferred poverty and contempt to riches and honor. The variable factor is the attitude of will towards riches, honor, and their opposites. In the second mode, I am indifferent in this matter, and ready to accept poverty and humiliations (or enjoy riches and honor), and to that extent I have the spirit of the counsels, at least passively. But in the third mode, I am no longer indifferent; I prefer and desire the cross in imitation of Christ my Lord. Here is the full-flowering of Christian perfection, as St. Ignatius says, “where a person is more inclined to what is more conformed to the evangelical counsels and the example of Christ our Lord.” [4]

The three modes can be illustrated by the example of a man who has unjustly suffered a grave injury to his honor:

*First Mode:* He does not care to retrieve his good name if it cannot be done without serious sin.

*Second Mode:* He will not try to defend his honor if this would involve committing venial sin; but if it can be done without sin, he wants to restore his reputation.

*Third Mode:* He considers the loss of reputation as profit in Christ. Instead of defending himself, he will gladly suffer the injury in silence. But on one condition: as long as God’s glory is equally served, i.e., when neither a moral obligation nor benefit to others demands that he vindicate his legitimate rights. If such an obligation or benefit exists, then *ipso facto* there is no longer equal glory to God, and he will defend his reputation without failing in the spirit of the third mode. All the while his internal dispositions are such that if a just defense of his honor were not obligatory in itself or profitable to the neighbor, he will consider it a privilege to suffer in the company of his humiliated Master. [5]

## Rationale of the Third Mode of Humility

The essence of the third mode of humility consists in preferring what is difficult, simply out of love for Christ, in order to be more like Him in poverty, humiliation and suffering. Unlike the first and second modes, the reasonableness of my attitude in the third degree is not so apparent, and except for the light of faith would be quite unintelligible.

Subjectively the motive for practicing the third degree is sheer love, expressed in the desire to be conformed to Christ, the Spouse of an ardent soul. No other reason is sought and none demanded. But objectively there is a deep reason why an earnest follower of Christ should wish to imitate Him in want and ignominy. It is the purpose of all pain and suffering, which is reparative and expiatory: reparation in restoring the honor which is owing to God's offended majesty, and expiation in removing the stain of guilt and debt of punishment which the sinner has incurred.

If I am looking for a reason to prefer poverty to riches and contempt to honor, I have it in my love for Christ. Love is by nature assimilable; it desires to be like the one loved. If I ask further why Christ, "for the joy set before Him chose the Cross," I find it in the mystery of Redemption. It was the will of His heavenly Father that the world should be redeemed not only by the Incarnation, but in the historical atmosphere of suffering and pain. In the obedience to His Father, Christ chose to save the human race by enduring poverty, rejection, opposition and finally the disgrace of crucifixion although, absolutely speaking, the Redemption might have been accomplished by only a moment's pain. That Christ preferred this method of saving the world shows His wisdom in proving how much He loves us and how much we mean to Him; it also invites us to follow His example and prove our love for Him in return.

But the imitation of Christ in His suffering implies more than a way of proving our love for Him. It releases an energy which promotes the salvation of the world. The fact is a matter of faith; the explanation must be sought in the doctrine of the Mystical Body. For although

the earthly life of Christ and His death more than sufficiently atoned for the sins of mankind, nevertheless by a "marvelous disposition of Divine Wisdom, we may complete those things that are wanting in the sufferings of Christ in our own flesh, for His body, which is the Church." This mystical identification of Christ with His members makes possible the application of His merits, gained by tribulation, to individual souls, beginning with our own and extending to all the human race, not only on earth but also in purgatory; and not only in the Church but also outside the Mystical Body. It was on this basis that Pius XI placed the effectiveness of reparation to the Sacred Heart. "In the degree to which our oblation and sacrifice more perfectly correspond to the sacrifice of Our Lord; that is, to the extent to which we have immolated love of self and our passions and crucified our flesh in that mystical crucifixion of which the Apostle writes, so much the more plentiful fruits of propitiation and expiation will we gain for ourselves and for others." [6]

The same idea was expressed from another viewpoint by Pius XII, in urging the imitation of Christ suffering for the benefit of the Mystical Body and the salvation of the modern world. Although His passion and death merited for the Church an infinite treasure of mercy, "God's inscrutable providence has decreed that these abundant graces should not be granted us all at once; and the amount of grace to be given depends in no small part also on our good deeds. They draw to the souls of men this ready flow of heavenly gifts granted by God. These heavenly gifts will surely flow more abundantly if we not only pray fervently to God . . . but if we also set our hearts on eternal treasures rather than the passing things

of this world, restrain this mortal body by voluntary mortification, denying it what is forbidden, forcing it to do what is hard and distasteful, and finally accept as from God's hands the burdens and sorrows of this present life." If there was never a time when the salvation of souls did not oblige us to associate our sufferings with those of the Redeemer, "that duty is clearer than ever today when a cosmic struggle has set almost the whole world on fire," and only Christ in His members can save it. [7]

In the meditation on the Kingdom it is imperative to have a correct notion of suffering and humiliation as instruments for personal sanctification antecedent to the apostolate. The more closely a man follows Christ, poor and contemned, the greater becomes his union with God and the more effective his labor for souls.

Another feature of the imitation of Christ, however, belongs to the apostolate itself. If we examine the pages of the Gospel, where do we find Christ practicing poverty, suffering humiliations and enduring contempt even to the death of the cross? Is it not in the very work of saving souls? Every action of Christ on earth was intrinsically apostolic in carrying out the mission of His Father to redeem the world. In imitating Him, we shall find that a large source of suffering in our lives stems from the apostolate. And the more zealous we are, the greater share of trials we shall have. St. Ignatius is warrant for the statement that "the greatest reward that a servant of God can receive for what he has done for his neighbor is scorn and contempt, the only reward that the world gave for the labors of its Divine Master."

St. Paul testified to how much a person must be ready to endure if he will follow Christ in the apostolate: "... in journeyings often, in perils in the city, in perils in the wilderness, in perils in the sea, in perils from false brethren; in labors and hardships, in many sleepless nights, in hunger and thirst, in fastings often, in cold and nakedness. Besides these outer things, there is my daily pressing anxiety, the care of all the churches." [8] But in all of this, Paul was happy to suffer and gloried in the cross he was privileged to bear, because he saw himself not only imitating Christ to his own sanctification but cooperating with the Redeemer in the salvation of the world.

## Chapter 6 **References**

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- [1] Francis Suarez, *De Religione*, Tract. IV, Lib. I, cap. 4, num. 12.
- [2] *Monumenta Historica*, "Exercitia Spiritualia," p. 781.
- [3] *Ibid.*, pp. 779, 781
- [4] *Ibid.*, p. 781.
- [5] *Opera Spiritualia Joannis P. Roothaan*, Vol. II, p. 117.
- [6] Pius XI, Encyclical *Miserentissimus Redemptor*, in "Sacred Heart Encyclicals" (Carl Moell edit.), New York, pp. 38-40.
- [7] Pius XII, Encyclical *Mystici Corporis Christi* (N.C.W.C. translation), 1943, pp. 66-67.
- [8] II Corinthians 11: 26-28.

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