THE CALL OF THE KING

By JOHN COVENTRY

FR HUGO RAHNER has shown[1] how in a true sense the Exercises reflect Ignatius' own spiritual autobiography. He was born into a family which had a long and proud tradition of service of *El Rey Catolico*, the Catholic King of Castile. As a youngster he did his apprenticeship at court, and grew up fired by ideals of nobility in action, knightly deeds of chivalry and service, personal achievement and distinction. The typically ignatian ideal of the highest quality, *ad maiorem Dei gloriam*, which finds classic expression in the Kingdom exercise in the phrase, *ii qui maiori affectu esse volent, et insignes se exhibere in omni servitio sui Regis aeterni et Domini universalis . . .*, had its natural birth in this courtly framework of his life. In the introduction to the *Vita Christi* of Ludolph the Carthusian which he used, he would have read the editor's reminder to Ferdinand and Isabella that the rule of earthly kings is only a figure of the royal majesty of God, eternal King of all kings. In the Kingdom exercise and at other points in the Exercises he pictures God as a majestic king, surrounded by his saints as by a king's court, his *curia coelestis*. The edition of the lives of the saints which brought about his conversion depicted them as knights of God. It was with the ambition to be a noble knight of God that he made his vigil before our Lady's altar at Montserrat, as he tells us himself.

We have it from both Oliver Manareus and Jerome Nadal that at Manresa Ignatius was preoccupied with two exercises in particular, the Kingdom and the Two Standards. As he looked back over his previous life, he saw himself precisely as the sluggard knight, who had been deaf to his king's summons; he was penetrated with shame and confusion at the thought of such a dishonourable way of living; he saw clearly how such a one 'would incur the reprobation of all mankind and be regarded as a disgraceful coward'.[2]

We must be careful, however, not to confuse the matter of the *Spiritual Exercises* with what might be called their form – in the sense

[1] Rahner, H., S.J., *The Spirituality of St Ignatius Loyola.* An account of its historical development (Westminster, MD. 1953). [2] Exx 94.

of the use he put it to, the lessons he used it to convey. The matter is traceable in the cultural background of Ignatius, in the romances he read, in the few books which made such a vivid impression on him at the time of his conversion: they produce the ideal of distinguished and devoted service of Christ the King. But it is the form rather than the matter, the special sense Ignatius gave to service in this courtly context, that the retreat director must be careful to focus. The matter was given to Ignatius by nature and his limited christian experience; the soul he infused into it was given him directly by God in the graces of Manresa and in the vision of Cardoner. It has two characteristics in particular.

First of all, Ignatius learnt at Manresa, and trains the retreatant throughout the Exercises to learn, that the ideal of distinguished and devoted service is to be fulfilled, not by grandiose schemes and achievements, but by the most complete and delicate attuning of the powers of the soul to the inspirations of God's grace. For this self-conquest is necessary: the Kingdom exercise does not merely lead us to offer ourselves without reservation for the enterprise,[1] and it is explicitly said that this is not enough; *agendo contra sensualitatem etc.*,[2] we make an even more worthwhile and exacting offering. We have to learn how disorganised and misdirected are many of our impulses, and to detach them from false ends; we have to get all our powers poised and in readiness; then we have to learn to discern God's will, and to distinguish it from false attractions, so that we may throw ourselves wholeheartedly in its direction. So, at no point are we to have our minds wholly made up about God's will for us; we must remain detached from the best of long-term plans, ready to change direction immediately at God's call. Only this is dedication to the greater glory of God; only this is distinguished service; we must sit light to everything else.

It is this constant theme of the Exercises that separates their spirituality from any merely external imitation of Christ, or from any mere sentimental or superficial devotion to his Person. The idea of imitating Christ is certainly central to Ignatius' thought and to the whole movement of the Exercises throughout the last three weeks. He had been much struck by Ludolph's *Vita Christi* and imports some of its imaginative detail into the *Mysteria Vitae*. He was devoted to the book, *The Imitation of Christ*, and recommends it to the retreatant in a note following immediately on the Kingdom.[3]

[1] Exx 97. [2] 'Going against natural weakness'. Exx 100. [3] Exx 100.

But our contemplation of Christ from this point in the Exercises onwards is always to be accompanied by the Rules for the Discernment of Spirits, so that we learn all the time to discover what is God's particular message for us, and to be delicately receptive and responsive to it. Ignatius had first been fired himself by the idea of mere outward imitation of the saints, whose lives he had read during enforced inactivity: he was going to do valiant and spectacular deeds as they had done. But he learnt at Manresa to abandon all plans save that of conquering himself, and training himself to follow Christ along a way that God would unfold step by step. This responsiveness, and not any outward achievement, was to be the hall mark of distinguished service. This perceptiveness is what the Exercises are geared all through to produce in the retreatant.

The second characteristic of what has been called above the 'soul' that Ignatius infused into the Kingdom material was apostolic zeal. At Manresa and Cardoner he saw Christ the King not just as a model to imitate for personal sanctification, but as a living and redeeming King, combating the forces of evil. In other words, he was given by God the exercises on the King and the Two Standards. He knew that God called him to engage in the salvation of souls, to serve others and to help them, and he devised the Exercises to bring others to the same vision, to engage them in the same enterprise, and to teach them to learn from God how they were to set about it. The enthusiasm which the King is to engender is enthusiasm for the active reign of Christ in his Church on earth.

The function of the exercise

The First Week of the Exercises came to exist or to be usable in its own right, as a set of spiritual exercises, some or all of which men could profitably be put through, who were not judged suitable or ready to go further. But the First Week did not come into existence on its own, or as a detached entity in Ignatius's experience. Even when given apart, it in a sense demands and points to the other Weeks. The earliest Directories advise that for some retreatants it will be better to make a break after the First Week, until their own appetite and readiness for the rest of the Exercises has become more developed: they must be left some time in the purgative way before they can be admitted to the illuminative.

The purpose of the First Week for a retreatant who is making the whole Exercises is not to convert him from sin. A man who was not converted from sin would not be admitted to the whole Exercises.

One who is so admitted must previously have been converted, if not from a sinful life at least to a desire for a more than ordinary christian life. That being said, there remains a true sense in which the First Week reflects and echoes the process of conversion from sin, a process of turning-from. For one who had previously led a sinful life, it may perhaps be said that the First Week enables him to see what God has done for him in turning him from it, and so he is filled with gratitude; for all retreatants there is presented and stressed the idea of disordered impulses and the necessity of ordering them. These are the dominant themes and impressions of the First Week, though they are by no means all that it contains. Positive ideals are engendered, and affective attitudes to them encouraged: the majesty of God, the goodness of God, the fundamental meaning of life as being for his praise, reverence and service. One has reflected that, if all ended here, one would still have a coherent and exacting religion to live by. But it is undeniable that there is a certain coldness about the First Week and that one experiences a certain contraction of heart and a deep impression of one's own nothingness: we are led by self-examination to abhorrence of sin, abhorrence of the disorder of our impulses and actions, abhorrence of mere worldly display and frivolity. We see the immense importance of following God's will and, at the realisation how little we have guided ourselves by this rule in the past, we are filled with shame and confusion. Ignatius has detached us from the wrong values, but he has not yet given us alternative values that can warm our hearts and satisfy our disengaged affections. Reason has a compelling alternative, but our affections are still very largely suspended. It is at this point that we are given the exercise on the Kingdom to open our hearts and to fill them with enthusiasm for Christ as a king who calls us.

Some would question the word enthusiasm on the grounds that it is not for the retreat director to generate enthusiasm, to give stirring exhortations that might produce an unbalancing emotional state. It is not, however, the function of the director that is here being considered, but the intrinsic function of the exercise, the effect it is meant to have on one who makes it. And all who have made the Exercises have experienced the sudden inrush of warmth that this exercise produces. Nor does there seem evidence that Ignatius was one to despise enthusiasm: though he wished the retreatant to learn the discernment of spirits he himself had learned at Manresa, he also wished him to share the affective warmth of

his own devotion to Christ. Hence there is a marked contrast with the First Week. The reasonings of that week cohere on their own: I am bound to serve the least wishes of the majesty of God, and such service is the very meaning of life. It could have ended there. And yet this, I find, is after all to be the framework and nature of my service, the call and following of Christ. These are to be its terms. This is grace indeed, that God should set my service within a personal relationship of this kind. The heart that had contracted somewhat in the First Week opens and expands again.

One function of the exercise is to bring home to the retreatant that Christ calls him, with a personal invitation. He may be crushed by a sense of unimportance and uselessness after the First Week, and so Christ the King is depicted, not merely in some great sweep of canvas that would place him far above us, but as lowly, as stooping down to each of us, as deigning to need and to invite each of us. And yet at the same time the exercise does use a full canvas in that it invites us to imagine a general picture of the whole of our Lord's public life. This is one of the elements that is to generate enthusiasm in us.

As is well known, Ignatius seeks to arouse a deep sense of loyalty and devotion to Christ, and in that sense enthusiasm for him, by setting out the exercise in two parts. He first depicts 'a temporal king, chosen by our Lord God, revered and obeyed by the rulers and all the common men of Christendom'. He thereby appeals to all the sentiments of natural loyalty, all the nobility in which his own cultural background was steeped, all that makes a man feel a man. Even in his own time this form of the exercise must have been less suitable for women. And one can perhaps suggest that, though this parallelism is a large part of the means that Ignatius takes to generate devotion to our Lord as a King to follow, it is by no means integral to the end he has in view, i.e. to the function of the exercise in the retreat as a whole. This we have so far defined as being that of filling a certain void created in our affections by the detaching process of the First Week.

The devotion and enthusiasm that Ignatius here summons is in the main general and ill-defined. The exercise is described by the Directories as a 'principle and foundation' of the three Weeks that are to follow. After the First Week the retreatant is all agog to find and follow the will of God in the least detail. Ignatius throws at him the idea of the following of Christ the King as the way to find it. Before the retreatant sets out to contemplate Christ in the coming

Weeks, before he knows what he will find there, Ignatius leads him in the final colloquy of this exercise to write our Lord a blank cheque in advance, inviting him to fill in whatever he wishes during the rest of the retreat. So the exercise is not merely to fill in the coldness and void left in the heart by the First Week, but to dispose the retreatant as perfectly as possible to see what is actually there in the life and death and resurrection of Christ, and to embrace it. Thus a fuller explanation of the function of this exercise would be threefold:

1. Coming after the First Week, it gives the retreatant's heart an ideal to warm to, and restores a sense of his importance in the eyes of God.
2. As an introduction to the rest of the retreat, it disposes the retreatant to see and to accept what he will find in contemplating the life, death and resurrection of Christ.
3. As an introduction to the Second Week in particular, it already introduces the themes that will be further developed in the meditations that follow – hardships, suffering, injustice and abuse, poverty of spirit and actual poverty.

Students of the text of the Exercises point out that the 'day of the King' is really a sort of repose day between First and Second Weeks. It is not a full day of exercises, for nothing else is prescribed but that this exercise should be made twice, namely, on getting up in the morning and an hour either before the midday meal or before supper.[1] Some of them seem inclined to regard it as therefore of minor importance, suggesting that it is not of the substance of the Exercises and so can be omitted in the eight-day adaptation. But this does not seem to square with the external testimony we have to the preoccupation of Ignatius himself with the kingdom. It could as well be argued that it is an intended part of the lightening and cheering effect of the exercise that it is all that is put before the retreatant on an easy day.

Giving the exercise

We are all aware of the difficulties in the way of giving the exercise as it stands, not only because our retreatants do not have the ideal of chivalrous deeds of knightly and noble enterprise as part of their mental furniture, but because the whole idea of war and fighting is rather in disgrace. One has got off on the wrong foot

[1] Exx 99.

when the temporal king says to his followers: 'I am determined to bring under my control the entire land of the unbeliever'.[1] Can one imagine oneself saying this to a group of african clergy? The same bell is rung, if more faintly, when the eternal King tells his followers: 'I am determined to bring under my control the whole world and all my enemies'.[2] One does not have to agree that the whole idea of war is corrupt, and that there is nothing left fit to appeal to. The rallying of a nation by Winston Churchill in the shock of 1940 to the defence of their homes and of all the values they held dear, was a deep and unforgettable experience. But the call of Christ the King in the Exercises and the tradition embedded in the Church's thinking of herself as militant, and of life as a warfare, is not a defensive one. It is very much of an offensive. The whole liturgy of baptism depicts the offensive of Christ and his Church against the power of evil, with its enlisting of the christian soldier and its hurling of imprecations at the power of evil. We cannot, and do not need to, avoid the aggressive aspect of christian life: *induite vos armaturam Dei.*[3] But we cannot feel quite at home with temporal parallels, and it is in any case unsuitable to give the exercise in a context that raises irrelevant questions and associations.

All would probably agree that the first thing is to decide about the end or purpose of the exercise, which we have tried to define above, and thereafter to select the most suitable means – not necessarily the same for men and women – for attaining it. There will probably always be much diversity of opinion about the means.

Some think that the essential movement or mechanism of the exercise lies in evoking the fundamental ideals of loyalty and service in the first part, and focussing these on Christ on the second; and that this can and should be done without any flavour of militancy or warfare. The world is in a mess in so many ways, and it appears to be beyond human powers to control it and put it right. As good christian men we can dream of a heaven-sent leader ('chosen by our Lord God') who suddenly produced the key to the whole problem; we do not have to name him or locate him, or mention actual men who have shown something of these qualities: Ignatius's temporal king was such a pipe-dream rather than any really possible monarch. We indicate what depth and devotedness of loyalty such an imaginary leader could command. Then we turn to Christ and

[1] Exx 93. [2] Exx 95. [3] 'put on the armour of God'. Eph 6, 11.

show that he is indeed such a leader, that he is the only possible one, and that he summons each of us.

Many, in view of the need and appetite for a biblical approach in our hearers, would prefer a biblical example of service and loyalty. Moses and David are the chief forerunners of Christ in the Old Testament. St Paul is a great model of devoted service to him: the whole setting and content of the Epistle to the Philippians, written from a roman prison, gives all that we need of Paul's devotion and Christ's stooping to our level to summon us. In the devotion of Ruth we have a type of self-sacrifice more calculated to evoke the specifically feminine qualities of loyalty than any more 'political' setting could.

The biblical theme of the kingship and kingdom of God has, of course, undergone very full exploration and development since St Ignatius' time. A book like Fr von Schnackenburg's *God's Rule and Kingdom*[1] (translated by Fr John Murray) is a mine of information on this biblical theme. The basic idea is that words such as *basileia* and *regnum* are ambivalent, meaning at once the developing rule or reign of God in history (his kingship), and the idea of an eventual and settled state or polity (his kingdom). In the interests of fulfilling the aim of the Kingdom exercise, but altering the means from those of Ignatius, one could perhaps use this theme: one could indicate the hope and aspiration of the people of God, and how they looked for a 'dream king' to set their world to rights and establish them in peace and justice; one could evoke the loyalty they were prepared to give to a messiah conceived in nationalist and this-worldly terms; and then in the second part of the exercise one could show how this biblical promise of God is in fact fulfilled in the kingship of the risen Christ who summons each of us now to further his rule and reign, and so progressively gather the world into his kingdom (in heaven). Such a treatment would have the advantage of stressing, in the light of current theological preoccupations, that it is the risen Christ who now calls us. And owing to its biblical and theological categories it should prove equally suitable for men and women. But there would be danger of the retreat director's presentation developing into a lecture and overloading the exercise. There is too much rather than too little material in the theme, and some of it belongs more to the exercises on the incarnation and the Two Standards. It might, however, be

[1] Edinburgh, 1964.

possible to build up the theme through these exercises, thus giving them a biblical setting without falsifying their nature and purpose. Or, if this could not be done without lecturing in the case of a lay retreatant with insufficient background, it might well prove effective in the case of, say, an annual retreat for a teaching order of nuns. For Ignatius the idea of Christ as king and leader, calling on our loyalty and enabling us to frame our lives in terms of devoted service had an especial power from his own cultural background which we can never really capture by any other parallels drawn from secular history. Most retreat directors today, then, would look in some way to biblical themes, and to the word of God, to exercise a comparable force.