

THE KINGDOM: THE TEXT OF THE EXERCISE

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THE CONSIDERATION *Del Rey* or The Exercise on the Kingdom, as it is commonly called, is a key-meditation that has become a problem. It is probably the most firmly established exercise of the four traditional key-meditations, together with the meditation on Two Standards. The Foundation or First Principle was added, as you know, during Ignatius's stay in Paris, while the fourth key-meditation, the Three Degrees of Humility, is still fighting, I think, for fourth place with the Contemplation to Obtain Divine Love. No less an authority than Nadal informs us that two exercises above all enlightened Ignatius's intellect when at Manresa, namely the Kingdom and Two Standards.¹

That the exercise has become somewhat of a problem may be partly due to the fact that the parable and all that is implied by it – war, fighting, battles, conquest, arms etc. – has lost a good deal of its appeal to war-weary christians. It may be partly due to the drift of the exercise towards an over-strained spirituality. The *ii qui magis affici volunt* 'complex' (those who wish to be moved by greater love) the *oblatio majoris momenti* (the oblation of greater moment), the rather negative form of asceticism expressed in the *agere contra* obsession: all this becomes too much of a burden for people already exposed to a very generous daily ration of spiritual, psychological, social and political pressures. Part of the problem may result from the experience that the exercise hardly bears repetition. This in contrast with the meditation on Two Standards. The surprise effect wears off quickly, and then enthusiasm becomes spurious. However, it is our conviction that in the end the problem does not arise from the difficulties in presenting this exercise. It proceeds from the discrepancy between the text itself and the way in which this text has been read and understood in the tradition of the Society, from Nadal to the Rahner brothers. A straightforward exposition of the main points

¹ MHSJ, *Epistolae et monumenta P. Hieronymi Nadal*, Tom. V, *Commentarii de Instituto Societatis Jesu* (ed. M. Nicolau S.J.), p 40.

of the text, followed by a survey of what befell the Exercise on the Kingdom in the course of the centuries, will hopefully contribute to its right understanding.

Now the very suggestion and invitation that we should take a good look at the text of the Kingdom is rather brittle. It might imply that jesuits have never had a good look at the words of Ignatius, that they were always slovenly in reading the text. The suggestion may put people off because it insinuates that only the present writer is impartial, balanced and a clear-sighted expert. One may even resent the very idea of having a good look at the text, as if one had never heard of the admonition to go back to the inspiration of our founders, as if *ressourcement* had been wilfully discarded. Yet undeniable facts should be pointed out:

1. The exercise on the Kingdom is never called a meditation or a contemplation. The words consistently used by Ignatius are *considerar* and *consideracion*, the verb occurring three times in the autograph copy, the noun once. In the text of Peter Faber, we have *considerar* no less than six times,² and in the abbreviated text of Helyar, the englishman, the oldest extant, we find it seven times.³ And after this exercise, the word *considerar* hardly makes another appearance. Now whether this is important or not is another matter. We merely observe that this exercise is the only one that is not called a meditation or contemplation. You may say, neither is the Foundation and First Principle, nor the Three Degrees of Humility; but these exercises, if they are that, do not even show any resemblance to a meditation or contemplation, with their preparatory prayer, preludes, points etc.

2. The exercise takes place on a day of transition. It does not belong to the second week, since the first exercise of the second week is the contemplation on the Incarnation. It does not belong to the first week either, as it follows the meditations and additions of the first week. Yet the autograph copy of the text has 'Second Week' in the top left-hand corner of the page. It is made twice; in the morning after rising, and an hour before the evening meal. In contrast, the meditation on Two Standards has a whole day, with at least four hours of prayer devoted to it.

3. It is the only exercise at the close of which it is not stated that the Our Father is to be said by the retreatant. Again, whether this

² Cf *Monumenta Ignatiana, Exercitia Spiritualia S. Ignatii* (Madrid, 1919), p 589.

³ Cf MHSJ Vol 100, *S. Ignatii de Loyola Exercitia Spiritualia* (ed Calveras and De Dalmases, Roma, 1969), pp 436-7.

is significant or not, is another question; we merely make the observation.

4. It is the only exercise without a colloquy. Most emphatically, the 'oblation of greater moment' is not a colloquy, as was also pointed out by the great and very accurate Rickaby.⁴ It is part of the application of the parable, the expression of the way in which a special group of followers reacts to Christ's invitation. It is of some interest that Helyar's text gives the oblation prayer, and then suggests a colloquy; and this then might be the triple colloquy of the first week. However, he adds the words *mutando materias* (changing the matter);⁵ so that now its subject-matter becomes the imitation of Christ. Polanco in his *Directory* even omits the oblation.⁶ That Ignatius himself drops the colloquy is the more remarkable, as he is wont to spend a good deal of care and attention in guiding the retreatant to make the proper colloquy: think of the ones in the first week, the triple colloquy in the second week, and so on. For Ignatius, the colloquy is never a means of rounding off the exercise. It is the final resting-point, towards which the whole exercise is directed. The colloquy shows the trend and movement of the exercise. It is the climax of praying: a prayer that is always one of intimacy, that is, of talking with (*hablar*) God as a friend with friend, a servant with his master. Without the colloquy, there is no proper end to the exercise; there is no direction in which the exercise moves. And probably, because the retreatant does not move, is at a standstill, does not meditate or contemplate, he is 'outside'. Standstill, of course, suggests rest and repose.

5. The text contains no reference to 'seeking some profit', which one finds in all the other contemplations – often more than once. Now this is probably linked up with the fact that Ignatius in this exercise speaks of 'people' in a vague sort of way; the 'I' of the retreatant plays hardly any part. Only in the second prelude does the retreatant appear to be directly involved; that is, when he begs for the grace 'not to be deaf, but prompt and diligent to do God's will'. Incidentally, this very prayer does not seem to be much of an advance upon the initial disposition, as given in the fifth annotation, where the retreatant is supposed to be liberal and magnanimous in order to fulfil the will of God.⁷ The question here suggests itself, why did not Ignatius have the retreatant ask for the grace to

⁴ Cf Rickaby, J., S.J.: *The Spiritual Exercises of Ignatius Loyola* (London, 1923), pp 82–83.

⁵ Cf Calveras and De Dalmases, *loc. cit.*, p 438.

⁶ Cf *Monumenta Ignatiana*, *loc. cit.*, p 810.

⁷ Exx 5.

be magnanimous and generous in following the call of Christ, as far as the laying down of one's life; why only 'not to be deaf, but prompt'? The demand here on the exercitant seems to be less than in the fifth annotation; it is certainly less than 'to seek some very personal direct profit'.

6. The object of the consideration is undoubtedly the call: that much is indicated by the title of the exercise. Throughout the exercise this remains the object; except once where the text reads that it is surely 'worthy of consideration to have a good look at Christ who calls'. It can hardly be expressed more gently; it is 'worthy of consideration to look at Christ'. The implication is that, once the retreatant admits that this is indeed worthy of his attention, time and energy, he will turn his thoughts to Christ. But this further implies that for the present he is still, to a large extent, a spectator; his concern is whether it is worthy of consideration to look at Christ. He is an outsider who sizes up a certain situation. Notice, in this connection, the accuracy of the title: 'The Call of the temporal King should help to contemplate the life of the eternal King'.

I think that these observations, and Ignatius's rather exceptional way of proceeding, point in one direction: namely that the retreatant is given a day of rest, of repose, a day to recuperate after the strenuous efforts of the first week. The official directory of 1599 reads: 'Those who, after finishing the Exercises of the First Week, are about to go on to others, ought to take a rest from the strain and hard work of meditation for at least one day.'⁸ We find the same suggestion also in the earlier Directories of Polanco, González Davila, Miro and Pereyra. Now, if the exercise takes place on a day of repose, it is to be expected that the text will contain no sign whatsoever of any decision to be taken by the retreatant. The 'oblation of greater moment' is not made by the retreatant. according to the text, at least not at this point. The retreatant does not go beyond the desire not to be deaf to Christ's call, when and if it comes. This view is corroborated, I believe, in the peculiar character of the first prelude. Strangely enough, at first sight, the normal first prelude, the so-called *historia*, is absent. Notice also that the exercise *Del Rey* is the only one to contain a 'composition by seeing the place' which is not preceded by the *historia*. The meditations of the first week also lack the *historia*, but there the

⁸ *Monumenta Ignatiana, loc. cit.*, p 1146.

composition is never achieved by seeing the place. Now this means that the retreatant is only superficially involved in the *historia*; he is practically a spectator. The same point would seem to be made by the very fact that this is the only place where the past tense is used in the 'composition by seeing the place'; . . . *Castillos por donde Christo nuestro Señor predicaba* ('the country places where Christ our Lord preached'). In the other compositions the present tense is always used.⁹

To my mind there has been a lack of precision in reading the text of the Exercise on the Kingdom, and a good deal of harm has come from it. When exegetes of the text, and those who give the Exercises, push the retreatant into the *reality* (no longer parable) of king and campaign, of battle and conquest, of arms and final victory, the attention cannot but shift from the consideration of the call to the response *here and now*; in terms of an urgent and almost inescapable request. It is the response, not the call, that then begins to dominate the exercise. There are a few other over-emphases with which we are very familiar: for example, the rather harsh *agere contra*, and the 'oblation of greater moment'. This oblation, as we have said, is made by those who apparently are moved by greater love: the notorious *ii qui magis affici volunt* of Fr Roothaan's translation. Evidently there are two groups of people: those moved by love, and those moved by greater love. It is my considered view that much of the uneasiness in the jesuit spirituality of the *magis* has its origins here. It appears to originate in a misreading of the closing sentence of the First Principle and Foundation: '... always desiring what is *more conducive* to the purpose for which I have been created'.

What we need to weigh carefully is whether or not there has been introduced into ignatian spirituality a considerable measure of pelagianism or semi-pelagianism, even of unrestrained asceticism. Fortunately there is nothing whatever in the text of the exercises to warrant interpretations of this kind. There are indeed two kinds of response to the call, as there are two kinds of 'responders'; but these are found in the application of the parable, not in the parable itself. The first group is described as having reason and judgment, in virtue of which 'they will offer their whole persons to the toil'. Of the second group, Ignatius writes (in the accurate translation of

⁹ Cf Peters, William A.M.: *The Spiritual Exercises of St Ignatius: Exposition and Interpretation* (Jersey City, 1968), esp. pp 26-31.

Rickaby): 'They who shall be more desirous to show affection . . .'¹⁰ Incidentally, I think that Calveras accepts this reading, and it is also found in Nonell, one of the outstanding commentators of the last century. For us who have been brought up on the Roothaan translation – *ii qui magis affici volunt* (those who want to be moved by greater love), the early renderings of Helyar and Peter Faber are highly significant.¹¹ Faber's goes back to the latin text of 1541 and 1548, Helyar's to that of 1536.¹² Though these translations do not really do full justice to the syntactical position of *magis* (*más*), at least they bring out the only logical difference between the two groups. The distinction is not between those who love and those who love more, or love with greater intensity; it is rather that the first group is moved and motivated by reason and judgment, whilst the second looks to the love for him who calls. It is a question of accent: are we going to read, *qui affici magis volunt* (those who prefer to be moved *by love*); or, *qui magis affici volunt* (who want to be moved *by greater love*)?

The misreading has been of almost classical proportions, as has the harm done. In the generally accepted reading and interpretation, it is the person of the King demanding our love who should be at the centre; but in actual fact the heart of the exercise has become love, or greater love – generosity or greater generosity. And the result is that the major preoccupation has become the 'I'. Small wonder, then, that the *agere contra* has become the expression and the sign of individual generosity. It would seem to follow that undesirable pressures and tensions are now brought to bear upon the retreatant, and this to the detriment of those fundamental and essential characteristics of the Spiritual Exercises: *paz, tranquilidad, quietud* (peace, tranquillity, quiet).¹³

All this is why I believe that the exercise *Del Rey* is extremely low-keyed, and has a rather unobtrusive, perhaps even unimportant, place in the Spiritual Exercises. There is no reason, then, why it should not be omitted whenever it is judged not to be helpful for contemplating the life of Christ. This is our interpretation of the

¹⁰ Rickaby, *loc. cit.*, p 78.

¹¹ Note the position of *magis*, which, as in the autograph spanish, (*más se querán afectar*), precedes the infinitive. Faber's text reads: 'hii qui magis desiderabunt insigniri et illustrari . . .' (Calveras and De Dalmases, *loc. cit.*, p 607); and Helyar's exactly the same (*ibid.*, p 437).

¹² For the dates of these texts, see Calveras and De Dalmases, *loc. cit.*, pp 591, and 419–20.

¹³ Cf Exx 333.

verbal form *ayuda* (should help) in the title of the exercise.

It is not surprising, then, that the word *Rey* is not used by Ignatius outside this exercise; and it would seem that he is anxious to drop the word in the exercise itself. The oblation is addressed, not to the eternal King, but to the eternal Lord – even ‘the Lord of the whole of creation’ (*Eterno Señor de todas las cosas*). Nor should it surprise us that there is no war-like terminology in the Exercises, with the perhaps understandable exception of the Two Standards, with its emphatic scriptural overtones. It is lacking even in the fourth week, where one would have thought that Christ’s victory would irresistibly call up the exercise *Del Rey*; but there is no reference to it. All this is what we would expect when the prelude to the exercise leads the retreatant to see Christ not as preparing for battle, not gathering an army, and not making war, but roaming the countryside as a humble preacher. Here I would like to point out that the other writings of Ignatius show no trace whatsoever of the language used in this exercise: neither his letters, nor his constitutions, nor his diary (or what remains of it), nor, finally, the story of his life, as he dictated it, a year or a little more before his death. After Manresa, when he is on his way to the Holy Land, Ignatius is no longer the *hidalgo* or the *caballero*. In his autobiography he calls himself *nuevo soldado de Christo* (the new soldier of Christ), but this only once; while about eighty times he is the pilgrim. (This is the way he used to sign his letters: ‘the poor pilgrim’.)

What then did Ignatius have in mind when he inserted this strangely structured exercise into his booklet? The words ‘repose’ and ‘transition’ have been used to clarify this question; but a further close look at the text should give us still more insight. In reading commentaries on the Spiritual Exercises, or detailed meditations based upon them, one frequently receives the impression, that, at this stage of the Exercises, at the end of the first week, Ignatius pulled out of the bag something utterly unexpected: a psychologically overwhelming kind of spiritual stunt. The reverse is true. The word ‘King’ comes as no surprise whatever. From the first morning (confer the guidance given in the second addition of the first week), the retreatant must try to experience confusion, having recourse to examples.¹⁴ The first is that of a courtier or knight; and Ignatius uses the word *caballero*, which is also used in the Kingdom. The retreatant is to see himself as a courtier, before

¹⁴ Cf Exx 74.

his king and court (the word Court is also used in the oblation of the Kingdom), the king who had given him many gifts and rewards. This recalls the king of the parable, 'so generous and so human' (*tan liberal y tan humano*), and whom he has now offended in many things. This is worth repeating: every morning from the very first beginning, and first thing in the morning, the retreatant is to see himself before a king and his court, as a courtier or knight, and very much ashamed of himself. First thing in the morning, he is to reflect upon his relationship with God; and once again this means seeing himself, tasting himself, as a recreant knight. After five or six days like this, neither *Rey* nor *Caballero* in the meditation on the Kingdom comes as a surprise at all. The question may even be asked whether the exercise *Del Rey*, as we find it in the text, adds anything essential to the disposition to be acquired by those thoughts and feelings in the early morning during the first week. The appeal, or if you prefer it, the call, which is sounded through the various exercises of the first week is unmistakable: things have to change drastically; the retreatant has to listen, must not be deaf; and henceforth he must be prompt to do God's will instead of going his own way.

The disposition, then, of the first week foreshadows the exercise *Del Rey*; one might even say that it contains the exercise. What emerges now is this: it is not Christ's *Kingdom* which is uppermost in the mind of Ignatius, but the relationship between the unfaithful courtier and his king. Consequently, it is only to be expected that the Kingdom does not play any really important part in the weeks to come; that is, in any *explicit* way. We must notice that when Ignatius suggests that the retreatant should contemplate the Sermon on the Mount – '... theirs is the Kingdom of Heaven', there is not the slightest direct reference to the Kingdom, not even in the reference to the text of scripture.¹⁵ When the contemplation on Christ's preaching in the Temple is given, there is not a word about the many parables about the Kingdom of Heaven. When Ignatius deals with St John the Baptist, it would be reasonable to expect some emphasis upon the Kingdom that is now at hand, but Ignatius remains silent.¹⁶ It all goes to prove that Ignatius was anything but obsessed by the importance of the exercise *Del Rey*. Yet the close similarity between the disposition described in the second addition – the thoughts and feelings of the

¹⁵ Cf Exx 278.

¹⁶ Cf Exx 273.

retreatant in early morning – and that of *Del Rey* does not fully explain the purpose and function of the exercise. In order to explore this aspect further, we must give careful attention to the title of the exercise.

First of all, Ignatius is fairly expansive in the titles which he gives to the various exercises. As a rule, he gives us information both as regards the content and the structure of the meditation or contemplation. Form and subject-matter are given as follows: 'Meditation (or Contemplation) on . . .' (the subject-matter is then stated); ' . . . contains, after a preparatory prayer, two (or three) preludes, (a number of) points and a colloquy'.¹⁷ None of this occurs in the title of the Kingdom. Again we notice the unique character of the exercise. Take, for example, the title of the first exercise (first week): 'The first meditation is of the three faculties, on the first, second, and third sin, and contains, after the preparatory prayer and two preludes, three main points and a colloquy'.¹⁸ Compare this with the title of the Kingdom: 'The call of the temporal King helps to contemplate the life of the eternal King'. Evidently, we have something entirely new here. There is no mention of any structure, of a preparatory prayer, preludes, points or colloquy. The brevity and starkness of the title is intriguing, the omissions are startling, and prompt the question, why? The simplest explanation appears to be that Ignatius does not want to see this exercise turned into a meditation or contemplation; he does not want to see it strictly and properly structured. This also means that he does not want the retreatant to become much involved. There is a strong suggestion in the very title that somewhat 'harmless' information is being given, not as subject-matter for meditation or contemplation, but for consideration: about a call of a temporal king. Of this information, Ignatius says that it *might* help the retreatant to contemplate the life of the eternal king. The function and purpose of the exercise is, I believe, indicated by the verbal form, 'might help'. To us it seems an almost inescapable conclusion, if we take to heart the teaching of the first principle and foundation, 'if the exercise is not helpful, omit it'. But this leaves unanswered the question why Ignatius thought that a retreatant of the first week might need some help in order to contemplate with profit the life of Christ. The answer to this question will, I think, show what kind of help this is likely to be. There is a real danger, when one considers the books of medita-

¹⁷ Cf e.g. Exx 65 and 101.

¹⁸ Exx 45.

tions, and the commentaries, of the past, that the retreat-director and the retreatant may overlook the important part played by Christ during the first week. There has been a strong tendency in the past to limit the exercises of this week to a consideration of the 'four last things', of sin and punishment, of death and judgment and, in the course of time, of venial sin and tepidity: in general, to considerations closely connected with the purgative way. The crucified Christ at the end of the first meditation was felt to be something of an anachronism. These 'first week' preoccupations are difficult to reconcile with the text of the Exercises properly read, especially if one calls to mind the importance of the colloquys in the conviction and practice of Ignatius.

The very first colloquy, as was remarked above, is addressed to Christ, even to Christ hanging on the cross: and this on the first day of the retreat.¹⁹ The colloquy of the third and fourth meditations (repetitions) is addressed separately to our Lady, to the Father and to the Son.²⁰ The fifth meditation, on eternal punishment, concludes with a colloquy once again addressed to Christ; and here its resting point is amazement and wonder, that the Lord has treated the retreatant with so much goodness and mercy up till now. It is only the second exercise, on one's own sins, which closes with a colloquy addressed to God our Lord.²¹ One must take into account the impact of colloquys like these, especially as they are repeated again and again over the five or six days given to the first week. They all have one common theme: Christ as the source of saving mercy; '... how he came down from heaven to die for my sins; the *tanta pietas et misericordia* (such great mercy, compassion and fatherly goodness 'up till now').²² This goes hand in hand with a profound conviction, perhaps even vision, of 'great disorder in one's own life' (colloquy, third exercise), and thus of a great need of redemption. Nor can one afford to overlook the torturing questions, 'What have I done for Christ, what am I going to do for Christ?'

Think also of the disharmony between faith and good works in the colloquy on the meditation on hell, and the plea for an intimate knowledge of the disorder in one's own life. In the colloquys, in all the exercises of the first week, the retreatant sees, savours, himself and his continued existence as explicable only in and through the

¹⁹ Cf Exx 53.

²⁰ Cf Exx 63.

²¹ Cf Exx 61.

²² Cf Exx 53, 61.

cross. He tastes himself as 'still alive' – a phrase which occurs a good number of times – as the beneficiary of Christ giving his life on Calvary. This aspect has not been brought out strongly enough in the past. What, then, can be more natural than that the retreatant should turn, gradually more and more, from the benefit to the benefactor, from the death on the cross, as source of life, to the whole life of him who died on that cross?

It is to assist this gradual transition, where necessary, that the exercise on the Kingdom is given, in which the call is heard to move from benefits received and still to come (the rewards of joining the king), to a personal relationship of love with the benefactor. The inner dynamism of the first week is not gratitude for mercy shown, but an irresistible urge to respond to this mercy; and this response finds expression in an intense desire to love the Saviour, and hence to know him, as he has revealed himself in his life among men.

This final disposition of the first week is, as it were, gathered up in a rather gentle consideration called *Del Rey*, which is meant to give some help to the retreatant, eager, even impatient, to contemplate the life of his benefactor, that is, to know and love him better. With this conclusion we find ourselves in the third prelude and the colloquy of all the contemplations of the second week.

So the help to be given by, and to be expected from, the exercise *Del Rey* is rooted in the first week, and looks forward unavoidably to the second. It foreshadows what is contained in the weeks to come, not because the imagery used is made more expressive in the second, third, and fourth weeks, but because this mystery of a God in search of love is wonderfully unfolded in the contemplations that the retreatant will be privileged to make: the mystery of a God in search of love, not of a kingdom. There is nothing in the consideration *Del Rey* which is not given deeper content and wider perspective in the contemplations of the life of God made man.

In conclusion, then, I repeat that the exercise *Del Rey* seems to me very low-key, and not of first-hand importance. What, then, of Nadal's testimony, which almost identified Ignatius's experience at Manresa with the Exercises on the Kingdom and the Two Standards? We shall deal with this dilemma, if it is a dilemma, in our second paper, where we try to survey what befell the consideration *Del Rey* in the tradition of the Society of Jesus.