

THE EXERCISE IN THE JESUIT TRADITION

By WILLIAM PETERS

AT THE BEGINNING of the first world war, the great belgian canon lawyer and moralist Arthur Vermeersch, published a book entitled *Miles Christi*. Written in french, it was soon translated into many modern languages: proof enough of its success.¹ It is classical in its approach to the Spiritual Exercises of Ignatius. The author writes of four key-meditations, namely, the Foundation and First Principle, the Kingdom, Two Standards and the Three Degrees of Humility. The exercise on The Kingdom is called a second or new foundation, based upon the first Foundation, which now is 'transfigured'. In the extensive exposition of this second foundation, with which the book opens, three sections are devoted to the parable: the king, the campaign, the response of the king's subjects. The application of the parable or the second part of the exercise shows a similar structure: the king, the call, the answer. To stress the importance of this exercise, Vermeersch adds another set of considerations and meditations.

Vermeersch can be rightly considered to be a typical representative of a certain school of thought concerning The Kingdom. In his company we find Meschler, Vogt and Vogels, Von Hummelauer, Grueben, Schilgen, Sierp and Przywara, also Longhayne, Grandmaison and Pinard de la Boullaye; Casanovas, Arao and Calveras, Morris, Dignam, McMenamy, Coppens and Longridge; and from the east, Ambrozzi and Coathalem.² Monier, Stanley and Karl Rahner belong to it too. In mentioning all these names, we have restricted ourselves to the post-Roothaan period: that is, roughly, to the past century. Roothaan's translation and commentary³ gave

¹ An english version was published as recently as 1951 (El Paso), under the title *Miles Christi Jesu: Meditations on the Summary of the Constitutions*. Cf De Guibert, J., S.J.: *The Jesuits: their Spiritual Doctrine and Practice* (trans. W. J. Young, ed. G. Ganss, Institute of Jesuit Sources, 1964), p 515.

² Most of these authors receive a mention in De Guibert, with an accurate citation of their works; Cf Editor's Index, *ed. cit.*

³ Cf De Guibert, *ed cit.*, pp 467-8.

a strong impetus to a fairly militaristic reading of this exercise, although we must add that very clear traces of such vocabulary are found in the earliest documents. One need only turn to the so-called vulgate translation, from the hand of Frusius in elegant latin,⁴ to this latin translation.⁵ As this was the standard text up to the time of Roothaan, that is, for three centuries, its influence has been considerable. There are places in it in which the whole exercise of the Kingdom now breathes a spirit of belligerence; and any one who is not truly 'bellicose' appears unsuitable to continue the Exercises. A successful author like Bellecius speaks of Ignatius's *militare ingenium* and his *bellica evocatio*.⁶ But long before this age, in fact even before 1548 when Frusius's translation was approved by the holy See, one reads in the text of *Magister Joannis* (assumed to be Jean Codure) of the temporal king who calls his subjects to wage war, to fight paganism; and of Christ who exhorts his own to accompany him *ad bellum spirituale, quo mundum cum suo principe debellare decrevit* (to a spiritual war, by which he has determined to reduce the world and its chief).⁷ In an italian translation of 1555, the year before Ignatius's death, the *militia spiritualis* is so much emphasized that we come across *soldati* at least four times, and the promptness to do God's will has now become promptness to follow and obey.

There is a danger, however, that the good jesuit, brought up on the *Miles Christi* approach to the Kingdom and the spirituality that corresponds to it, might easily make the mistake of reading nineteenth and twentieth century ideas into the writings of the society of the sixteenth, seventeenth and eighteenth centuries. An impartial comparison of the documents shows that the war-like mentality is by no means universal in those earlier periods; in fact it is on the whole rather weak. It is there, undoubtedly, and when we turn to great names like Gagliardi, del Puente, Avancinus and de Palma,⁸ the influence of the vulgate translation is clear enough. But it may come as a surprise that, for instance, the official Directory of Aquaviva, put together after consulting the opinions and experiences of Pereyra, Mirón, Gonzáles Dávila and Fabius de

⁴ Cf Calveras and De Dalmases, for a scholarly examination of Frusius's *Versio Vulgata*, *loc. cit.*, pp 117-39.

⁵ Roothaan's translation is printed side by side with the vulgate translation in *Monumenta Ignatiana*, *loc. cit.*, pp 222-563.

⁶ For Bellecius, see De Guibert, *ed. cit.*, pp 425-6.

⁷ Calveras and De Dalmases, *loc. cit.*, p 564.

⁸ For bibliographical references, see De Guibert, *ed. cit.*, Index.

Fabiis, is very mild in its use of military terms: even the word king is not used (*Lord* occurs twice).⁹ There is no suggestion of battle, of weapons, of war, even of *agere contra* or an oblation of greater moment. Mission, perfection, imitation occur, and the meditation is called 'a kind of foundation or introduction *totius huius tractatus, et summa et compendium vitae et operum Christi Domini*'.¹⁰ What is perhaps even more astounding is that Pereyra, who had the reputation of knowing and directing the Exercises well, omits this exercise *Del Rey*, according to his directory. From the first week he moves directly to the contemplations on the Incarnation and Nativity; the second day of the second week is devoted to contemplating the Shepherds and then he adds, *y el del Rey, porque aqui comienza a llamar gente este Rey*: to us a very enlightening remark.¹¹ Besides, Pereyra gives to the meditations of the second week the general heading of *ego sum vita, veritas et vita*; whilst González Dávila follows the same path in his annotations.¹² So does Cordeses, who stresses imitation to such an extent that the Kingdom just disappears.¹³ Incidentally, the official Directory is here inspired by the same spirit.¹⁴

There is then no reason or cause to be shocked when the retreat notes of Claude de la Colombière do not contain any reference to the exercise *Del Rey*.¹⁵ His contemporary, Maffaeus, drops this exercise; but he inserts between the end of the first week and the beginning of the second the meditation on Two Standards. Another contemporary, Fr Judde, has no room for *Del Rey* in his ten days retreat; and in his long retreat – he was a master of novices – the exercise is a meditation not on conquest or a call, but solely on Christ: not as King, but as Master, Model, and Judge.¹⁶ It will not now cause any surprise at all that, in the notes that we possess of men like Balthasar Alvarez, Alvarez de Paz, Lallemant, Surin and Rigouleuc, the exercise of the Kingdom does not play a part.

Careful handling is imperative when we now recall Nadal's

⁹ *Monumenta Ignatiana, loc. cit.*, p 1148.

¹⁰ '... a summary and compendium of the life and works of Christ the Lord. *Ibid.*

¹¹ The Editors of the Spiritual Exercises in *Monumenta Ignatiana (loc. cit.)*, decided not to publish Pereyra's directory because of its imperfect nature, and the fact that 'it departs very much from the order of the Exercises'. pp 771–2.

¹² *Monumenta Ignatiana, loc. cit.*, p 916.

¹³ For Cordeses, see De Guibert, *ed. cit.*, p 223 ff.

¹⁴ *Monumenta Ignatiana loc. cit.*, p 1148.

¹⁵ His *Notes spirituelles* have been translated by W. J. Young, *Faithful servant: Spiritual Retreats and Letters of Claude de la Colombière* (St Louis, 1960).

¹⁶ For Judde, see De Guibert, *ed. cit.*, pp 429 ff.

words that a jesuit vocation is *vera militia* and that this least Society of Jesus is truly a brave army, ever ready, and always at the disposal of the *militans Ecclesia*, and that for this purpose Ignatius has given the jesuit *exercitia spiritu vere militaria, potissimum quatuor scilicet de Regno, de Vexillis, de Tribus classibus et de humilitatis gradibus*. Nadal appears to have mellowed his own words when he was visiting Coimbra. In his twenty-one exhortations, he speaks of Ignatius's life, of the end and scope of the Society of Jesus, of the three vows, and so on. Only once, in the fifth exhortation, do we find ourselves *in guerra y batalla*, and these are of a spiritual nature; the exhortation deals with the vocation to the Society. One is here reminded instinctively of Nadal's famous saying that at Manresa Ignatius was given the first idea, if not the outline, of his future Society; and this in connection with the meditation on Two Standards.

Thus, for better, for worse, the exercise has traditionally become linked with the first beginnings of the Society of Jesus; it explains why this exercise has been given such an overwhelmingly important place in the ignatian retreat and in the spirituality of the Society of Jesus. The association became so close that the fourth General, Mercurian, could say that *Del Rey* was not an exercise for non-jesuits (*externi*). Mirón, though, was somewhat milder, allowing in certain cases those outside the Society to make the exercise. One should not conclude that this position has by now been abandoned. Returning to Vermeersch's book, we observe that the sub-title is *Meditations on the Summary of the Constitutions of the Society of Jesus*. If we ask what on earth the text of *Del Rey* has to do with religious life, Vermeersch gives this answer: Ignatius makes the religious life a campaign for the conquest of the world. Is this true? Is the exercise on The Kingdom linked up with religious life? Is the origin, or at least the inspiration, of the religious life given in the exercise *Del Rey*?

It is generally admitted that at Manresa nothing was further from Ignatius's mind than the religious life. The conversion had taken place before he came to Manresa, even before Montserrat, and the vigil at arms on the eve of the Annunciation of 1522 was confirmation, not conversion. When he did away with his courtier's fine clothes in exchange for a beggar's rags, he gave expression in a symbolic way to the complete break in his life that was the final fruit of his conversion. Hence it appears most unlikely that at Manresa he went back to thinking in terms of warfare, of bravery, of battle and conquest. We know that at the beginning, and also

at the end, of his stay at Manresa, he was convinced that he had to go to the Holy Land, and there spend the rest of his days. We know how wrong he was. It is also known that it was not until 1539 that Ignatius and his companions began seriously to deliberate about becoming religious; and yet, in the *Deliberatio primorum patrum* there is not a single reference to The Kingdom.¹⁷ As a matter of fact there is hardly any reference to The Kingdom, its contents or spirit in the six or seven thousand letters of Ignatius. One might have a right to expect some weighty words devoted to this experience in his autobiography, but not a word is found. What stands out in the manresan experience are Ignatius's insights into, even visions of, the blessed Trinity, the mystery of creation, the eucharistic Presence, the humanity of Christ, and God's working presence in the whole of creation.

There should be now no difficulty in understanding why there is no true influence of *Del Rey* on the Constitutions of the Society. When we recall key-passages and key-expressions, as for instance the *maxima familiaritas cum Deo*, the *instrumentum Deo conjunctum*, the *virī vere spirituales*, the admonition *in devotione crescant*, where, according to the autobiography, *devotio* stands for the *facilitas Deum in omnibus inveniendi*, these breathe a spirit different from that of the Kingdom. The touching little phrases in his autobiography speak of littleness, weakness, childlike trust in God, and surrender to his loving care, etc., and never of great generosity, of going to war, not even of *agere contra* or momentous oblations. And what remains of Ignatius's spiritual diary is more marked by *humildad amorosa*, humility drenched in love, than by anything even remotely resembling soldiery or military bravado. It is our firm conviction that here we touch more truly the tradition of the Society than in many a book of meditations or many a retreat of these last hundred years. Even a reading of the letters of our Fathers General up to the beginning of this century shows how very rarely the Kingdom is mentioned, directly or indirectly. When Roothaan refers to Christ as our Captain (*Dux*), and exhorts us to bear sufferings through which we become like *duci ac Regi Christo Jesu*, to our Lord and King, Jesus Christ, we read something quite exceptional. It is not without interest, and perhaps instructive, to observe the part played by *Del Rey* in books of meditations. The practice of daily

¹⁷ Cf Futrell, J.C., S.J.: *Making an apostolic Community of Love* (Institute of Jesuit Sources, St Louis, 1970), pp 188 ff.

mental prayer begins to prosper in the second half of the sixteenth century. The first collections of books containing meditations for every day of the year follow the *schema* of the four weeks of the Spiritual Exercises (parallel of course with the purgative, illuminative and unitive way); but more often than not the exercise *Del Rey* is omitted. In the course of the latter part of the seventeenth century, as a reaction against all that *Port Royal* stands for, we find many exercises devoted to the eucharist, the passion and our blessed Lady. Soon after, there is again a significant shift: ascetical considerations of a practical nature about God's infinite perfections, about man's many infirmities, about the seven capital sins, about the theological and moral virtues, and so on, become staple food. But of the exercise on The Kingdom there is hardly a trace; it just does not seem to have stirred any interest at all, among jesuits and non-jesuits alike. It is fascinating to peruse those juicy anti-jesuit publications, especially of the eighteenth century. They attack the jesuits' doctrine, opinions, behaviour, practices, and heaven knows what else. What we do not find is the accusation that they are an army drawn up for battle, that they love war and weapons, that they are merciless – to use a very anachronistic metaphor – with their tanks and bulldozers, if this is to the glory of their king and captain.

Reflecting upon all this material, we feel inclined to believe that there may very well have been a certain aversion to anything military in Ignatius. Of course, *sub crucis vexillo militari* is found in the earliest descriptions and approbations of the Society. But this expression, if anything, shows the influence of scripture and of the meditation on the Two Standards. Was there a certain hesitancy on Ignatius's part to fall back upon a war-like vocabulary? Both Gonçalves de Câmara, to whom, as we pointed out, Ignatius dictated his life's story, and Ribadeneira, his first biographer, make mention of a book, entitled *Enchiridion Militis Christiani*, the 'hand-book of a Christian Soldier'. Ignatius did not like it; it chilled his heart, as Ribadeneira tells us. Where its author Erasmus was exerting profound influence, and where Ignatius did not like him or his writings, it is surely not unreasonable to assume that Ignatius kept away from anything that might suggest erasmian influence or agreement. Any stressing of the *miles Christi* would have undoubtedly done just that.

We suggested indirectly that things changed rather radically in the nineteenth century, and that Roothaan's influence was a

determining factor. Yet the situation is more complicated. Outside factors (life in the Church and in society in a rather turbulent century) contributed to a predilection for a *caballero* attitude in christian and religious life. However, even Roothaan was never an out-and-out Kingdom-addict. He has left us retreat notes, which go back to his stay at Dunaburg (when, admittedly, he was only twenty years of age), in which Christ is not King, but *Medicus*. Jumping forward half a century, we find Roothaan giving retreat-conferences at Louvain. Here he deals with the end of man, with sin and death, then with knowing and loving the Lord, that is, with the third prelude and colloquy of all the contemplations of the second week; but notice the omission of the Kingdom (the other four conferences have for their subject-matter the hidden life, Two Standards, the passion and spiritual joy). There is no reason then to consider great men like Goodier and Rickaby as standing outside what is considered to be the genuine tradition of jesuit spirituality, when they only gently touch, and no more, the exercise *Del Rey*. Rickaby, as usual very accurate, omits the title when he comes to speak of this exercise in his *Waters that go softly*. Even Karl Rahner deviates to a certain extent. With him, the second week opens with the contemplation on the Incarnation; and this is followed by an exercise on the Nativity. It is only then that he turns to the exercise on the Kingdom.

Jesuit tradition shows no uniformity of opinion as regards the importance, place and function of the exercise *Del Rey*. Neither is there uniformity of opinion as regards the interpretation of the exercise itself. Indeed, one would think that Ignatius was very clear about the heart of this exercise. In the text, everything proceeds from, and is directed towards, the call. The title is proof enough: 'The call of the temporal king'. Yet, when Pinard de la Boullaye writes his commentary on the Spiritual Exercises, he makes an effort to decide which is the one responsible choice from among a good number of interpretations. So he asks himself why Ignatius fastens upon Christ as king, and why not as man's brother, or the bridegroom, or the redeemer, the saviour, the model, as happened when Ignatius's followers took the Exercises in hand. He tries to answer the question whether the end and purpose of *Del Rey* is abnegation or apostolate. He inquires whether courage, surrender, love, friendship, discipleship or blind following of the captain is paramount. Indirectly, attention is drawn to the simple observation that in the course of the past four centuries strong emphasis has

been placed on the King's personality, on the imitation of the King, on the 'toiling with him', where *comigo* (with him) is taken to be the key-word of the whole exercise, and on the *más*, followed by *insignis esse*, and hence the *agere contra*. At times, when reading authors of note, one is given the impression that completely different spiritual realities are presented. Thus there is an almost unbridgeable gap between Brou, who in his rightly famous book, *Ignace, maître d'oraison*, cannot shake himself loose from *comigo* and *imitación* (though he prefers the verb *sequi* to *imitari*, to move with Christ, to imitation of him); and Monier, who, in a book written only a quarter of a century later, can only see the essence of the exercise *Del Rey*, and as a matter of fact, of all the exercises in Ignatius's book, as becoming a soldier of Christ who seeks *des militants*. His conviction is summed up as follows: 'The Exercises do not intend to make saints, nor people learned in spiritual matters, but soldiers, *avec le métier de conquérants* (with the job or profession of being conquerors)'. Add to all this the part played at various times and in various authors of the *quanto más* (so much the more) in the application of the parable, upon which phrase alone whole edifices of spirituality have been erected, and we realize that caution is needed when this exercise is viewed in the light of tradition.

Indeed, jesuit tradition has always shown in its diversity the tension that exists between Ignatius's autograph text and Frusius's translation. Ignatius is gentle, Frusius bellicose; as is proved by the simplest word-study. In the title of the translation the temporal king calls his subjects to wage war (*suos subditos evocans ad bellum*), the *caballero* becomes *miles*, *vocación* becomes *bellica evocatio*, *agere contra* becomes *expugnata carnis, sensuum amorisque proprii et mundani rebellione*, (rebellion of the flesh, of the senses and of worldly and self-love having been conquered), *hago oblación* is now *ego meaque omnia tuae subijcio voluntati* (I subject all that I have to your will); and that promptness to do God's will is turned into the promptness to serve and obey. The tension is aggravated by the fact that this exercise became closely linked with the very origin of the Society of Jesus. Nadal, asking the question why Ignatius's foundation was called the Society of Jesus, replies:

It is to be noted that our way of life is called *militia* in the bull *Regimini Militantis*, and this because of what Ignatius was shown in those meditations, namely about the war which Christ declares on the world, the flesh and the devil, and about the Standard which the Society follows with all its might.

No story about the destiny of the Exercise through the centuries is complete without an acceptable answer to the question as to how Frusius could deviate from Ignatius's text. How could Ignatius have let such changes pass? Besides, Nadal's statement that Manresa really turned upon the exercises of the Kingdom and Two Standards, in so far as they gave direction to the life of the founder of the Society of Jesus, must be properly assessed. In attempting to answer the how, why and whence of Nadal's opinion, one should diligently note that he always joins the Kingdom and Two Standards together. If these exercises are taken in conjunction, his statement is acceptable. There can be no doubt whatsoever that the Two Standards goes back as far as Ignatius' experience as a wounded man at Loyola. It is there that we find the first beginnings of discerning the movements caused by different spirits. Manresa had the poor fellow caught in a vice of frightening proportions between the good and evil spirits. The experience changed his life completely. He carried with him ever after, if not the wounds, then at least the scars of this conflict throughout his life. Consequently he could not but see the world as a battlefield; and this in close harmony with scripture, especially with the book of the Apocalypse. That this experience and vision inspired his life's work cannot be doubted.

This observation may be of some help to answer our question about Frusius's translation. Ignatius's text dates for the greater part from the year 1522. Frusius translated the text in the years 1546 and 1547: that is, almost a quarter of a century later. In these twenty-five intervening years much had happened. Ignatius himself had moved from Spain to the Holy Land, to Paris and finally to Rome. The poor pilgrim who wished to spend his life in solitude, not so far from the holy places in Palestine, now heads a growing group of very talented and spiritual young men, who made quite an impact on the life of high and low in Italy and Spain, in France and the northern countries. Ignatius had enemies in Spain, but these were mostly jews and moors, as they had been for centuries. With his new Society he was in the thick of clash and conflict, not only with 'reformers' who were outside the Church, but also with many brethren who were of the same fold (the inquisitors in Spain and in Rome, the *savants* of the Sorbonne; and also Paul IV, a true Carafa, who stands for a hostile group of dignitaries in the holy city). Willy-nilly, Ignatius and his young jesuits found themselves no longer first and foremost *padres reformados*, but for good or ill, men who were called upon to do some reforming in the Church.

This spelt opposition and worse: it meant conflict and battle. Such a situation might have made it next to impossible not to listen to the Kingdom as a call for battle. And, with the battle-cry in actual fact sounding in their ears wherever they went, whether this was Paris, or Coimbra, or Louvain and even further afield, not to mention Geneva and Trent itself, it was only to be expected that the exercise took on a different tone, even a different content. Ignatius did not object. In the first place, he never claimed for his text the direct inspiration of the holy Spirit, not least for every word it contained: the close word-study is of a much later date and shows how accurate Ignatius is in the use of words. In the second place, Ignatius believed in the ongoing guidance of God's spirit. To Ignatius, the final word was not spoken at Manresa, nor was the final revelation given during his stay there, as he was soon to experience. In his openness to the inspirations and guidance of the holy Spirit, he would not be likely to isolate himself, his work, his young Society, nor his ideas and opinions, his hopes, expectations and ambitions, from what was happening around him. Thus we are not surprised that he accepted, perhaps even endorsed, the emphasis on the military in Frusius's translation.

There appears today to be a fairly wide-spread sense of discomfort both as regards the content of the exercise *Del Rey* and the way to present the consideration or adapt it. We would like to refer here to lectures given on this exercise at various seminars and workshops on the Spiritual Exercises, beginning with those contained in *Our Colloquy* of the Irish Jesuits, and those given at Valkenburg before the second world war, to those presented at Chicago (1962) and Willowdale (1963), in Bombay and Loyola in 1966, at Fordham in 1961: and Fr Coventry's paper some seven years ago at Southwell House. There appears to be little uniformity, except perhaps in what often looks like a determined effort to save this exercise and to keep it as high-key as generally is thought to be part and parcel of Jesuit tradition. But the dissident voices today are many. Retreat directors prefer *El Señor* to The King. They feel more drawn to the *instrumentum Deo conjunctum* of the Constitutions than to the wielding of arms. They tend to stress the motive of love rather than to hammer away at *agere contra*. Many have turned aside from the parable, and prefer to give the exercise a strong foundation of scriptural texts (nothing new, as we have seen above). Enlightening is the move from Vermeersch's *Miles Christi* to K. Rahner's *Minister Christi*, and the correction seems to be very healthy

and quite in keeping with Ignatius's mind. In this way we do not weaken the exercise *Del Rey*, but give it its rightful place and function: the exercise is a low-key consideration, destined for a day of repose.

However, in giving what we think is the proper status to the exercise, we have in no way lowered the place and importance of Christ's kingdom. As soon as the retreatant turns his prayerful attention to the contemplation of the Incarnation of the Son of God, he not only contemplates God as *El Señor* in Christ, but at that very moment finds himself in the midst of the *Regnum Christi*. If we are convinced that the exercise is not as important as is traditionally held in jesuit tradition, we do not for a moment imply that the Kingdom of Christ is unimportant or plays only a minor part in the Spiritual Exercises. Nothing could be further from the truth. If anyone doubts this, he does not understand the Exercises. 'Thy kingdom come' is the heart of the Spiritual Exercises of Ignatius as it is the heart of God's dealings with man. It has everything to do with the first beginnings of the Exercises as expressed in the first annotation, the seeking and finding how God will dispose and order man's life; but it has little directly to do with the consideration *Del Rey*. And that is the way Ignatius wanted it.