

THE CHRIST OF THE KINGDOM AND THE COMPANY

By JAMES WALSH

RECENT WRITING on the Spiritual Exercises has tended to make heavy weather of the 'curial' and military vocabulary and imagery of the exercise on the Kingdom, and yet at the same time to tolerate similar cultural limitations in that on the Two Standards, on the ground that this exercise is firmly rooted in scripture and thus continues to make a valid and universal appeal. So W. Peters claims that 'the exercise (on the Kingdom) has become somewhat of a problem, 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 for war-weary christians'.¹ He pushes the claim further in an extended treatment of the approach to the exercise on the Kingdom in the jesuit tradition, and concludes that the military emphasis originates in the *versio vulgata* of Frusius in opposition to the gentleness of the autograph text. 'How', he asks, 'could Frusius deviate from Ignatius's text? How could Ignatius have let such changes pass?' His answer is that during the twenty and more years that elapsed between Ignatius's basic text (1522) and the translation of Frusius (1547):

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 . . . now heads a growing group of very talented and spiritual young men . . . in the thick of clash and conflict . . . with the battle-cry in actual fact sounding in their ears wherever they went . . . it was only to be expected that the exercise should take on a different tone, a different content.²

Peters is here constructing an argument for his view that the Kingdom exercise is 'low-key', and is in no way essential to the structure of the Exercises as a whole: it is to be given only in so far as it helps the exercitant, which will not always be the case. He has, however, no difficulty in accepting the statements of Oliver Manare and Jerome Nadal, that the Kingdom and the Two Standards were communicated to Ignatius at Manresa; that they shaped his own vocation — 'the vocation which the Company has now' (Nadal); that these exercises are oriented to the care and promotion of the salvation of the neighbour (Manare).³ This is because 'the Two Standards goes back as far as

¹ *Supplement to The Way*, 18 (1973), p 6.

² *Ibid.*, pp 25-26.

³ Cf Manareus, O. S.J.: *Exhortationes super Instituto et Regulis Societatis Jesu*, ed P. Losschaert (Brussels, 1912), pp 344-5; Nadal, *Monumenta V* (Rome, 1962), p 40.

Ignatius's experience as a wounded man at Loyola . . . Manresa had the poor fellow caught in a struggle of frightening proportions between the good and evil spirits . . . consequently he could not but see the world as a battlefield; and this in close harmony with scripture'.⁴

Fr Lyonnet, amongst others, has clearly shown the close dependence of the Two Standards on the New Testament, particularly on the temptations of Christ in the synoptic gospels, on the pauline references, with their military metaphors, to the battle of christians against the spirits of wickedness (Eph 6, 11-12) and the victory of Christ over them (1 Cor 15, 24), on the pictorial imagery of the Apocalypse, and on Satan as the adversary and the 'enemy of human nature'.⁵ Yet for this writer, at any rate, the deep scriptural roots of the Exercise do not free it from its military terminology and imagery, particularly if one takes it in the context in which Nadal consistently puts it:

We follow Christ in his combat, his warfare. . . .⁶ The Society makes progress in the holy Spirit and fights under the Standard of the Cross by serving the Lord alone, and his bride the Church, under the Roman Pontiff, Christ's vicar.⁷

These and similar passages are the source of the popular idea of the Society evoked in an english hymn composed in the early years of this century, whose refrain runs:

Knight of our Lady, courageous and true,
Lead us to battle, we'll march under you;
Noble Ignatius, your comrades we'll go
Fearlessly forward to conquer the foe.

The point, surely, is that the portrait of the 'temporal king' in the exercise on the Kingdom is a typical medieval *exemplum*, just as the exercise on the Two Standards is medieval allegory. The danger has been, and is still, that we approach the text of the Exercises in too literal and fundamentalist a way. We need to take to heart the advice of Chaucer's Nun's priest, when he had finished his allegory of Chauntecleer and Pertelote:

But you that holden this tale a folly
As of a fox, or of a cock and hen
Take the morality, good men
Taketh the fruit and let the chaff be still.⁸

⁴ Peters, *art. cit.*, p 25.

⁵ 'La méditation des Deux Etendards et son fondement scripturaire', in *Christus*, 12 (October 1956), pp 435-56.

⁶ *Monumenta V.*

⁷ *Monumenta IV*, p 618.

⁸ *The Canterbury Tales: 'The Nun's Priest's Tale'.*

The issue is what is exemplified, and what is hidden under the mantle of the allegory. The tone and temper of both these rhetorical devices are aptly illustrated in the medieval English poem, *Langland's Vision of Piers the Plowman*. In the course of the second part of the poem (in the first part, a company of pilgrims, the whole of mankind, is led in their quest for the shrine of 'St Truth' by a simple tiller of the soil, Piers the Ploughman), the dreamer wakes in Jerusalem on Palm Sunday, where he sees

One like to the Samaritan and somewhat to Piers Plowman
Barefoot on an ass's back . . .

and is told:

This Jesus of his nobility will joust in Pier's armour,
In his helm and his hauberk, *humana natura*.

When the poet eventually meets Piers, he finds him all stained with blood, carrying a cross to Calvary; and he learns that this is indeed Christ, christendom's victor. Later on in the poem, the descent into hell is portrayed, and our Lord compares himself with an earthly king — who can pardon the condemned — to indicate that his own redemptive power extends to all mankind.⁹

This digression has its relevance. Ignatius, too, is a 'poor pilgrim', in search of truth and the perfection of charity; and Christ has revealed himself to him in a number of guises. Ignatius will, in turn, reveal him to his followers in concepts, language and imagery which are native, meaningful and appealing to the sixteenth-century spanish hidalgo and to those who immediately share his culture.

'My kingdom is not of this world': certainly the Christ whom Ignatius is stirred to follow is the suffering, outraged, rejected Christ who stands before the kings of this world; and it is this Christ whom Ignatius believes will call those who are to belong to the Company of Jesus. They will:

desire to clothe themselves in the same clothing and uniform of their Lord because of the love and reverence he deserves . . . and would wish to suffer injuries, false accusations and affronts, and to be held and esteemed as fools . . . because of their desire to resemble and imitate our Creator and Lord Jesus Christ . . . since it was for our spiritual advantage that he clothed himself as he did. For he gave us an example that in all things possible we might seek, through the aid of his grace, to imitate and follow him, since he is the way which leads men to life.¹⁰

⁹ Cf 'Piers Plowman', in *Pre-Reformation English Spirituality*, ed James Walsh (London, 1965), pp 121-31.

¹⁰ *Examen Generale* (101). Cf *The Constitutions of the Society of Jesus*, ed George Ganss (St Louis, 1970), pp 107-8.

Nor does Ignatius temper his vocabulary in his letters to women. 'To bend every effort to obtain the praise, honour and service of God our Lord', is to 'declare war against the world, to raise one's standard against it, and to be ready to reject what is exalted by embracing what is humble, to accept indifferently honour and dishonour, riches and poverty, love and hatred'.¹¹ The continuing tension in vocabulary and imagery is specified by the englishman, John Helyar, who set down his own way of giving these two exercises in 1535-36.¹² He prefaces the text of the Two Standards thus:

... Christ our sovereign captain and Lord, who here promises nothing that is pleasant or joyful, but a continual warfare, all that is difficult, hard and bitter — if one excepts the interior joy of the heart; but holds out a future full of happiness, joy, peace — in fact eternal rejoicing, which eye has not seen, nor ear heard, etc.¹³

Likewise at the end of his version of the Kingdom, he recommends that the exercitant make the threefold colloquy of the repetition of the first two exercises on sin,¹⁴ *mutando materias*, the purpose of which is to ask for the grace of the oblation; and he adds several verses from different psalms — asking for the grace to be taught 'the ways of the Lord'.¹⁵ The tension, it would appear, is deeper than the images and rhetorical devices which belong to an outworn culture and jar on the modern ear and eye; deeper also than to be capable of resolution by a simple appeal to the common judaeo-christian scriptural tradition:

Lord, teach me your ways.

But the Lord said to Samuel, 'Do not look on his appearance or on the weight of his statue, because I have rejected him; for the Lord sees not as man sees; man looks on the outward appearance, but the Lord looks on the heart'.¹⁶

The Lord and King of the Exercises and of the Constitutions is the risen and exalted Lord, 'the head of the body, the Church, in whom the complete being of God, by God's own choice, came to dwell',¹⁷ yet who still appears as the Jesus who is persecuted;¹⁸ so that 'those who shall have a greater desire to be moved by love, and to signalize themselves in a total service of their eternal King and universal Lord, will not only offer their own persons in the task; they will even go against their own

¹¹ Letter to Isobel Roser, 10 November 1532 — *Epistolae Ignatii I*, pp 86-88.

¹² Cf *Exercitia Spiritualia S. Ignatii Loyola*, ed J. Calveras and H. de Dalmases (Rome, 1969), pp 419-20.

¹³ *Ibid.*, p 441.

¹⁴ Exx 63.

¹⁵ Helyar, *loc. cit.*, p 434.

¹⁶ Helyar, *ibid.*, citing Ps 24, 4 & 1 Sam 16, 7.

¹⁷ Col 1, 17-18.

¹⁸ Cf Acts 9, 5.

life-in-the flesh and their natural and this-worldly love . . .'.¹⁹ As it was for Paul, so it will be their happiness to suffer for others, for it will be Christ labouring and suffering in them:

It is now my happiness to suffer for you. This is my way of helping to complete, in my poor human flesh, the full tale of Christ's afflictions still to be endured, for the sake of his body which is the Church.²⁰

The conflict that this involves can be sublimated (or even mythologized!) by reference to 'higher powers', allegorized in the terminology of medieval chivalry, or 'psychologized' in terms of aggression and growth to personal maturity;²¹ but it remains the basic struggle of the flesh against the Spirit:²² the bias of self-interest, self-love and self-will,²³ in opposition to the qualities which define the spirit of Christ living in the disciple — poverty, suffering for others, humility.

The spiritual work which the Exercises represent, 'of overcoming oneself and regulating one's life — after the pattern of Christ's — without being swayed by any disordered attachment',²⁴ is analogously a 'theandric' operation — the reflection of Christ's own; and this is perhaps what Bartolomeo Torres meant when he said that when he had studied theology it was for the sake of teaching others, but when he made the Exercises, he laboured to know in order to act (*trabajava de saber para obrar*):²⁵ 'a knowledge which is a well-spring of action . . . a living, affective interior assent to the rightness of the way of the Lord. It is a knowledge wrested from experience guided by the grace of Christ'.²⁶ To learn to know Christ in this way — to search for the interior knowledge which is the constant petition of the Exercises — is 'to experience the power of his resurrection, and to share his sufferings, in growing conformity with his death'. This is the balance which Ignatius would have us seek — 'the righteousness that comes from faith in Christ, given by God in response to faith'.²⁷ It is this knowledge alone which puts us in touch with, assimilates us to, the Christ who is sent 'to devote himself to the pure service of the Father'.²⁸ 'Jesus, who, for the sake of the joy that lay ahead of him, endured the cross, making light of its shame'.²⁹ It is where this knowledge is lacking that the jesuit

¹⁹ Exx 97. ²⁰ Col 1, 24.

²¹ Cf Croft, G.: 'Psychological reflections on the Kingdom', in *Supplement to the Way*, 18 (1973), pp 79-83.

²² Cf Rom 7, 21-24.

²³ Exx 189.

²⁴ Exx 21.

²⁵ *Monumenta Ignatiana: Exercitia Spiritualia* (Madrid, 1919), p 667.

²⁶ Yeomans, William: 'Two Standards', in *Supplement to the Way*, I (1965), p 24.

²⁷ Phil 2, 9-10.

²⁸ Exx 135.

²⁹ Heb 12, 2.

purpose and vocation falter. 'Have I been all this time with you, and you still do not know me?'³⁰

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As God has called you, live up to your vocation. Be humble always and gentle, and patient too. Be forbearing with one another and loving. Spare no effort to make fast with bonds of peace the unity which the Spirit gives. . . . And these were his gifts: some to be apostles, some prophets, some pastors and teachers, to equip God's people for work in his service, to the building up of the body of Christ. So we shall all at last attain to the unity inherent in our faith and our knowledge of the Son of God — to mature manhood, measured by nothing less than the full stature of Christ. . . . Let us speak the truth in love; so shall we fully grow up into Christ. He is the head, and on him the whole body depends. Bonded and knit together by every constituent joint, the whole frame grows through the due activity of each part, and builds itself up in love.³¹

There is no better summary than this of the eighth part of the Constitutions. It was Paul who also said 'Be imitators of me, as I am of Christ', and presented his own hierarchy of authority to the christian community — that Christ is the head of every man, woman's head is man, and Christ's head is God; 'though in Christ's fellowship woman is as essential to man as is man to woman . . . and God is the source of all'.³² So the christian family mirrors the body of Christ which is the Church, but it expresses a series of relationships in which there is at once subordination and equality in terms of Christ and of God. And the mark of this relationship of likeness is 'receiving the word in suffering but with joy in the holy Spirit'.³³ So those commissioned are apostles and legates of Christ, not simply because God makes his appeal through them,³⁴ but because they are a model for the way of the christian life.³⁵ It is ultimately because we are God's favourite sons in Christ that we are called to live according to the pattern of his sacrificial love.³⁶

All these scriptural models and images are important to Ignatius, wherever in his Constitutions he attempts to describe what sort of body his Company is. So in Part VIII, when he is speaking of the union of far-flung members amongst themselves and with their head, he says that even if large numbers are found to be sufficiently mortified as to be incorporated into the Company, they are to be considered not a crowd, but God's people (*gens electa*).³⁷ More generally, Ignatius grew more and

³⁰ Jn 14, 9.

³¹ Eph 4, 1-3, 11-13, 15-16.

³² 1 Cor 11, 1, 3, 11, 12.

³³ 1 Thess 1, 6. ³⁴ 2 Cor 5, 20. ³⁵ Phil 3, 17. ³⁶ Eph 5, 1; Rom 12, 1-2, 4-5.

³⁷ Pars VIII, cap I (658). The oblique reference is to 1 Pet 2, 9 (Vulgate): 'Vos autem genus electum, regale sacerdotium, gens sancta'. By some oversight, the Ganss edition translates ambiguously 'an élite race', which would not have pleased Ignatius, with his insistence on 'this least Society'. Cf *Ed.cit.*, p 286.

more aware towards the end of his life that there must be a numerical limit beyond which the sort of unity in charity that he envisaged would cease to be feasible in practice, and he would quote the (Vulgate) text of Isaiah: 'You have multiplied the people, but not their happiness'.³⁸ Like other founders, whose charismatic gifts in the first years made the obediential relationship a sweet yoke because most of his brethren could recognize Christ so easily in him, he found in his later years that, as his personal contacts weakened because of the problem of distance and numbers, there occurred a widening gap between letter and spirit, initiative and passive acceptance, responsibility and acceptance of will and judgment. Unless the head is known to the members, it is hardly likely that the qualities of his person, let alone his good reputation and prestige amongst them, will be particularly helpful towards the union of minds and hearts.³⁹

In recent times, the historical and cultural background of Ignatius, and what has come to be called his 'world-view', has been subjected to close and expert scrutiny. His concept of the role and function of Superior General, it is said, and particularly of the hierarchical structure of his company, was strongly influenced by his early sixteenth-century Basque origins and his training among the castilian nobility. It is emphasized, for example, that

As a Basque hidalgo, Ignatius was part of a social structure which was above all familial, wherein the father as the *Senor* had exercised an absolute power of discipline over the persons of his family and of all those who lived under his protection.⁴⁰

And it is implied that the castilian tradition, as codified in *Las Siete Partidas*, was as influential as St Paul in the formation of the ignatian concept of the General as the unique head of the entire body — the king who is the heart, soul and head of the Kingdom.⁴¹

In the last analysis, however, such observations do little more than point up the human paradox that has existed in every epoch of the christian community and will continue to exist until Christ be all in all: the Church, of whom Christ is head and husband,⁴² is not yet co-extensive with the Kingdom or ready to be presented, holy and without blemish, to the Father;⁴³ she is sinful and in need of purification, penance and restoration.⁴⁴ Ignatius, no less than many other leaders before and after him, found himself caught up in the paradox. He

³⁸ Isai 9, 3. 'Multiplicasti gentem et non magnificasti laetitiam'.

³⁹ Const. Pars VIII cap 1 (666-7).

⁴⁰ Futrell, J.: *Making an Apostolic Community of Love* (St Louis, 1970), p 58.

⁴¹ *Ibid.*, p 53.

⁴² Exx 353.

⁴³ Eph 5, 27.

⁴⁴ Cf *Lumen Gentium*, 8.

would describe his community, in the persons of those jesuits who were sent to work in Abyssinia, as 'from all ranks and twelve in number out of devotion to the number representative of Christ our Lord and his twelve apostles. They will offer themselves for every kind of labour⁴⁵ and danger for the good of souls in the lands subject to your highness'.⁴⁶ And he goes on to say that they are sent with 'the authority, the true power of the apostolic See' — the keys of the Kingdom bestowed on Peter and his successors. Yet equally he would oppose the papacy with all his strength to prevent Francis Borgia being appointed Cardinal; and his directive to the german Jesuits is an implicit criticism of papal policy: not to be imprudent in their defence of the Holy See's authority; to fight against heresy, but to love and show compassion to the heretics. So Nadal would say: 'We are papists only in so far as we ought to be: that is, for the glory of God and the greater good of all'. For Ignatius, reform of the Church and the world depended on the reform of the Pope and his curia.

And yet, over and again, in his Constitutions, and particularly in his Rules for thinking rightly within the Church militant⁴⁷ — another military epithet — Ignatius is adamant that the institutional Church — warts and all — is the Church to which the Society is firmly attached by every conceivable bond. The Society exists only in so far as it is hierarchically approved and sent. Christ is head of the Church as she is, not as she is supposed to be, or as we would wish her to be. So, for Ignatius, Christ is the head of the Pope, whether the Pope is Leo the Great or Alexander VI, the Pope is the head of the Society, and the head of the Society is the head of every Provincial. God's creation, the Church, all heavenly and ecclesiastical bodies, are inevitably and inexorably hierarchical in their structure, as the famous Letter on Obedience insists.⁴⁸ This was the cultural and ecclesial situation accepted by Ignatius and his first companions, once they had decided that obedience to one of their number was to be the *ratio agendi apostolica* of the Company. It is this way of working — *agere sequitur esse* — that the Constitutions attempt to reflect. Yet Christ is the head of every member of the Society; it is his personal guidance, 'the interior law of charity and love which the holy Spirit writes and engraves upon hearts', which will preserve, direct and promote the Society in the service of the Trinity, far more than any exterior Constitution.⁴⁹ The

⁴⁵ Cf Exx 96.

⁴⁶ *Epistolae S. Ignatii*, VIII, pp 460 ff.

⁴⁷ Exx 352.

⁴⁸ To the members of the Society in Portugal, 26 March 1553: *Epistolae Ignatii*, IV, p 681.

⁴⁹ Const. (134).

catholics of the sixteenth century, who had suffered the violent and disruptive influence of a Huss and a Wycliff, were more willing than are we to see the distinction between the personal worthiness of the minister and the sacred power committed to him hierarchically. Ignatius would say (or was it Polanco?) of any and every Superior in the Society or the Church:

Nor on the contrary, should he lack prudence, is he to be the less obeyed in that in which he is Superior, since he represents him who is infallible wisdom, and who will supply what is wanting in his minister; nor should he lack goodness or other desirable qualities, since Christ our Lord, having said, 'The scribes and the Pharisees have sat on the chair of Moses', adds, 'All things, therefore, whatsoever they shall say to you, observe and do; but according to their wishes do ye not'.⁵⁰

This was the cultural and social way of it in the Lord's time: conform or be cast out of the synagogue, whether its rulers are corrupt or not. (The apostles, however, were told to expect expulsion from the synagogue.) And it was the way of it in the ecclesiastical society of the sixteenth century: it was 'simply not done' to look the Superior in the eye. By and large, it no longer seems to be the way of it in our day. Christ our Lord, the head of each one of us, is supremely worthy of honour and power.⁵¹ The Father has exalted him and given him all power because of his humility and obedience.⁵² He tells us that we are endowed to recognize him in the poor, the downtrodden, the deprived and the destitute.⁵³ He does not tell us how to recognize him in the proud, the inflexible, the remote, 'those dressed in a little brief authority'. *Acatamiento*, reverence for the person of the Superior, depends on recognition of personal interior qualities, as with Christ.

There still remains, however, a way of recognizing Christ in the most unprepossessing of situations — through humiliation; and, in particular, the humiliation of being governed and directed stupidly or badly — Christ's own experience of the hostility of the Pharisees, the vacuity of Herod and the vacillation of Pilate, coupled of course with the sense of betrayal felt in the perfidy of Judas, the denial of Peter, the cowardice of the apostles, and the indifference of his people as a whole. It is only the Exercises — the doing of them, and particularly the Third Week — which can teach us how closely, for Ignatius, the Jesuit must be identified with the suffering Servant. It is not an identity which we take to readily; the Society will always have difficulty in accepting the ideal of the third mode of humility — the distillation of its charism.

⁵⁰ *Ibid.*, From the Letter on Obedience, cited above, p 90, n 48.

⁵¹ Cf Apoc 5, 12-13.

⁵² Cf Phil 2, 6-11.

⁵³ Cf Mt 25, 34-40.