

PRESENTING THE CALL OF THE KING

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WHAT DOES a modern director do with the exercise on the Call of the King? Peoples' reactions vary so. Some say that the parable is alien or offensive with its medieval imagery of hierarchic and male structures, of power and war; others find the very same parable helpful. Some say it is a critical structural exercise of the greatest importance; others claim that too much is made of it, that it can be omitted. What is one to think of this exercise? How does one present it? This article attempts to speak to both issues. Its aim is twofold: first, to present an analysis of the Kingdom exercise and, second, to describe and comment on ways in which modern directors present it.¹

An analysis of the Kingdom exercise

This study focuses on the complete Exercises (thirty day or nineteenth annotation) as given to first-time retreatants. I assume that the Exercises are meant to be adapted to the retreatant and that they are meant to lead the *whole person* (mind, feelings, body, unconscious depths, etc.,) into a freer and deeper love relationship with Christ, a love based on a union of wills. The text studied is the Autograph text.² Since the Exercises are the fruit of Ignatius's experience, we need to study them in light of that experience, as well as taking into account the interpretations of the early Directories and of modern directors.

In this section we focus on the text of the Call of the King but always in light of its larger context. That context places the Exercises in a time of transition, of new beginnings. In the First Week the retreatant experienced himself or herself as a 'loved sinner'. He or she saw more clearly God's wondrous love, the ingratitude involved in his or her response and God's further response of even more love and forgiveness offered in Jesus. This experience of love and forgiveness obviously nurtured a grateful love relationship. But the Second Week now invites the retreatant

to a new stage in love, to the possible invitation of being with Jesus in his work of compassionate love.

This context suggests three related perspectives for understanding better this exercise and its function: (1) as a principle and foundation for what follows, (2) as a bridge, and (3) as a test (when needed). I will say a few words about each of these perspectives and then analyze the text of the Kingdom exercise. This will lead to some conclusions about the importance and function of the exercise and prepare us for the second part of the article where we will present and comment on modern ways to present the Call of the King.

(1) *Principle and foundation.* As the Official Directory of 1599 points out,³ the Kingdom exercise is a type of foundation for what follows. Such a perspective helps us understand the unique structure of the exercise. The exercise belongs to a transition day when not much happens and is made only twice. It is not, in Ignatian terms, a meditation nor a contemplation.⁴ There is an impersonal character to it, the retreatant considering the King's call as a spectator. It has no colloquy nor does it even end with an Our Father. It is something to consider, analogous to the way one considers the Principle and Foundation of the First Week. It orients the retreatant and sets the stage so one can enter more fully into the dynamic of the Second Week. It is seminal: starting a process rather than being the dramatic event of transformation.

(2) *A bridge.* The Kingdom exercise does not simply lay the foundation for a new stage. It acts as a bridge between the First and Second Weeks, linking the First Week experience to what follows. The dynamic of the First Week with gratitude and love as its fruit can flow into a desire to know Jesus more, to enter into a new relationship of service. If the retreatant realizes that he or she might be invited to labour with Jesus to free others just as he or she has been freed, then the experiences of the two Weeks are linked in a way that can foster more a wholehearted response.

(3) *A test.* A third view of the Kingdom exercise focuses on Ignatius's conviction that not all are ready or called to the Second Week. To lead some people into this new dynamic would be a disservice, for that journey demands a certain type of love and generosity. Without a solid foundation in being loved one can enter a service spirituality not so much to minister in love, although that is the rhetoric, as to win love. Some directors wonder if a retreatant who has had no history of love or intimacy in his or

her life is ready for the Second Week. If the director is not sure if the retreatant should move into this new stage, the Kingdom exercise can act as a test. As we shall see, no retreatant is expected to make the oblation at this point, but his or her reaction to the consideration can shed light on whether to proceed. If there is still unclarity, some directors will continue until the Two Standards and then carefully observe if the retreatant can make the oblation authentically and not out of playing a role.

A Study of the text

With this background let us look at the text of the Kingdom exercise. At the very beginning (Exx 91)⁵ Ignatius gives us two indications of how he sees it. First he writes that it will aid (*ayuda*) in contemplating Christ's life. Then in the second prelude Ignatius tells us what is to be desired and prayed for (and thus what the exercise should foster). One prays not to be deaf to the Lord's call but prompt and diligent to do his will. Here is an expression of the interior orientation needed for the Second Week. Here is a prayer for the desire and ability to discern Jesus's invitations. This prayer takes a more specified form in the third prelude of each Second Week contemplation (Exx 104): the retreatant prays for interior knowledge of Jesus that he or she may love and follow him more. The loving and following cannot be separated. The stage is being set, an orientation fostered, that will nourish this special relationship with Jesus.

Two comments on the body of the exercise: first, the exercise needs to be studied against the background of Ignatius's experience. Ignatius as a youth was fired by a dream that ignited his whole being with a focused energy: to be a knight for some great lord or lady and to do wondrous deeds in their service. Modern psychology repeats what Ignatius experienced: an image that speaks to and comes from one's depths fosters an integration, motivation, and energy for full living. God's grace transformed that image, leading Ignatius to realize that his dream could be lived in a way far beyond anything he imagined.

Second, it helps to read the Call of the King as a parable. Following Joachim Jeremias's study of Jesus's parables, I view a parable as a story with one basic point.⁶ A parable is distinct then from an allegory, a form where each part has its special application. The parable as a whole takes what is more known to reveal what is less known. The first part of the Kingdom parable presents what

was at first more visible, more known and more attractive to Ignatius: the idealized lord-vassal relationship. The parable presents an idealized king (he has never existed!), an invitation to labour *with him* in the noblest of works (in Ignatius's eyes), and the response a noble knight would make to such an invitation. The parable presents a special love relationship, to Ignatius the deepest of love relationships possible. The idealized lord was provider, protector, leader, and friend.⁷ The knight-vassal offered his love in deeds of help and counsel. No matter to Ignatius that this feudal structure in reality was dying. The ideal was large and clear as the setting sun.

The application of the parable reveals a new dimension of Jesus and what the retreatant's relationship with him can be. The dream is transformed and found to be a possible reality. The parable introduces Jesus from a new perspective so that the exercitant can enter the contemplations on his life with a better sense of who Jesus is, what he is about, and what he invites people to. In that presentation Jesus and his call are united in one point, for the invitation is to a partnership in love. The entire thrust of the Exercises indicates that the metaphor of warfare does not emphasize conquest but empowerment, Jesus's coming to free people from the power of the 'enemy of human nature', to work for the reign of God as the only way to universal peace and justice. This vision presents much more than a 'me and Jesus' spirituality. It stimulates living with Jesus for others.

The next two points in the Kingdom exercise shift to possible responses to the King's call. Since this exercise only sets the stage, the retreatant considers responses but does not make one. Ignatius wants no quick, emotional-high response. The response, if it is to come, must come from the whole person who freely and 'reasonably' enters into this relationship. The response comes only after a serious consideration of the cost and after growth in knowledge and love of Jesus. Then the exercitant is asked to offer an unconditional commitment, to sign a 'blank cheque'. This special moment occurs in the meditation on the Two Standards (Exx 136-148). There, for the first time, the retreatant asks to be placed under the standard of Jesus.

B *Questions and comments*

The Kingdom exercise is an orientation of the whole person, pointing the retreatant in a certain direction and fostering a special

relationship. In that orientation the exercitant can be grabbed powerfully and imaginatively by the person of Jesus and his mission so that he or she will want to know, love and follow him more (Exx 104). This seems to be what happened to Ignatius in his conversion reading and at Manresa. According to Oliverio Manareo and others around Ignatius he applied himself during his own retreat chiefly to two exercises, the Two Standards and the Call of the King.⁸

How does one reconcile Manareo's statement and our contention that the Call of the King is a consideration? Whether the exercise touches the depths of the retreatant through imagery or whether it offers a more 'rational' consideration, it is meant to colour or help in contemplating Christ's life. Thus it can be helpful consciously to recall that orientation throughout the week. The more the consideration is in imagery that taps the depths of the person the more natural and helpful it will be for the retreatant to return to it as he or she contemplates Jesus's life.

I submit that the Kingdom exercise has an important function in the Exercises but that there may be different ways to fulfil that function. So much depends on the retreatant (how different the dynamic can be for one who has made the Exercises in some form for years), on the way God is working, and on the individual director. Our present study does not offer a simple answer as to how to give the exercise but does raise questions that might assist the director. First, is the retreatant ready and able to move into a Second Week dynamic? Does that need to be tested? Second, how is the transition to be made? Has it happened naturally or does it need to be fostered? Can the retreatant's First Week experience of Christ's saving work or the way Christ was experienced be integrated better into this next step?

Third, how to lay the proper foundation or orientation for the Second Week dynamic? Is the retreatant entering into the contemplation of Jesus's life with insight that Jesus both continues to work to save and calls some to labour with him under the standard of the cross? That 'seeing' or orientation can take place at two levels. On one level there can be a basic consideration of this truth that helps the retreatant contemplate better the life of Christ. On another level there can be a 'seeing' of this truth with the whole person as it is expressed in images that express or tap what is deepest in the person. What type of orientation is this retreatant capable of and called to?

We have seen that the Kingdom exercise had an important function for Ignatius but that there might be different ways to fulfil that function today. We have seen the importance of Kingdom imagery for Ignatius but wonder what a modern director does with it. Having clarified something of the Kingdom exercise's purpose, we now need to ask how best to present the exercise today. We will respond to this question by describing and commenting in light of the above study on different ways modern directors present the Call of the King.

Ways to present the Call of the King

Directors present the Call of the King in a variety of ways. Some use the ignatian text or a modern paraphrase while others use neither. In this section I will briefly sketch and comment on different approaches under five headings: (1) text alone, (2) scripture with or without the Kingdom text, (3) parables, (4) matter from the unconscious, and (5) material from personal experiences.

(1) *Text alone.* Some directors simply present the Kingdom exercise with little or no explanation. They find that with enough time everyone gains something from it. They choose to stay out of the way, believing that it is better to let people discover with God's grace what is there for them. It is interesting to note that some directors find their retreatants get something out of the text while others say that some of theirs do not (because cultural imagery does not orient them and causes a negative reaction). A question we might need to ask ourselves: why this difference in directors' experience? Is the difference tied into the director's expectations? Does this indicate how much a director's expectations and views affect the retreatant?

(2) *Scripture.* For those I interviewed, the most common method of presenting the exercise is through the use of scripture. To list all the scripture texts used by directors is another article. Here I will briefly sketch some categories of texts that are used either alone or with the ignatian text. Then I will offer some general questions and comments.

The most commonly used group of texts describe individual calls by God (e.g., the disciples, Mary). If there is a need to test the retreatant's readiness to continue, one director will have the retreatant do an active imagining or 'role-play' meditation on Jn 1,29-39. Other directors focus on: (1) the mission of Jesus (e.g., hymns of Paul), (2) his message (e.g., the beatitudes), (3) titles of

Jesus (e.g., Good Shepherd), or (4) a whole section of the gospel (e.g., Mk 1-5). In this last approach the retreatant tries to get a better sense of the person of Jesus, his mission and call (with the hope that a focusing image may emerge then or later).

Some directors will explain the Kingdom text and the relationship fostered by it and then suggest a scripture text on the different qualities of the idealized lord as realized in Jesus (provider, protector, leader, friend). Or they will suggest scripture texts that answer four questions: (1) Who is this person who calls me? (2) What is his cause? (3) What will it cost me? and (4) What will be the outcome I can expect?⁹

Some directors stress the importance of giving a solid theological perspective on the gospel meaning of Kingdom along with a scripture passage and/or Kingdom text. They explain that the Kingdom is God's rule breaking into our world, a rule that is Christ's self-giving love seeking to free us and give us life. In this context some will use the liturgy of Christ the King. This approach can give a solid foundation, based on scripture, of Christ's Kingdom and may give rise to modern parables of the Kingdom, especially if joined to some method mentioned later.

Let me suggest some questions that might help the director who uses scripture texts, especially if the ignatian parable is not included in the presentation. (1) A retreatant may hide in the beauty of the text and not be challenged and tested by the oblation considered in the Kingdom exercise. Is that happening with this retreatant? (2) Which texts should be given to this retreatant? Should the texts be chosen to build on any special First Week experience of the retreatant? (3) Is the exercitant being offered a solid foundation for understanding Christ, his call and the nature of a whole-hearted response? Does the presentation offer the possibility of tapping into imagery that might focus the whole person?

The ignatian text, if it truly speaks to the retreatant, offers a focused message leading to insight and desire. It may be that the scripture text can do that better since scripture has a special power of revealing Christ. However, if the director uses scripture texts alone he or she may want to ask two more questions. First, is the choice of texts emphasizing certain aspects of the Kingdom exercise at the expense of others? Second, how does changing the exercise from a consideration to a contemplation effect its dynamic?

(3) *Parable*. Some directors foster the dynamic of the Kingdom exercise through a modern parable or story presented in connection

with the ignatian text or with scripture. The broad outline of one such story is: you have been freed from prison by someone who stole in at great risk to help you escape and now that person asks you to go back with him to free two others. Another story: a medical student asks a woman he loves to marry him but says that he wants to devote his life as a doctor among the poor and asks if she would be willing to live and help him in such surroundings. Each story has its own appeal and emphasis. The first story emphasizes gratitude and builds on the First Week experience. The second story emphasizes labouring with the beloved to help others. Each of the directors who uses one of these stories also uses others to stimulate the retreatant's reflection. Through this process the retreatant may eventually creatively discover his or her own parable.

Some directors such as David Fleming paraphrase in less medieval clothing the Call of the King.¹⁰ These directors believe that the basic imagery and relationship is archetypal (transcends cultural conditions). They seek to re-express that image in ways that speak authentically to the modern person about Christ, his mission and call. They often speak of someone special who sees the poverty, fear and oppression in our world and comes to help people to overcome these obstacles, to help people live more full lives as individuals in the world. At times the director chooses whether to focus on the person inviting as a great hero or as a beloved who knows and loves the retreatant deeply. It is worth noting that the lord-vassal imagery weds these two qualities together. In using this approach, it must never be forgotten that all these images and stories are only fingers pointing to Christ. They help only to the degree that they lay a solid foundation for contemplating Christ's life. They hinder the process if they become ends in themselves or foster a quick, sentimental response with no depth.

A story has a specific power. Compare the difference between simply saying Christ in love calls you and expressing it in a story that speaks to your whole being. There is even greater value in a story or image that the retreatant discovers (cf second annotation) for it leads to intimate understanding and relish. A story expressive of one's inner desires has an authenticity and power that no brilliant story of the director can equal. But such expressions always need to be measured against the gospel and tradition. The image or story, if it is truly authentic and from one's depths, may point to areas where healing and growth are needed.

(4) *Images from the unconscious.* Images, as the language of the unconscious part of ourselves, offer two-way communication between our conscious and unconscious parts.¹¹ These images can help to integrate, mobilize, tap into and express the energy and dynamism of the whole person. One way to reach these images is to encourage them to come up from the unconscious. They can come up in many ways, such as through dreams, active imagining, sketching or writing. The director can foster this process by encouraging the retreatant to talk about the images and make them part of the prayer and reflection. The director's attitude can make quite a difference here. Many retreatants report that they dream much more (i.e. remember their dreams) in a retreat. The barriers between the conscious and unconscious aspects of the self are weakened at such times. The director should encourage this process for it offers a way for God to work deeply in the retreatant. One could say much more on this topic but it needs to be said in some detail in another article.

(5) *Personal experiences.* Helping a retreatant explore significant personal experiences and desires offers an important approach for contacting one's energy and images. This assists the retreatant to discover what really motivates and touches him or her and not talk out of the head on what 'should' motivate one. One form of this approach suggests reflecting on specific experiences of love and intimacy. Such questions can be asked as: what qualities draw you to the one you love? What do you seek in a friend? Then one can reflect on his or her relationship with Christ and how Christ wishes to be the deepest of loves. One may also be encouraged to reflect on specific experiences of God's saving work and expressions of love in his or her life.

Other questions directors use to tap into motivation for mission and service are: what would you die for? What would you live for? What are your dreams for a better world and for yourself? The director assumes that the deep desires within one are true and graced, that they are seeds of life and are meant to draw one forward. These desires may need to be transformed, as Ignatius's image of the temporal lord was transformed, by being with Christ and his dreams. But the dreams and hopes give an authentic starting point from the retreatant's side that can then interact with Christ and his message. Variations on this approach include the suggestion to religious to reflect on the attractive power of the founder or foundress of that community. Some show the film

'Something beautiful for God' as a way to uncover what might deeply touch the retreatant.

Concluding remarks

Any presentation of the Kingdom exercise has value to the degree that it remains true to the basic function of the original exercise. It has value if it is authentic for the retreatant. The exercise must be rooted solidly in who the retreatant is and who Christ is. The first part of the parable in the Kingdom exercise spoke deeply to Ignatius. The second part was a transformation of the first. There is a complicated relationship between the two parts. On the one hand the first part is the more known and reveals something of who Christ is. At another level the first part is transformed to something new and more wondrous. That process may continue and different images emerge. In Ignatius's autobiography the dominant image is pilgrim. In the Constitutions for the Society of Jesus it is more a labourer in the vineyard.

A director is gifted with a variety of approaches for viewing and presenting the Call of the King. In my analysis I view the Kingdom exercise as very important but as a structural exercise that can be presented in a variety of ways. Normally, little need happen in it, especially for first-time exercitants. The director can attempt to get ahead of God if he or she fosters too much too soon by expecting an emotional response and decision to make the oblation. The director can also expect too little of the Kingdom exercise and not take seriously a good preparation and transition into the contemplations on Christ's life and into the ultimate making of the oblation in the Two Standards meditation. In this process the retreatants may later on experience a great deal from this consideration as they discover their own personal story or myth and come to know and love Christ more.

I believe that the imagery and story of the Kingdom exercise give form to a basic relationship of love and of wanting to make a difference that is critical for the dynamic of the Second Week and beyond. I seek then to explain something of the place of this parable in Ignatius's life and its role in the Exercises. I point out the basic relationship and energy behind the parable and ask if the retreatant can resonate with that or with some other image or parable that points to the same type of relationship. My use of scripture passages and of ways by which the retreatant can get in touch or develop his or her own expression depends on my

own prayerful sense of the individual retreatant. The exercitant's personality type, experiences thus far in the retreat, stage of development and type of prayer are some of the factors in my discernment process as director. For me then adaptability is important. This includes not doing too much for the retreatant but giving enough direction for the exercitant to work toward an authentic orientation.

There is a gift for us in all the opinions and views on the Call of the King exercise. It can call us to be more open to the individual experiences of the retreatants and to the wondrous ways God leads people deeper into Christ. I hope that this analysis and sketch of viewpoints enrich your giving of the Exercises.

NOTES

¹ In preparing this article I questioned over sixty men and women directors on how they present the Kingdom exercise and what they see as its purpose and dynamic. Such a diversity of views and methods! I wish to thank publicly all who responded to my questions. Your input has been extremely helpful and is woven through these pages.

² *Sancti Ignatii de Loyola Exercitia Spiritualia*. Edited by José Calveras and Candide de Dalmases. *Monumenta Ignatiana*, Series 2a. *MHSJ*, vol 100 (Rome, Institutum Historicum Societatis Iesu, 1969) pp 140-417.

³ *Directory to the Spiritual Exercises of our Holy Father Ignatius*. (London, Manresa Press, 1925), p 80. The text reads: 'It is, as it were, a kind of foundation or prelude to the whole course of Exercises, a compendium of the life and works of Christ our Lord in the mission entrusted to him by the Father . . . ' The Latin text is on p 668 of the *MHSJ* volume on the Directory.

⁴ In this article I speak of the Call of the King as an exercise or consideration instead of a meditation to accentuate this difference.

⁵ The number in parentheses refers to the usual numbering used in the text of the Exercises.

⁶ Cf. Jeremias, Joachim: *The parables of Jesus* (New York, Charles Scribner's Sons, 1972).

⁷ Schmitt, Robert L., S.J.: 'The Christ-Experience and relationship fostered in the Spiritual Exercises of St. Ignatius of Loyola'. *Studies in the Spirituality of Jesuits*, October 1974.

⁸ Manareo, Oliverio: *Exhortationes* (Brussels, 1912) quoted by Joseph de Guibert, *The Jesuits: their spiritual doctrine and practice*, tr. William Young (Chicago, Loyola University Press, 1964), p 118. For other quotes from companions of Ignatius cf. Hugo Rahner, *The spirituality of St. Ignatius Loyola*, tr. Francis Smith (Westminster, Md., Newman Press, 1953), pp 34f.

⁹ Cowan, Marian and Futrell, John: *The Spiritual Exercises of St. Ignatius of Loyola: a handbook for directors* (Le Jacq Publ. Inc., 1981), pp 69-72.

¹⁰ Fleming, David L: *The Spiritual Exercises of St. Ignatius: A literal translation and a contemporary reading* (St. Louis, Institute of Jesuit Sources, 1978), pp 64-69.

¹¹ Cf. the April issue of *The Way*, vol. 24, no 2 (1984). An entire article could be devoted to this type of work in giving both the Kingdom exercise and the entire Exercises.