

Katarzyna Kamińska  
Dorota Majda  
Dariusz Wiśniewski SJ

## **Ignatian exercises with bibliodrama**

Center of Spirituality in Częstochowa offered in 2015 thirteen series of 8-days Spiritual Exercises of Ignatius of Loyola. Two of the series were carried out with use of bibliodrama methods. This report demonstrates and describes first session planned for the year ahead.

### **General statement**

The retreats lasted 8 days, from 21<sup>st</sup> to 29<sup>th</sup> of October, and were treated as “synthesis”. It means that they were addressed to the people who have already passed all the way through the Ignatian exercises and wanted to deepen this experience. Among the eight participants, who signed up voluntarily, nobody had previous experience in bibliodrama. In the same time, in the Centre, the other “weeks” of Ignatian retreats were undertaken in full silence and “synthesis” group became part of bigger (over 60 people) community. This situation forced some of the external conditions that had to be fulfilled by exercises with bibliodrama: the day program of it had to be adjusted to the plan of work of the whole Centre.

The *synthesis* retreats were titled: “To live according to the Beatitudes”. The text of The Beatitudes (Mt 5, 3-12) was divided into seven parts and each day the bibliodrama exercises were devoted to one of them. The sequence of beatitudes was not complied with the order presented in The Gospel but was adjusted to the group process predicted and expected by the leaders. This text was chosen because of two reasons: The Beatitudes globally recognize experience of the Christian life and seems to be a very good material for “synthesis”. The participants were not a homogeneous group and the text had to be universal enough so that anyone could benefit, regardless of the stage of life or faith.

## **Leaders**

The bibliodrama exercises were carried out by three leaders. For the reason that the exercises with bibliodrama were part of the Jesuits Spiritual Center offer the presence of Jesuit priest with credit of trust was important. The other leaders also had to have their own experience of The Spiritual Exercises of Ignatius of Loyola, in theory and in practice. Additionally, they previously served as spiritual guides.

The project was entirely invented and developed by the whole group of leaders. All leaders were present during every bibliodrama exercise as leader or co-leaders so they could have supported each other and noticed difficulties or crises of participants.

The activities were divided among the leaders in such a way that everyone had similar contribution of the time and possibility of leading each part/phase of bibliodrama process. During the breaks the leaders met to share reflections and instantly make the necessary changes. Additionally, since the bibliodrama exercises were carried out under current supervision of Krystyna Sztuka, who had witnessed many of the activities, her comments and suggestions were also immediately considered and the necessary improves straightaway implemented. In the evenings the leaders met again and once more shared reflections and assigned responsibilities for the next day. Such system gave possibility to take into account day condition of the leader and his or her predispositions.

Besides moderating the bibliodrama exercises each of the leaders had individual 20-minute meetings with two or three retreatants as a spiritual guide to help them going through the Exercises.

## **General program**

As mentioned above some of the general program of Ignatian exercises with bibliodrama had to be coherent at least in some points to the retreats plan of the whole Centre. Adjusting its program to the order well known to participants gave them a sense of stability and security. What is more, it gave the participants sense of community with retreatants from other weeks. Thus, the program was as follow:

<b>Day of arrival:</b>	<b>Days from 1 to 7:</b>
15:30 – Eucharist	07:00 – Body work and meditation
16:30 – Meeting for all retreatants	08:00 – Breakfast
18:00 – Dinner	09:00 – 12.30 Activities
19:00 – Introduction to exercises for synthesis group	13:00 – Lunch
	14:00 – 17.00 Time for individual praying , meeting with spiritual guide, (in 7 <sup>th</sup> day possibility of confession)
<b>Day of departure:</b>	17:15 – Eucharist
06:30 – 07:15 – Eucharistic adoration	18:00 – Dinner
07:30 – Eucharist	19:00 – 19:45 – Eucharistic adoration
08:15 – Breakfast	20:00 – Evening meeting
09:15 – Meeting for all retreatants	
10:00 – Sharing of retreats experience among participants from all groups	
12:00 – Lunch	

The days of participants' arrival and departure were almost the same for all weeks. In other days the meal times, time of Eucharist and Eucharistic adoration were common to all groups and coherent to the tradition of the Spiritual Centre.

In order to maintain consistency between the way of giving exercise and bibliodrama process the first activities in the morning were bodywork and 20 minutes of individual meditation in synthesis group. They were based every day on the same sentence from Ps 119, 105: *Your Word is a lamp to my feet and the light to my path.* After breakfast, from 9:00 to 12:30 it was time for group work. In the afternoon participants had time for individual work and meeting with the spiritual guide. In the evening the group met again for a summary of the day.

## **Method**

Besides the necessity of fitting the program of bibliodrama retreat to the work of whole Centre there were other problems and challenges that the organizers had to face and overcome in order to prevent the participants from getting lost and give them a chance to receive what they had expected - spiritual experience.

### **The noticed problems and proposed solutions were as follow:**

1. Linking the process of bibliodrama, with its five phases, to the phases of Ignatian exercises.

The aim of The Spiritual Exercises of Ignatius of Loyola is using the various methods and spiritual activities to liberate ones inside/heart of all inordinate attachments. As a consequence make it capable to seek and find the will of God in the disposition of his or her life for the salvation of the soul. It is done in the spiritual exercises by such methods as: silence, guidance for the prayers, individual prayer and reflection that comes afterword. As well as every day meeting with spiritual guide and examination of the conscience.

In the Ignatian retreats with the bibliodrama the individual inner process and the group process arise simultaneously. It could create confusion and bring anxiety to the retreatants. In order to prevent them from those experience some analogy between the phases of bibliodrama process and the methods used in the Ignatian exercises were assumed. The assumed analogy is as follow: the role of the first phase – sensibilisation – is similar to the role of silence in the retreats. It should help the participant to move away from everyday life and sensitize to what is here and now. The process that occurs in the second bibliodrama phase (touch) is quite consistent with making choice of biblical text by the Ignatian exercises leader and giving the retreatants the guidance for the prayers. The third phase (identification) is similar to the situation that should take a place during individual prayer. The fourth phase (actualization) occurs during the reflection that the retreatants take after the meditation or contemplation and in the meeting with spiritual guide. The aim of the last bibliodrama phase (summary) is similar to the role played in exercises by examination of the conscience.

The analogy presented above is not exact and does not display all the wealth of the bibliodrama process or the exercises. It was used just in order to help the retreatants to

experience The Ignatian exercises with bibliodrama in peace and harmony.

2. The tension between the group processes (dynamic) occurs in the bibliodrama and the individual way of passing through the Ignatian exercise for each retreatant.

In our culture people who decided to take part in The Spiritual Exercises of Ignatius of Loyola expects rather going inside their hearts than create or find a community. The same expectations were presented among the participants of the exercises with the bibliodrama: they came for the individual retreats where the group process, although valuable, was less important. To meet those expectations as much as possible the day was divided in such a way that the equilibrium between the individual and the group work was prevented and the individual process was not determined by the process that occurs in the group.

The body work and the morning meditation were an entrance to the group but in the same time they allowed the individual experience. Thus, entering to the group occurred gradually. The essential part of group work took a place in the morning activities (9:00 – 12:30). It was the first and the second phase of the bibliodrama where the attention was put on the group and the processes occurring inside. The third phase took a place on the border of the morning group activities and the afternoon individual work. The fourth phase started in the morning but much more happened during the private tense prayer and in the conversation with the spiritual guide. The fifth phase occurred in the evening, during the meeting in the whole group. It was done both individual (the examination of the conscience) and in the group (by presenting the picture and sharing reflections). Because, from the day of arrival the participants were invited to express their feelings and experiences in the form of aquarelle picture that they were painting through the day and all week. This work with the picture was kind of a link connecting all elements of the day process.

3. Distinction the emotional stir that appears in each participant origin from his or her insight or are based on/derived from the group working.

Besides the topics proposed by the leaders during the exercises with the bibliodrama two kinds of the additional contents can appear: the topics brought by the participant and those derived from the dynamic of the group. Thus, the individual way of The

Ignatian exercises cannot be totally fulfilled only by the contents derived from the group experience and it is necessary to save a space for the personal subjects. Simultaneously, it is important to prevent the retreatant from getting down to his or her own problems outside of the group. On the other hand, the process occurred inside of the group might bring the burden to retreatant who is not necessary interested in solving the problems resulting from group dynamic during individual retreats.

#### 4. Direct and indirect (through the group) way of experience of God.

In the Ignatian retreats the experience of God in private prayer is crucial and the time and the place for it must be protected. In retreats with bibliodrama it cannot be reduced just to reflection after each activity. It, additionally, forces the necessity of muting the group process that occurs during the morning bibliodrama exercises and give the time for individual work in the afternoons. Moreover, the prayer brings new contents and retreatant need to have time to work on them. In the bibliodrama group process there is almost no space for it. The solution might be to take these new subjects for individual conversation with the spiritual guide. The other possible way – to change the previously established scheme and adjust it to the new contents was not taken into consideration. The same program was planned to be used in the second retreats session and in order to have any observation of the factors that impact of the results the method should have been unchanged.

### **General evaluation**

- Because of the problems presented above and of the length of the retreats the workshop was a great challenge. The bibliodrama activities lasted for seven days and were physically and emotionally exhausting.
- The dynamic of the group was seen as well as the dynamic of the internal process occurring inside of each participant.
- The scheme that was proposed (every day with a new text) led to the situation that the topic was not fully explored and some of the aspects remained open. From one hand it served for mobilization by raising the tension but from the other hand, it gave the possibility to stay on the surface. However, it was coherent with the group expectations.

It also made the workshop easier for the leaders because when the text was new the spectrum of methods used in the morning part does not need to be extremely broad. For more homogeneous and matched group, it would be possible to reduce the amount of the content and thus create the opportunity to descend into the deep.

- The retreats with the bibliodrama treated as synthesis stage of Ignatian way, clearly showed the problems of participants which were not solved on the previous stages. It might origin from the conditions of the retreatants or from the limitations of the methods used previously.

- It was quite surprising that the bibliodrama method was very confrontational. It led to the conclusion that the level of confrontation can be quite easily increased or decreased by bibliodrama activities and their selection should be done with great caution.

- The picture painted by retreatants and the individual conversation with the spiritual guide turned out to be a good method of expressing emotions and it allowed to keep silence. The participants did not search for other ways of giving vent to emotions even if they strongly worked inside them.

The assumptions made on the beginning and presented in this report were realized. So the workshop can be considered a success. The presumptions were approached with caution thus serious mistakes were avoided. The methodic errors were recorded and reported in the detailed description of the workshop. They were also fixed during the second series of retreats that came a month later. It would be interesting to try to give the Ignatian exercises with bibliodrama under different assumptions.