

## All My Liberty

### Chapter 4: The Standards of Christ and Lucifer

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Commentators are agreed that this is one of the “great” meditations of the Exercises, as evident from the elaborate detail of its composition and from the reference to its importance in other writings of St. Ignatius. It is also unique in having what may be called two corollaries: the Three Classes of Man and the Three Modes of Humility, where the basic principles of the Two Standards are further specified and applied to the exercitant’s immediate needs.

Apart from its intrinsic ascetical value, the meditation on the Two Standards crystallizes the ideals of the Christian apostolate introduced by the call of Christ the King. One of its principal conclusions, therefore, describes the following of Christ as a social and apostolic venture, where a dedicated soul goes beyond the desire for its own sanctification to cooperate with Christ “in propagating His doctrine among all men throughout the world.”

In the Spanish autograph, this meditation is entitled, *De Dos Banderas*, without the definite article (*las*) which might have implied that the whole world must be ranged under one or the other leader. More specifically, St. Ignatius envisions those who are most active and prominent in the respective camps of Christ and Satan, although the Two Standards may be proposed even to those who are not going on to make the Election.

The purpose of this meditation is to help dispose the exercitant to make a good election on his state of life, or, if that is fixed, on its more perfect fulfillment in the following of Christ. In the words of St. Ignatius, by means of this exercise we are to “consider the intention of

Christ our Lord, and on the other side that of the enemy of our human nature, and how we ought to dispose ourselves in order to arrive at perfection in whatever state or kind of life God shall give us to choose.” It is the first in a triad of such predisposing exercises, along with the Three Classes of Men and the Three Modes of Humility.

There is an advance in the Two Standards over the meditation on Kingdom in several ways:

- Where the Kingdom represents a simple call to follow Christ, the Two Standards points up the existence of another and contrary call from the enemy of Christ, Satan, to follow him.
- In the Kingdom, the difficulties to be experienced in following Christ are either inherent in human nature or at least not created by opposition from a malicious will; but in the Standards the origin of the conflict is the hatred of the devil against Christ and His faithful servants.
- The call of Christ the King is to imitate Him, “in bearing all insults and reproaches and all poverty,”—but without further explanation or motivation. In the Standards these are supplied, where poverty is shown to be the normal source of reproaches, which are the means to humility, the basis of all other virtues.
- Although the call to the apostolate was implicit in the Kingdom, it is explicit and of the essence of the Two Standards, where Christ “the Lord of the whole world chooses out so many persons, apostles and disciples, and sends them throughout the whole world diffusing His sacred doctrine through all states and conditions of men.”

## Diabolical Temptations

It is a matter of faith that by God's permissive will the devils try to lead men into sin. Temptations come from the devils' malice. "Out of envy they try to impede man's progress, and out of pride they seek to usurp the power of God, deputing certain ministers to contend against men, just as the angels of God minister in definite offices for the salvation of men." [1]

However, not all temptations come directly from the devil. Indirectly, no doubt, Satan incited Adam to sin and by his fall induced into human nature a certain proneness to evil. In that sense the devil may be called the source of all temptation and sin. But concretely and immediately, sin proceeds not only from the devil but also from concupiscence and the misuse of our liberty. "Even if there were no devil," says St. Thomas, "men would have a desire for food, venereal pleasure and the like. Especially because of fallen nature, a great deal of deordination follows in this area unless the appetites are controlled by right reason; but the final restraint and proper ordination of these appetites depends on the free will. Consequently it is not necessary that all sins come from the instigation of the devil, although when they do come from him, men are deceived into giving consent by the same allurements as seduced our first parents." [2]

We may legitimately ask why St. Ignatius makes no mention of concupiscence in the meditation on the Two Standards. For one thing, it would have been outside the scope of this particular exercise and not congruent with the dispositions that an exercitant should have at this stage of the retreat. The supposition is that already in the First Week, he was moved by fear of the consequences of lust and pride to resolve never again to fall into sin; furthermore it is assumed that he wishes not only to keep the commandments but also to follow the evangelical counsels; and lastly, he is supposed

to be ready to embrace the fullness of Christian perfection, if God calls him to that manner of life. Given this kind of man, Ignatius wants to prepare him to hear and follow the divine vocation by removing what he considers the main obstacles that stand in the way, namely, a congenital inclination towards worldly possessions and vain honors, which the devil will surely exploit to the detriment of further progress in virtue if not to the complete abandonment of God.

If at this stage the devil tempted a person to gross immorality or manifest pride, he would probably fail. So he concentrates on that form of concupiscence which the man has likely not considered. Masking himself as an angel of light, he tries to lead magnanimous souls astray by confirming their attachment to earthly goods, ostensibly for good ends, in order to nourish their desire for human praise, which leads to pride and all kinds of sin.

Another logical question is whether the diabolical strategy follows the same pattern: riches, honor to pride. St. Ignatius answers in the negative, where he qualifies the universality of this plan by saying "as he (the devil) is wont to do in most cases." This is a marginal note made by the saint himself in the Spanish autograph, which is put in parentheses in English translations.

The essential point, however, never varies in the devil's method. Its basic subtlety consists in exciting a man's desire to obtain or retain things which are indifferent in themselves, such as riches and honors, but whose desire is never without danger and not seldom actually deadly. Anyone in whatever state of life who allows himself to be thus implicated will soon experience the attacks of Satan in the form of anxiety, darkness, disturbance of mind, confusion and positive horror, calculated to drive him out of the state of perfection or at least to make perfection impossible in whatever state he is living. For this reason, riches and honors are

properly denominated by St. Ignatius as nets and chains. Lucifer will picture deceptive and perishing goods as though they were real. And although it is not in his power either to give or expedite their acquisition, the devil stimulates cupidity to the point where men persuade themselves that what they ardently desire will surely be acquired, if only they persevere in the effort. [3]

## Pride as the Source of All Sin

When St. Ignatius says that the devil leads his followers from pride to all other vices, he merely echoes the words of Scripture that “Pride is the beginning of all sin” (Ecclesiasticus 10:15). There is an obvious difficulty, however, in reconciling this with another text where St. Paul says that “The desire for money (or avarice) is the root of all evil.” (I Timothy 6:10). Evidently both statements are true, but they need careful distinction, beyond the fact that St. Ignatius himself recognizes that riches lead, through honor, to pride, and thus to every kind of sin.

“Covetousness,” according to St. Thomas, “as denoting a special sin, is called the root of all sins, in likeness to the root of a tree to which it furnishes the sustenance. For we see that by riches man acquires the means of committing any sin whatever, and of sating his desire for any kind of sin, since money helps him to obtain all manner of temporal goods . . . so that in this sense, desire for riches is the root of all sins.” [4] It may be conceded that avarice is sometimes rooted in other evil inclinations, such as gluttony or ambition. But generally speaking the hankering for temporal possessions gives rise to other sins, and not vice versa.

Defining pride as the inordinate desire to excel, St. Thomas explains in what sense pride is the beginning of every sin:

In voluntary actions, such as sins, there is a two-fold order, of intention and of execution. In the order of intention, the basis of action is the end

(or purpose in view). Now man’s purpose in acquiring temporal goods is that, through their means, he may have some perfection and excellence. Therefore, from this aspect, pride, which is the desire to excel, is said to be the beginning of every sin. On the other hand, in the order of execution, the first place belongs to that which by furnishing the opportunity of fulfilling all desires of sin, has the character of a root, and such are riches; so that from this point of view, avarice is the root of all evils. [5]

Following the above explanation, pride is the beginning of all sin because it means that spirit of self-exaltation which induces disobedience. In so far as a man is proud, he will not submit his mind and will to others, even to God; he becomes a law unto himself. Such autonomy is incompatible with obedience to the law of God, and becomes the basic disposition from which every sin must flow as from a fountain; being that insubordination of creature to Creator which takes on a variety of forms—or specific sins—according to the different circumstances in which a person finds himself.

Pride can be the origin of sin in still another sense, as described in the writings of the Fathers. It corrupts everything it touches. St. Gregory the Great explains that other sins assail those virtues only by which they themselves are destroyed: as anger destroys patience, gluttony abstinence and lust continence. But pride is not satisfied with uprooting one virtue; it is a ravaging disease which corrupts the whole spiritual life. No matter what action is placed, if motivated by pride, the end desired is vainglory and not the glory of God. “For when pride assaults the mind a kind of tyrant invests a besieged city; and the more gifted his victim, the more harshly does he rise up in authority.” Once a man allows this tyranny to enter his mind, “the eye of his heart becomes closed and he loses all balance of judgment. While the good things that others do are displeasing to him, what he does, though amiss, meets with his approval . . . Convinced that he surpasses others in everything, he walks with

himself in imagination, silently chanting his own praises.” [6]

Finally pride is the beginning of sin because it deprives a man of supernatural help from God, without which the assaults of temptation cannot be overcome. “God resists the proud” (I Peter 5:5). On his part, the proud man does not ask for divine grace, and therefore does not receive what would have been given to him in answer to humble prayer; on the part of God, the Lord will not force His assistance on a will that refuses to cooperate.

Also to be noted is that when St. Ignatius speaks of riches as leading to pride, the riches may be either material or spiritual:

One person prides himself on gold, another on the highest and heavenly virtues. And yet one and the same thing is going on before the eyes of God, though, as it comes to the hearts of men, it is clothed in their sight with a different garb. At first a man may have been proud of some earthly possessions, and later on is elated at his sanctity; in either case, it is still the same pride which has only changed appearances in order not be recognized. [7]

Spiritual pride, of talent or virtue, is especially possible in persons who have risen above material and secular interests; hence the besetting temptation against which consecrated souls in the cloister and the active apostolate should be warned.

Comparable to pride as the source of all evil, humility is the fountainhead of all virtue. Properly speaking, “humility is the reverence by which a man subjects himself to God.” [8] As the disposition of will which inclines a man to subordinate himself to the divine will, it is fundamental to the practice of any virtue. It is also the *conditio sine qua non* for obtaining and profiting from the grace of God. In this sense especially, “humility holds the first place” among the virtues. “It drives out pride, which

God resists; it makes a man submissive and always ready to receive the influx of divine grace.” So that “humility is said to be the foundation of the spiritual edifice” as its indispensable condition. [9]

This is the meaning of the classic passages in patristic literature on the importance of humility in the spiritual life, following the teaching of Christ who bade us imitate Him above all in the practice of this virtue. St. Augustine says that the whole life of Christ on earth was a lesson in humility, which explains its relation to the other virtues. “The reason why Christ particularly commended humility to us was because thereby is removed the chief obstacle to man’s salvation. For man’s salvation consists in tending to things heavenly and spiritual, from which he is hindered by striving to magnify himself in earthly things. For the removal of this obstacle, therefore, our Lord has shown by examples of humility how external greatness should be despised. Thus humility is a predisposition to man’s free approach to spiritual and divine blessings.” [10]

In relation to supernatural perfection, humility serves the function of clearing the way. The negative hindrance that must absolutely be removed is pride, which repels God and which God repels. By removing this elementary barrier to the influx of grace, humility is properly considered the source of whatever virtue is acquired in the supernatural life. When revelation tells us that “God resists the proud, but gives grace to the humble” (James 4:6), this is not only a statement of God’s economy—the more humility the more grace—but a law of human liberty in cooperation (or conflict) with divine generosity, that unless a man is humble he will (in the measure of his pride) resist whatever grace he receives.

## Call to a Special Apostolate

Analysts of the Spiritual Exercises see in the meditation on the Two Standards the “social moment” in the following of Christ by active

cooperation with Him in the salvation of souls. “Everything else is subordinated to this new ideal of service. The service of the Divine Majesty becomes synonymous with the helping of souls, which is work to be done within the Church Militant.” [11]

The most concise statement of the apostolate in the Exercises occurs in this meditation. Parallel readings of the autograph and original Latin or vulgate version will supply certain details not found in English translations generally based on the Spanish:

#### Spanish Autograph

Consider how the Lord of all the world chooses so many persons, apostles, disciples, etc., and sends them throughout the whole world to spread His sacred doctrine among all men, no matter what their state or condition.

#### Vulgate Version

Closely examine how the Lord of all creation personally sends forth chosen apostles, disciples and other ministers throughout the world, to impart to every race, class and condition of mankind His sacred and salvific doctrine.

This statement of principle deserves to be more fully analyzed since it contains all the essentials of Catholic evangelism.

The one represented as sending men and women into the apostolate is “the Lord of all creation,” yet God in human form, who is Jesus Christ. During His life on earth, Christ sent the apostles and disciples by a personal commission from Himself; since the Ascension, this commission still ultimately comes from Christ, but immediately through His Vicar on earth, the Roman Pontiff. Consequently the only valid basis for the apostolate is to be sent (apostellein) by God through His authentic representatives to a definite work for souls.

But not everyone is sent, since “the Lord chooses,” and the ones sent are “chosen.” No matter how large the absolute number, they are still only a fraction of all the faithful. The principle of choice is a mystery hidden in God. Yet one of the signs for this grace of vocation is precisely the ideals of this meditation generously accepted and followed through to their logical conclusion. If I have the willingness, born of grace, to follow Christ in poverty and humility for the conquest of souls, then I have a call to the apostolate, whatever its concrete form may be, as elaborated in the Three Classes, the Three Modes and the retreat Election. A retreatant may well have an apostolic vocation in the true sense, without being necessarily called to the priesthood or the religious life, since, in the formula of Pius XI “The call to the laity to participate in the hierarchical apostolate constitutes a vocation truly and properly so called.” [12]

Christ sends His disciples “throughout the whole world,” according to the universality of the apostolic commission “to preach the Gospel to every creature.” Hence the responsibility for the truly apostolic spirit to be willing to work anywhere for the salvation of souls, since the desire of Christ is so manifest. He wants all men to be saved. Where an apostle’s scope of labor is limited, he yet strains to be as widely effective as possible, never complacently satisfied that he has reached the limit of his influence. The phrase, “every class and condition,” is typically Ignatian in stressing the need of bringing the Gospel to every level of society, and not only to the wealthy or externally cultured. The admonition goes back to apostolic times, when St. James had to warn the early Christians, “Do not join faith in our glorious Lord Jesus Christ to partiality towards persons ... Has not God chosen the poor of this world to be rich in faith and heirs of the Kingdom?” (James 2:1,5).

The directives from Christ are to spread or impart His sacred and saving doctrine to all mankind. Again a paraphrase on the Gospels, “Going therefore teach all nations ... teaching

them to observe whatsoever I have commanded you.” The immediate purpose of the apostolate is to transmit the truths of revelation since, in the providence of God, “faith comes by hearing,” which means that someone who has the faith zealously passes it on to others. The measure of his zeal will be the depth of his conviction that faith is essentially a social possession, to be acquired only from other human beings, and conserved also only by their instruction, ministry, prayer and example. St. Ignatius’ accent on imparting “sacred doctrine” illustrates his characteristic insistence on the intellectual foundation of all solid conversion, up to the perfect service of evangelical obedience, where the human mind submits to the mind of an earthly superior, vested with the authority of God.

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#### References

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- [1] St. Thomas, *Summa Theologica*, Ia, q. 114, a.1.
- [2] *Ibid.*, a. 3.
- [3] *Opera Spiritualia* Joannis P. Roothaan, Vol. II, p. 103.
- [4] *Summa Theologica*, Ia IIae, q. 84, a. 1.
- [5] *Ibid.*, a. 2.
- [6] St. Gregory I, “Liber Moralium,” xxxiv, PL 76, 744-745.
- [7] *Ibid.*
- [8] *Summa Theologica*, IIa IIae, q. 161, a. 3.
- [9] *Ibid.*

[10] *Ibid.*, a. 5.

[11] Ignacio Iparraguirre, *A Key to the Study of the Spiritual Exercises*, Calcutta, 1955, p. 68.

[12] Pius XI, Address to the Directors of the Roman Catholic Action, April 19, 1931, in Luigi Civardi, *Manual of Catholic Action*, 1943, p. 56.

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