

## All My Liberty

### Chapter 5: Three Classes of Men

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The title, *Three Classes of Men*, stands for three kinds of persons in any walk of life. They might be three classes of religious or priests, husbands or wives, workers or professional men. However, classified, they represent three levels of volitional disposition to sacrifice whatever is less than God and stands in the way of His more perfect service and love. Viewed from another aspect, they are three states of spiritual detachment which in ascending degree dispose a man for the reception of divine grace. Implicit in the meditation is the belief that no matter how entangled in secular pursuits and impeded in the way of perfection, a person can rise above this condition if he takes the trouble to recognize these impediments and is humble enough to pray for help to overcome them.

Meditation on the Three Classes is the second stage in the soul's preparation for the Election. In relation to the Two Standards it brings the battle between Christ and Satan out of the realm of theory into practical, everyday life. What the Two Standards teach objectively about the cosmic struggle of Satan against Christ, the Three Classes depict psychologically, in the mind and will of the exercitant. Also a new element enters in the conflict between flesh and spirit, or nature and grace, as described by St. Paul: "The flesh lusts against the spirit, and the spirit against the flesh; for these are opposed to each other, so that you do not do what you would" (Galatians 5:17).

St. Ignatius describes three classes of persons, all presumably past the Principle and Foundation, who want to know and achieve what is more pleasing to God. But they are laboring under the difficulty of an inordinate affection for some creature, typified by a large sum of money. The three groups have one thing in common, the same sort of creature with the same kind of effect on the will, an unreasonable affection for the object possessed. They are also alike in wanting to be rid of the inordinate affection, but they differ in the means required for getting rid of the attachment.

One class only want to be rid of the attachment, and are unwilling to use any means to that effect. They fail in the fundamental prudence which demands that suitable means be taken to attain a given end. A variety of reasons may account for this velleity: it may be sloth which avoids the effort necessary to remove the obstacles; or avarice which dreads to make a sacrifice of some long-cherished possession; or fear which shrinks from losing an apparently harmless bodily comfort or spiritual consolation; or lack of self-confidence about meeting and overcoming the difficulties; or want of conviction on the importance of becoming internally detached and a certain impracticality on the method to use; or finally a weak faith which distrusts the mercy of God to supply all the graces necessary "to find God our Lord in peace" of mind and heart.

The second class will compromise: they want to be rid of the internal impediment and also retain the external possession. They want to shape the course of providence to suit themselves, instead of adapting themselves to the demands of providence. Evidently not all creatures we possess make us inordinately

attached to them. The cumulative factors which produce attachment are manifold and frequently beyond our control—assuming that the creature itself is retained. It may well be that a given object, like money, a position or favorite pastime of which I am now enamored, may be kept or continued without sacrificing the object and detachment achieved. But if I am sincere in wanting to be freed of a psychological burden, I must be willing to dispose of the physical entity which causes the unruly interior effect; otherwise when the time comes (if it comes) to sacrifice what I possess, I will not do so even though I know full well there is no other way of deliverance from the attachment.

The third class have the generosity to dispose of the creature (outside themselves) if this is necessary to shake off a dangerous affection (within themselves). They apply without hesitation the basic norms of the Principle and Foundation: the *tantum quantum* rule which measures the use or abstinence from creatures only by their utility to attain the end of man's creation; and the rule of the counsels, which is not satisfied with a minimal service of God, but wants to do whatever is more conducive to salvation and more pleasing to the Divine Majesty.

## Self-Love and Detachment

Assuming that the object I possess is not intrinsically sinful, I can still be unduly attached to it, as may be recognized by certain signs. Some of these are external and others can only be experienced internally.

If the object occupies my mind at times that should be free of such pre-occupation, like prayer or necessary duties; or if the amount of

attention I give to the person, place, or thing is out of proportion to its objective value and importance. The standard hierarchy of values: supernatural, spiritual, intellectual and material may be applied here. So that if, for example, I am more concerned with an intellectual project than with my spiritual obligations to the evident detriment of the latter, I ought to suspect undue affection for the former.

If I find myself habitually taking complacency in some possession, to the point where I tend to condemn or pity others for lacking what I have, this is a sign of inordinate self-love.

If I often lose peace of mind from definable or undefinable causes, on account of what I have or do, I am too attached to the object, person, or practice, since ordinate affection, being orderly, produces tranquility of mind which is the essence of peace.

If I am always afraid of losing or being hindered in the use of some gift or possession, or if I feel dissatisfied with what I have, whether its amount, quality or perfection, I am too enamored of the object because the right kind of affection precludes such anxiety.

If I regularly talk about my achievement along certain lines or advertise what I have for no better reason than the pleasure I get from being recognized, this is a sign of disorder in the appetitive faculties.

If I am inclined to envy others for some kind of talent, production, or property which I feel outshines or obscures my own, this is a danger signal pointing to the need for greater self-control.

If I tend to be jealous of what I have, slow to share it with others or fearful that others may acquire the same, I am overly in love with the creature, no matter how lawfully acquired or how holy the thing may be in itself.

St. Ignatius states without analysis that the test of true detachment is to be willing either to keep or put away a creature to which a person has become strongly attracted. Why, we ask, should this be so? Why is it necessary to be ready physically to relinquish something – wealth, employment, a mode of action – as a guarantee that I am detached from the creature in question? Why is it not sufficient, as in the second class of men, “to remove the attachment (psychologically), yet so wish to remove it as to remain (physically united) with the thing acquired”? The reason lies deep in the psychology of Christian asceticism.

Any creature I possess outside of my own mind and will, and to which I am strongly attached, carries with it beneficial effects which I enjoy when and in so far as the creature is used. Money is a ready example; less obvious but equally pertinent are cultural possessions or even spiritual things in the intellectual and moral order, like methods of teaching or business, preaching and prayer, or certain opinions, religious or secular, in the practical or theoretical sphere. My will may become more or less bound to any of these because I have learned from experience what comfort, pleasure and joy they afford me when I use them. But when on reflection I discover that my attachment is inordinate, I am faced with the decision of either compromising or going “all out” in ridding myself of the disorderly affection. St. Ignatius would have it that unless I am ready to be rid of the *thing itself*, I am not really sincere in

the desire to correct the malaffection. Why so?

Whenever a creature produces an undue attraction, the fault or defect must not be sought in the object as such, but rather in me. Evidently, because the same creature may be safely possessed by someone else without detriment or even with positive benefit to his spiritual life. Perhaps I have not received the grace necessary both to keep physically and spiritually to profit from the disturbing creature. Or I may be lacking, culpably or otherwise, in those qualities of mind and temperament needed to overcome the natural seductiveness of what disturbs my peace of mind. Or most certainly, the state of life to which God has called me makes demands on my generosity and self-sacrifice which cannot be properly fulfilled except at the cost of being freed of certain inordinate affections. In any case, there is no objective assurance of becoming volitionally detached unless I remove what stimulates the attachment, namely, the object itself. There is a limit to my ability to be exposed to the stimulus and to remain ordinarily attached. And even this limit is unpredictable, undefinable and uncertain. To make sure I am delivered of a troublesome affection, I must remove its stimulating source. The degree of my readiness to do this determines my sincerity.

## Two Kinds of Inordinate Affection

Besides looking at inordinate affections psychologically, as above, they can be studied entitatively, in terms of the end from which they deflect. In general, the end in view is the love and service of God; manifested in obedience to the commandments or

observance of the counsels. The radical obstacles to achieving this end are the inordinate affections we have for creatures, which prevent or hinder our love of God. There is a difference, however, between overcoming inordinate affections that stand in the way of loving God through precepts, and removing those which impede loving Him through the counsels. The former are mandatory and binding in conscience under grave or venial sin; the latter are not of themselves obligatory, but offer opportunities for showing extraordinary love and rendering signal service to the Divine Majesty.

St. Ignatius directs the meditation on the Three Classes immediately to correcting whatever affections hinder the observance of the counsels, whether to be undertaken for the first time or already embraced as a permanent mode of life. A careful distinction should therefore be made between the two meanings that “counsel” has in ascetical literature.

Counsel may refer to the practice of the theological virtue of charity beyond what is prescribed under pain of sin. The accent is on the word “practice,” because we are always bound to intend to love God as perfectly as possible, following the injunction of Christ, “Thou shalt love the Lord thy God with thy whole heart.” But we are not obliged always to exercise the most perfect kind of love in practice. Thus, for example, to renew acts of divine love every hour is in itself more perfect than to make them only once a day; but there is no strict obligation to do so. The same can be said of any virtue commanded by the love of God. I may never intend to set a limit on the intensity to which my good actions are animated by theological charity, but I am not required always to place the most exalted possible degree of these virtues. Accordingly,

St. Thomas clearly distinguishes between two modes or degrees of adherence to God in charity. “One is necessary for salvation, to which all men are obliged, i.e., that our hearts be not attached to anything which is contrary to God but are habitually referred to Him. The other is the way of supererogation when a person adheres to God beyond the common state.” [1]

More generally, counsels refer to the moral virtues which are practiced beyond their strict necessity to keep out of sin, as means of attaining the love of God in which Christian perfection essentially consists. They are consequently instruments of perfection which facilitate the acquisition of divine charity and increase its supernatural intensity. Speaking of adherence to God by way of supererogation, St. Thomas explains that “this takes place by detaching the heart from temporal things, and thus more clearly approximating heavenly glory, since the more cupidity decreases, charity increased.” [2]

The two kinds of counsel are intimately connected, as means are related to end. By detachment from creatures in the spirit of the third class of men, we become better disposed to practice the love of God and neighbor, and more fit to make acts of charity of greater merit in the eyes of God. Traditionally the world “counsel” has become associated with an above average practice of certain moral virtues, notably poverty, chastity and obedience, as useful media for growing in theological charity. In this sense, we may say that perfection consists secondarily and instrumentally in the counsels. In fact, all the counsels, like the precepts, are directed to promote charity, but in a different way. The precepts other than the two commandments of love are intended to remove whatever is

contrary to this virtue, whatever might destroy it. But the counsels are ordained to remove the impediments to the practice of charity, even though not directly opposed to it, such as marriage, preoccupation with business and civil responsibilities. [3] While precepts and counsels, therefore, both subserve charity, the one is indispensable, the other only helpful. Observance of the precepts (excluding the precepts of love) eliminates only what directly opposes charity, whereas the counsels remove whatever may hinder its positive practice.

We should add, however, that the counsels (in the second sense) have still another function, namely, to contribute to the actual perfection of charity—which is more than removing impediments to its exercise. “Fasts, vigils, meditation on Holy Scripture, disposal and deprivation of all one’s possessions do not constitute perfection. They are instruments of perfection. It is not in them that the science of perfection consists, but through them that the end of this science is achieved. Consequently we depend on these steps to reach the perfection of charity.” [4]

In the spirit of the third class, as a person faithfully lives out the evangelical counsels he facilitates the practice of charity by removing obstacles that stand in the way. Thus a religious is freed from the burden of material possession through poverty, of family care and worry through chastity, and of personal independence through obedience. But more than facilitating the practice of charity towards God and neighbor, the counsels add to its intrinsic perfection through additional grace which their practice obtains and the numerous occasions they offer to exercise the most selfless love of God.

A word of clarification may be added on the practical correlation between the precepts and counsels. According to the common doctrine, it would be misleading to say that the Christian life as such consists in obeying the commandments, and perfection in observing the counsels. Perfection means obedience to the precepts and keeping a certain number of counsels. After proving that perfection is nothing else than the love of God and neighbor, St. Thomas explains that in practice it consists *essentially* in the commandments (especially charity) and *secondarily* in the counsels, whose function is to remove the obstacles that hinder the exercise of charity.

Two points should be emphasized. First the indispensability of observing the commandments of God and the Church in the quest for perfection, and not neglecting these in favor of works of supererogation. Without the precepts, perfection lacks the necessary foundation. And secondly, the need of practicing the counsels, at least some of them and at least by internal disposition, like the spirit of poverty and chastity for people in the world. Without some of the counsels (practiced according to one’s state of life, the inspiration of grace and the advice of a spiritual director), perfection is impeded by unruly attachments and lacks the scope for generosity which it naturally desires.

## Chapter 5 - References

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[1] St. Thomas, In Epist. Ad Philippenses,” cap. 3, *Opera Omnia*, Vol. XIII (Parma Edition), New York, 1949, p. 522.

[2] *Ibid.*

[3] *Summa Theologica*, IIa IIae, q. 184, a. 3.

[4] *Ibid.* Confer Cassian’s *De Monachi Intentione ac Fine*, Collatio I, PL 49, 490.

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