

‘YELLOW ARROWS’

The Mentoring Experience of the Two Standards

Alberto Ares Mateos

WHEN A PERSON WHO IS not very familiar with the Christian tradition takes a look at the Two Standards meditation of Ignatius' *Spiritual Exercises* (Exx 136–148), he or she runs the risk of interpreting the meditation as a nonsense exercise. Why should I want to be poor or humiliated? How can it be said that having possessions and being esteemed is not a good thing? Everyone knows that there are important necessities essential to life: physical survival; safety and security; belonging, acceptance and affection; respect and self-respect; self-actualisation and fulfilment.¹ It has been shown that lifestyles of immaturity, self-punishing insecurity and irresponsibility have developed under the name of poverty.² So what can be said for the itineraries that Ignatius is presenting to the exercitant in the Two Standards: encouraging people to desire first poverty, then humiliations and finally humility?

The Two Standards

Poverty versus Riches: What Am I?

Ignatius clearly took into account all the necessities that a human being must have in terms of survival. For Ignatius, commodities are not bad things for Christians, but a potential means to serve God and our fellows (Exx 23). Although some relations between commodities and power tend to corrupt, we need to become indifferent in order to use

¹ See Abraham H. Maslow, *Toward a Psychology of Being* (New York: Van Nostrand, 1982 [1962]), 3.

² Kenneth L. Becker, 'Beyond Survival: The Two Standards and the Way of Love', *The Way* (July 2003), 125–136, here 125.



them in the right way. This is the key point: to become indifferent in order to discern and make the right decision. And we already know from the Principle and Foundation (Exx 23) what indifference means. Things are not good or bad in themselves,³ but their quality depends on the way one relates to them. Ignatius would say that we have need of material things as well as intellectual and psychological security. We need them, but they are not the goal of our lives, which is to live fully as human beings.

Commodities do not determine who we are. Commodities, such as real income, basic goods and so on, are good. But, if we live exclusively thinking of having more things, we are treating commodities as goals and not as means, which is what they really are.⁴ Commodities become idols.

Poverty helps us to be indifferent, and to be opened to spiritual freedom. 'The poverty that is freedom to love is giving what I am, to the point of risking loss.'⁵ Poverty means living in a way not merely determined by our need for security of achievement and possessions,⁶ that is to say, for a secure world. It involves the *freedom* to doubt, to listen to other views.

Contempt versus Esteem: Who Am I?

We all need to be honoured, respected and esteemed. The problem for Ignatius comes when honour, respect and esteem are the foundation of

³ 'Goods are neutral. They can be used to bring people together or drive them apart.' (Mary Douglas and Baron C. Isherwood, *The World of Goods: Towards an Anthropology of Consumption* [London and New York: Routledge, 1996], quoted in Kenneth R. Himes, 'Consumerism and Christian Ethics', *Theological Studies*, 68 [2007], 138.)

⁴ Amartya Sen, *Development as Freedom* (New York: Anchor Books, 2000), 13–15, 54–86.

⁵ Becker, 'Beyond Survival', 135.

⁶ See George E. Ganss, *The Spiritual Exercises of Saint Ignatius: A Translation and Commentary* (St Louis: Institute of Jesuit Sources, 1992), 167–168.

our identity. We then become the slaves of our own necessities. We are what other people expect of us. We are subordinated to the project of preserving our status, our relationships and connections, and our reputations.

Being freed from the grip of other people's false esteem and accepting some kind of risk and vulnerability help us to become conscious that we are more than the expectations of other people. When someone rejects my ideas and my behaviours, it helps me to realise that 'all that I am becomes ways that I am living love: my true human self-fulfilment as an individual, conscious, autonomous and responsible loving person'.⁷

Humility versus Pride: 'I Am I' versus 'I Am God'

*Humility is the truth ... whoever ignores this, lives a life of falsehood.*⁸

Pride is the next step on the path of the enemy of human nature—on what I am calling here the *path of least resistance*. Once we live exclusively to possess commodities, to be honoured and esteemed, the next step is to become a proud person. And proud people live with the fear of losing all that they have accumulated in their lives: commodities, status, connections and so forth. Fear and enslavement are fundamental. In order to maintain what they possess, the proud become self-sufficient (or at least, this is what they believe). When everything becomes an idol that they venerate, they start to think they do not need anything from anyone. By following this path they start to become their own god. But they do not feel joy, because they are trapped by their own needs.

Humility is simply realising that I am I, with my own needs, possibilities, limitations and history, trying to be free to live, to discern and to give what I am and have. As Teresa of Avila said: *humility is the truth*. For Ignatius, humility is the point of entrance to all the other virtues. A humble person has an open door to faith, hope, love and so on. Humility means accepting the complexity and ambiguity of human life. A humble person does not believe in taking short cuts in order to follow Christ. It is only through Him that I can live a joyful and full life.

⁷ Becker, 'Beyond Survival', 134.

⁸ Teresa of Avila, *The Interior Castle or the Mansions*, translated by the Benedictine Nuns of Stanbrook Abbey (Rockford: Tan Books, 1997), VI, chapter 10, 6.

Walking a Tightrope

Everyone who begins to serve Christ seriously experiences opposition and the diversity of spirits.⁹

The temptation to create a simplistic dualism opposing a true spirituality, life and economy to false ones always exists. It seems to me that most of our efforts to find a true way of living as opposed to a false one are mainly based on the anxiety caused by our own ambiguity.

Why has Ignatius chosen the dualistic scheme of two paths? Essentially this is for pedagogical purposes. Using this meditation, Ignatius encourages the exercitant to acknowledge the ambiguous desires of the human heart, both for Jesus and for what the world holds as important. As Christians, we know we are both holy and sinful. God allows us the freedom to accept or reject God's love, that is to say, to follow what I am calling here *the path of consciousness* or *the path of least resistance*.¹⁰ A sure sign of maturity is the ability to acknowledge both aspects of our life.

The Adventure of Graciousness

Often, after people first make this meditation, they remark that they have no problem asking for actual poverty. But when the conditions of actual poverty are described in concrete terms ... they begin to realize that even desiring actual poverty is a grace.¹¹

But how can we deal with these tensions, struggles, suffering—with the enigma of our life? Ignatius offers this clear answer: by praying to God for the grace of being placed with God and with God's Son.¹² This is the goal of the triple colloquy (one colloquy to Our Lady, one to the Son and, finally, one to the Father). And that is not all. Ignatius invites exercitants

⁹ William Yeomans, 'The Two Standards', *The Way Supplement*, 1 (1965), 14–27, here 23. And see Ignatius of Loyola, *Letters to Women*, edited by Hugo Rahner, translated by Kathleen Pond and S. A. H. Weetman (Edinburgh: Nelson, 1960), 267.

¹⁰ In *Evolución y Culpa*, Juan Luis Segundo describes how the human condition can be understood as a evolutionary process in which two dynamics are at work: 'conductas mayoritarias' (mass behaviour) and 'conductas minoritarias' (minority behaviour). I should like to relate these two movements to the *path of least resistance* and the *path of consciousness*. See Juan Luis Segundo, *Teología abierta para el laico adulto*, volume 5, *Evolución y culpa* (Buenos Aires: Carlos Lohlé, 1972). English translation: *A Theology for Artisans of a New Humanity*, volume 5, *Evolution and Guilt*, translated by John Drury (Maryknoll: Orbis, 1974).

¹¹ John J. English, *Spiritual Freedom: From an Experience of the Ignatian Exercises to the Art of Spiritual Guidance*, (Chicago: Loyola, 1995), 154–155.

¹² Dermot Mansfield, 'Presenting the Two Standards: I', *The Way Supplement*, 55 (1986), 30–31.

to pray with this meditation four times. He does not want to see any act of voluntarism that prevents a good discernment.¹³ Even so, accepting this gift requires a long process of internalisation that involves the whole person, and probably an entire lifetime.¹⁴ This is the adventure of graciousness: a process, a path where we become more conscious, more grateful and more responsible for God’s gift. It is a process in which we recognise the path of least resistance as one of falseness, and in which the path of consciousness or graciousness becomes a familiar place to walk.

‘Yellow Arrows’

‘Yellow arrows’ (*flechas amarillas*) are important symbols for pilgrims on their way to Santiago de Compostela. The arrows show the right way to follow the pilgrimage at every crossroads, and they have a mystical significance for almost all pilgrims. Struggling in my life between the path of graciousness and the path of least resistance, I have found four main *flechas amarillas* that help me to pray to God and to be received by his Son.

Becoming at Home in the World

*To be at home is to be able to make meaning of one’s surroundings in a manner that holds, regardless of what may happen at the level of immediate events. To be deeply at home in this world is to dwell in a worthy faith.*¹⁵

The idea of pilgrimage evokes adventure, courage, daring, relationship, covenant and promise. In our societies, where human migration takes place in every corner of the world, the pilgrimage as a metaphor has a

¹³ ‘El coloquio es el momento racional de la meditación. La palabra pone orden en lo “evidente afectivo” que el ejercitante ha ido viviendo preámbulo y punto a punto; ahora le toca a él intervenir. Su palabra es un *realizativo intencional*. Verbalizar el deseo de querer ser recibido bajo al bandera de Cristo es convertirse ya—en la intención—en su siervo y amigo’ [‘It is at the colloquy that reason plays a part in the meditation. The words here put a kind of order into the spontaneously affective material through which the exercitant has been working in the preludes and in the points; now he or she has to respond actively. The words the exercitant uses turn the intention into a reality. To express the desire to be received under the standard of Christ is already to have become—in intent—Christ’s servant and Christ’s friend.’] (José García de Castro, “Éranse una vez Dos Banderas”: Observaciones al texto ignaciano’, *Manresa*, 67 [1995], 163–164.)

¹⁴ See Maurizio Costa, ‘Banderas’, in *Diccionario de espiritualidad ignaciana*, volume 2, G–Z, edited by José García de Castro, Pascual Cebollada Silvestre and the Grupo de Espiritualidad Ignaciana (Bilbao and Santander: Mensajero and Sal Terrae, 2007), 211–221, here 220–221.

¹⁵ Sharon D. Parks, *Big Questions, Worthy Dreams: Mentoring Young Adults in Their Search for Meaning, Purpose, and Faith* (San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, 2000), 34.

special meaning. With increasing globalisation there also comes a desire to preserve regional traditions. It seems clear to me that the story of human becoming is best understood in terms of two tendencies: 'one for differentiation, autonomy, and agency, and the other for relation, belonging, and communion'.¹⁶ Integrating these tendencies into the metaphor of pilgrimage enriches our understanding of human development. The practice of pilgrimage is a going forth (a journey) and a return home. If we understand human development not simply as departures and arrivals but also as the journey itself and as a series of transformations in the meaning of 'home', then we will help each other to become more viably at home in the world.

Witnesses of Faith

A sign for me that it is not crazy to ask for poverty, contempt and humility is the experience of the companions who came before me. Everyone must accept the risks involved in decision-making, and must trust the witness given by certain people who help us consolidate our own value-system or structure. These are what Juan Luis Segundo calls 'referential witnesses'. The faith that we share is an anthropological faith. For Segundo, every human being has a tendency to trust referential witnesses in order to structure his or her own human existence.¹⁷ But why can we call this phenomenon faith? It is faith because those who carry on the values handed down do so while relying on information that they themselves do not have.

From another perspective, faith can be connected with meaning. Sharon Parks defines faith as,

... the activity of seeking and discovering meaning in the most comprehensive dimensions of our experience

Faith is integral to all human life. It is a human universal It is related to meaning, trust and hope. Faith determines action.¹⁸

How can the witnesses I trust be helpful *mentors* who increase my consciousness of God's plan for humanity, and for the human community

¹⁶ Parks, *Big Questions*, 49.

¹⁷ Here it is important to remember that 'faith', like 'hope' and 'love', is not a mere concept, but can also refer to a capacity of the human being (to 'have faith'). See Parks, *Big Questions*, 32–33.

¹⁸ Parks, *Big Questions*, 7, 16.



to which I am called and in which I am included? How do I learn to make meaning in ways that orientate and sustain a worthy adult life?

If we understand how important it is to have referential witnesses or mentors, then we realise that a mentoring environment is a powerful gift for the formation of meaning, purpose and faith. Good mentors help to anchor the promise of the future. Mentors also provide people with crucial forms of recognition, support, challenge and inspiration in a continuous dialogue.¹⁹ Mentoring environments, such as religious faith communities, the natural world, the workplace or institutions of higher education, among others, have an important role in helping us to receive the gift of a worthy dream. This dream is more than a fantasy or a casual day-dream. It is 'an imagined possibility that orients meaning, purpose, and aspiration'.²⁰

There is a sense in which *we become what we breathe in*. A mentoring culture motivates people by offering them worthy images, by encouraging a healthy criticism of the world, by evoking a sense of vocation, and by inspiring the finest aspirations.

¹⁹ Parks, *Big Questions*, 127–157.

²⁰ Parks, *Big Questions*, 146.

Falling in Love

‘Teacher, which commandment in the law is the greatest?’ He said to him, “You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your mind.” This is the greatest and first commandment. And a second is like it: “You shall love your neighbour as yourself.” On these two commandments hang all the law and the prophets.’ (Matthew 22: 36–40)

Our path of consciousness and graciousness can be called the path of love. Why? Because the tension that Ignatius presents can be perfectly seen through the prism of love. The path of least resistance is a road to fear and slavery.²¹ When we travel along it we become focused on the self: on riches (self-interest), on esteem (self-love) and on pride (self-will).

On the other hand, the path of graciousness has to do with love. And ‘love asks, first of all, not “Who are you for me and my needs?” but “Who are you? And what can I do to enable you to become more fully you?”’²² Psychologists, and common sense, show us that we need to be loved in order to love. Love invites love. When we love, we relativise our own needs; but this does not mean denying or ignoring them. True freedom of spirit means trusting that love is more than my own necessities, that love is the centre of my life.

We are blessed because God first loved us (1 John 4:10). And since God has first loved us, love is now no longer a mere ‘command’. Now love is the response to the gift of love with which God draws near to us. Jesus is the incarnated love who followed the path of graciousness in his own existence. At first sight, it seems a paradox or even a mystery, like the mystery of love.

For those who want to save their life will lose it, and those who lose their life for my sake will save it. What does it profit them if they gain the whole world, but lose or forfeit themselves? (Luke 9: 24–25)

If I have been graced with the gift of poverty (‘he emptied himself, becoming human’), then I am rich; if I have nothing of myself (‘everything I have is from the Father’), I have no power and I am despised and receive the contempt of the world (‘even to death,

²¹ James R. Dolan presents the two paths in terms of two slogans: ‘You Obey Me’ and ‘I Love You’. See James R. Dolan, *The Spiritual Exercises of St Ignatius: A Contemporary Revision for Retreatants and Retreat Directors* (Rochester, NY: McQuaid Jesuit Community, 2001), 97.

²² Becker, ‘Beyond Survival’, 133.

death in a cross'); if I have nothing, my only possession is Christ ('Christ is God's') and this is to be really true to myself—the humility of a person whose whole reality and value is grounded in being created and redeemed in Christ.²³

A good example of such paradox or mystery is falling in love. When we fall in love, we become humble in the face of another person. We experience the other person as a great gift, and we feel the desire to serve and give ourselves in return. We have found such a treasure, such a gift, that this experience transforms the way we use our own resources. Commodities, esteem and power²⁴ are good, but only if they help me to be with what I treasure. Resources are merely means to love the other person.

We need to pray to God for the grace of falling in love with Jesus. This text, attributed to Pedro Arrupe, illustrates the point:

Nothing is more practical than finding God, that is, than falling in love in a quite absolute, final way. What you are in love with, what seizes your imagination, will affect everything. It will decide what will get you out of bed in the morning, what you will do with your evenings, how you will spend your weekends, what you read, who you know, what breaks your heart, and what amazes you with joy and gratitude. Fall in love, stay in love and it will decide everything.²⁵

Hopeful Suffering

*De moi à moi, il y a un abîme que rien n'a pu combler.*²⁶

We all find tensions, inconsistencies and ambiguity in our lives. Our existence often seems to be an enigma. As Maurice Blondel shows,

²³ David L. Fleming 'Draw Me into Your Friendship': *The Spiritual Exercises: A Literal Translation and a Contemporary Reading* (St Louis: Institute of Jesuit Sources, 1996), 113–114.

²⁴ An interesting commentary on the Two Standards and the pairing 'power and love' can be found in Joseph Tetlow, *Choosing Christ in the World* (St Louis: Institute of Jesuit Sources, 1989), 160.

²⁵ Vincent O'Keefe, former general counsellor under Pedro Arrupe, believed that this quotation came from a spontaneous answer to a question at a workshop that Arrupe was giving to a congregation of religious women, probably in the late 1970s. At many (if not most) such gatherings one person or another would record Pedro's remarks on tape. (I am grateful to Kevin Burke for this information. *Ed.*)

²⁶ 'From myself to myself, there is an abyss that nothing yet has been able to fill.' Maurice Blondel, *L'action: essai d'une critique de la vie et d'une science de la pratique* (Paris: Presses universitaires de France, 1973), 338. English translation: *Action: Essay on a Critique of Life and a Science of Practice*, translated by Olivia Blachette (Notre Dame, In: U. of Indiana P, 1984), 313.



there is an inadequacy or inappropriateness between the willing will (*volonté voulante*) and the willed will (*volonté voulue*).

That is why, in proposing freedom as our end, we feel a disproportion between the willing will, *quod procedit ex voluntate* (what proceeds from the will), and the willed will, *quod voluntatis objectum fit* (which becomes the object of the will). We experience the difficulty of a choice and a sacrifice.²⁷

We all experiences a disproportion between what we actually do and what we would like to do.²⁸ This situation is a cause of suffering and tension in our daily life. Suffering is a part of our human existence. In fact, we cannot experience hope if we try to hide the reality of suffering.

J. B. Metz describes hope through an apocalyptic, eschatological term, '*memoria passionis*', the memory of the passion.

Considered theologically, the Christian memory of suffering holds the anticipation of a specific future for humankind as a future for the suffering, for those without hope, for the oppressed, the disabled, and the useless of this earth.²⁹

²⁷ Blondel, *Action*, 134.

²⁸ See Romans 8.

²⁹ Johann Baptist Metz, *Faith in History and Society: Toward a Practical Fundamental Theology* (New York: Crossroad, 1980), 112.

This way of thinking about the future holds out hope, even for those who die stripped of it. To hope, for them, means to hope in the possibility of that the history of suffering will be interrupted. It means thinking of history not as a closed system of cause and effect, but as a process that belongs finally to God.

But what are the main causes of suffering? Benedict XVI describes two in his second encyclical, *Spe salvi*: our finitude, and the mass of sin which has accumulated over the course of history.

Certainly we must do whatever we can to reduce suffering: to avoid as far as possible the suffering of the innocent; to soothe pain; to give assistance in overcoming mental suffering. These are obligations both in justice and in love, and they are included among the fundamental requirements of the Christian life and every truly human life Indeed, we must do all we can to overcome suffering, but to banish it from the world altogether is not in our power. This is simply because we are unable to shake off our finitude and because none of us is capable of eliminating the power of evil, of sin which, as we plainly see, is a constant source of suffering. Only God is able to do this: only a God who personally enters history by making himself man and suffering within history. We know that this God exists, and hence that this power to 'take away the sin of the world' (John 1:29) is present in the world. Through faith in the existence of this power, hope for the world's healing has emerged in history. It is, however, hope—not yet fulfilment; hope that gives us the courage to place ourselves on the side of good even in seemingly hopeless situations, aware that, as far as the external course of history is concerned, the power of sin will continue to be a terrible presence.³⁰

I often recall something that Fr Picón, a Jesuit friend of mine, told me when I was in trouble as a teenager:

Alberto, crisis and troubled times are hard moments, but they are also the occasions when a mature person emerges. If you learn how to deal with your suffering, your tensions and ambiguity, you will mature, you will become a 'man' and you will be closer to God. Sidestepping or fleeing from suffering will not help you to deal with your problems.

³⁰ *Spe salvi*, n. 36.

When we suffer the collapse of our self, our world and our sense of 'God', we are disorientated. Usually, if we get over the crisis, we discover a new reality beyond our loss.³¹ There is a transformation, a passion that leads to Easter.

The true measure of humanity is essentially determined in relationship to suffering and to the sufferer. A society unable to accept its suffering members and incapable of helping to share their suffering and to bear it inwardly through 'com-passion' is a cruel and inhuman society To suffer with the other and for others; to suffer for the sake of truth and justice; to suffer out of love and in order to become a person who truly loves—these are fundamental elements of humanity The Christian faith has shown us that truth, justice and love are not simply ideals, but enormously weighty realities.³²

Suffering is still terrible and well-nigh unbearable. The act of opening a newspaper, or simply thinking about people we know, reminds us of the truth of this fact. Yet the star of hope has risen, because Christ descended into Hell, the place of eternal suffering, transforming darkness into light. We all know that the task of our religious experience is to aid believers in their lives: 'giving an account of the hope that is in them'.³³ As Metz claims, we need a theology that defends the hope that we too can be subjects with the dignity of the God's sons and daughters; a theology beyond ideas and concepts, and focused on 'the subject' and 'the praxis'.³⁴

Christian hope is calling us to envision our future as individuals, as a community of disciples, and finally, as a community in solidarity with all of humanity.³⁵ People in our complex world are looking for a Church that not only provides clear moral principles, but also 'compassion and understanding and the assurance that they are not alone in their pain and in their suffering—and that there are grounds for real hope for them'.³⁶

³¹ Parks, *Big Questions*, 27–31.

³² *Spe salvi*, nn. 38–39.

³³ 1 Peter 3:15.

³⁴ Metz, *Faith in History and Society*, 224.

³⁵ Metz, *Faith in History and Society*, 229–237.

³⁶ Kevin Kelly, 'Towards an Adult Conscience', *The Way* 25/4 (October 1985), 291. See also Johann Baptist Metz, *Memoria passionis: Una evocación provocadora en una sociedad pluralista* (Santander: Sal Terrae, 2007), 184–195.

Following the Standard of Christ

In the Two Standards, and in the whole process of the Spiritual Exercises, Ignatius is looking for a *connatural* experience of God, that is to say, a deeper connection with God. Having a personal experience of God and following Christ in the mysteries of his life open us to this connatural experience. Only by following the same steps that Jesus did can someone start thinking, seeing, tasting, smelling as Christ. Following this path of graciousness helps us to think and act as Jesus did. In short, our human existence, including our path of least resistance, will be evangelized. The willing will (*volonté voulante*) and the willed will (*volonté voulue*) will be integrated, as they were in the life of Christ.

Does this mean that we will have resolved all our ambiguity and complexity? No, it does not. God continues to offer us freedom to be agents in our life and in the future, that is to say, to face the incredible and marvellous adventure of our human existence.

Alberto Ares Mateos SJ comes from Spain. He was ordained priest in 2007. He has since worked and studied in Valladolid, Salamanca, Vigo, Madrid and Boston. In September 2008 he returned to Spain, and is now coordinating a network of social institutions for immigrant families.