

# PRESENTING THE TWO STANDARDS, I

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**I**N MY EXPERIENCE, the presentation of the Two Standards (Exx 136-148) is quite a simple matter and I find myself looking forward to that day in the giving of the Exercises. There can be difficulties afterwards, in helping people to notice and come to terms with the reactions in themselves as they continue to pray the Triple Colloquy. But the meditation itself is so important in revealing the depths and implications of loving and following Christ that I have no problem in presenting it. The paragraphs that follow here, therefore, offer some simple guidelines for its presentation, and necessarily must include some idea of how I understand the Two Standards.

If the Exercises have been going well, then some important factors relating to this fourth day of the Second Week have been occurring already. The outcome of the First Week has been the experience of sorrow and gratitude. In the meditation on the Call of the King, following next, there has been appreciation of the possible call of Christ to close companionship with him now in sharing his labours, the work of our redemption, so that the prayer of offering has been considered by the exercitant (Exx 98), which includes the readiness to accept even probable humiliations as well as the life of evangelical poverty. Then, the contemplations which open the Second Week have Christ directly as their object — the eternal Word of the Father who is the poor and humble Jesus born of Mary, whom one desires to love more deeply and follow more closely, coming to be one of us. And, intimately linked with all of this and with how the Two Standards were primarily conceived of by Ignatius, there has been a brief introduction (Exx 135) to that crucial choice of one or other of the two states in the christian way of life and which, as will be outlined later in the Exercises, may alternatively comprise the issue of renewal and reformation in one's already chosen state.<sup>1</sup>

Against this background of the earlier part of the retreat, the Two Standards can be offered for meditation and the prayer of

the Triple Colloquy outlined.

*A presupposition: the reality of evil*

What should be touched upon or kept in mind in giving it? I think that the whole notion of serious struggle between good and evil, with vast dimensions and implications, should not lightly be left aside. It should have come up already in the First Week, in perceiving the cosmic extent of sin and its consequences, and in the experience of realizing the history of one's own personal sins and turning to Christ crucified (Exx 53). Here again in the Two Standards, the exercitant needs to be open in some way — as previously with regard to the sin of the angels and the sin of Adam and Eve — to the mysterious depths contained in the pithy description of Satan and his schemes and then, by way of total contrast, that of Christ and his way. There is something very big here, I believe, as in the reality intimated in Ephesians 6, 12ff and throughout the Book of Revelation, and that is not to be glossed over. An exercitant needs to be open on this, open to something massive about the nature of evil and therefore the immensity of Christ's work of salvation.<sup>2</sup>

It follows that some hard thinking may need to be done on the triple satanic temptation, as the invitation to security, esteem and self-sufficiency, benign in its outward posture, whispered today (and always was) in various subtle and sophisticated ways, but whose malignant purpose is to detach one utterly from God. Brief discussion may be necessary to help a person approach it rightly. A younger person coming to it for the first time may comprehend it quite easily, but perhaps more at an intellectual level. Someone older, with experience of life, ought to be aware of the manifold ways these temptations can infiltrate everything, even spiritual and social ideals, but may have a blunted sense of their malignity and so will need to turn to earnest prayer.

*Outlining the way of Christ*

But the forward movement of the prayer — as indeed it must be throughout the Second Week and later — is to look to Christ, 'beautiful and attractive' in appearance (Exx 144), whom one desires to imitate (Exx 139), and whose way is one of poverty, insults and humility. Here it is, I think, that the emphasis of the meditation must lie, and especially because it leads directly to the

prayer of the Triple Colloquy.

These steps of the way of Christ may not be new to the exercitant. Yet a person may need some help, more likely during the succeeding days, as memories and feelings surface through praying the Triple Colloquy. Sometimes, it seems to me that the question of 'bearing insults and wrongs' first of all may have to do with the past — with a need now to come to terms with past injustices through the grace of healing and forgiveness. Only then can the bearing of these in the future, with Christ's grace and whenever he might provide the opportunity, be looked at and prayed about in a right way. And regarding the prospect of actual poverty, which for Ignatius primarily means the possible embracing of the evangelical, religious way of life, its realization should solely be according to Christ's calling and grace.

I think it is important to show how everything must be left ultimately to what Christ would 'deign to choose' (Exx 98), and that whatever may be suffered would be 'without offence' (Exx 147) to him. For the perfection of love is shown in perfect readiness to do whatever God would wish and in the unconditional surrender of self when his will is manifested.<sup>3</sup> The gracious and reverential attitude of Ignatius, leaving all to God's sovereign freedom, no matter how earnestly one might pray for particular things, needs to be noted. This is not in any way to overlook the implications of desiring and praying to imitate Christ, as he calls all those who wish to be his disciples to renounce themselves and take up their cross daily and follow him (Mk 8,34-38, etc.).

### *Anticipating desolation*

Indeed, as the day of the Two Standards unfolds, and over the following days, the enormity and difficulty of it all may seem overwhelming. It will be subtly whispered that what is said about the steps to humility is a hard saying, that is too difficult or life-denying and negative.<sup>4</sup> Even with the greatest conscious sense of humility and gratitude that may emerge from the First Week experience, such thoughts as these can insinuate themselves, and also the underlying feelings of anger, distaste, revolt, discouragement. For the exercitant is not out of the woods yet, no more than the disciples could have been when they were 'in a daze' and 'afraid' (Mk 10,32) on the road with Jesus to Jerusalem and after further sayings of his on the implications of discipleship.

Yet it must be seen that if someone gets preoccupied with the difficulties, then there is surely unreality creeping in — the unreality and illusion, leading to discouragement and havoc, which the delicate rules for discernment of the Second Week (Exx 328–336) are designed to unmask.

The insinuation of unreality occurs so easily, making its way by stealth. It means that what is good and right is being lost sight of — and so I would come back to that point about the reverential attitude of Ignatius, his looking to Christ, and his referral of the outcome of all things to whatever God would choose in his loving freedom. For in this attitude is contained the heart of how a person should be in the Two Standards and in the prayer of subsequent days, and in it too are the necessary presuppositions for the director's use of the rules for discernment (as can be seen from Annotation 15).

Here we come to what I consider are the basic points in giving the meditation.

### *Looking to Christ*

First of all, the Two Standards has to do with Christ, with the 'sense and taste' (Exx 2: *el sentir y gustar*) of his person and way. The grace prayed for is 'to imitate him' (Exx 139). Certainly, there is required hard-headed knowledge of the malignancy of evil under its guise of reasonableness, as contrasted with the 'sacred doctrine' (Exx 145) of Christ. But the grace asked for is that of imitating Christ: precisely the grace flowing from deep-felt knowledge and love of him (Exx 104), even perhaps from the spiritual 'smell and taste' of the infinite fragrance and sweetness of his divinity (Exx 124),<sup>5</sup> as already beginning to occur in the contemplations of the previous day.

Therefore the focus must be on Christ, on being with him. The three days beforehand have been spent contemplating him, and all the days following will be the same. The meditation on the Two Standards is about Christ — and the pattern of poverty and insults would be grotesque without him, as indeed they are commonly experienced, because apart from Christ or because the light of his love is not perceived. Everything prayed for makes sense only in being with him — as shown in the repeated 'with me' of the Call of the King (Exx 95), which will recur crucially in the Third Kind of Humility (Exx 167), and will acquire its deepest

meaning in the mysteries of the Passion.

So the temptation of the Evil One, in emphasizing the difficulties, or in proposing some unreal good, is especially intended to take our gaze off Christ — and the only way out and forward is to bring the exercitant back gently to him (Jn 6,68–69).

### *The secret of true joy*

Secondly, to be with Christ, to grow in his love and to be identified with him in poverty and insults is to know happiness. It is the way of happiness and can only be understood in love. Outside of this love it would seem as if the road to happiness is as almost the whole world conceives it: to have the security of achievement and possessions, to be honoured and respected, and to be proud of what one is in consequence. But that is what the Evil One proposes, even under a spiritual guise, or when he sets to work in our moments of discouragement. It is also to end up shackled and ensnared, and to find that happiness always eludes one's desperate grasp. The only true way is Christ's: there is no joy outside of these three steps of being poor, being freed from the grip of the untruthful honouring of others, and learning humility.

So it is right to speak of joy, and the mysterious yet simple way to it, about which Christ speaks to whoever would be his disciple: 'that by following me in suffering, he may follow me in glory' (Exx 95).

In the *Little flowers of St. Francis* (ch 8) there is the story of the saint teaching a perplexed Brother Leo about the secret of perfect joy. Francis says that it will not be found in human or spiritual achievements but when, frozen and soaked from their journey, they can patiently endure being turned away and treated as scoundrels by the brother porter at St. Mary of the Angels.<sup>6</sup> And the ignatian rules for the discernment of spirits have that touchstone of the lightness of joy: a joy which can even be imperceptible at a sensible level, yet is truly present in 'the peace of God, which surpasses all understanding' (Phil 4,7).

### *The place of prayer*

Thirdly, the true following of Christ is grace and gift, and the fruit of persevering prayer. And here again, the strategy of the Evil One is to try to remove the reality of grace from the picture,

and to stop prayer — to replace that prayerful looking to Christ by the lure of analysis and introspection.

Therefore it is never out of place to give a gentle reminder of 'the need to pray continually and never lose heart' (Lk 18,1). Yes, of course it is right to help a person to be aware of interior reactions and feelings over this day and the succeeding ones. But such awareness must lead to humble prayer, to the appreciation time and time again that *God* gives, God leads, God himself takes one by the hand along the path of the following of Christ. It is all God's work, and what he does for each one is in the measure and at the pace which he knows is most appropriate. Perhaps it will take quite a while to realize this: and such appreciation is itself a gift of grace, and a great step forward.<sup>7</sup>

So everything must issue in prayer — and here is the Triple Colloquy, that beautiful movement of Ignatius, whereby the exercitant approaches Mary who will speak with her Son, then prays to her Son that he might plead with the Father, and finally comes to the Father directly (Exx 147). The contemplations of the following days will also conclude with this threefold prayer, in which our desire is surely an echo of what is so much desired by the Father for us, that we should come to share more and more in the life of the Son, by walking 'in the same way in which he walked' (1 Jn 1,6 also 1 Pet 2,21).

### *Conclusion*

These points then, regarding prayer, joy and looking to Christ, are the ones I think should govern the presentation of the Two Standards. I fear that other considerations might clutter and obscure the attractiveness of Christ's call.<sup>8</sup>

Now all of this, of course, principally refers to those coming to the exercise at the time of their major choice of a way of life, or else who wish to confirm and deepen decisively their commitment. But in passing, it is worth mentioning that there are also exercitants beyond these stages, who have grown considerably in prayer and generosity. In such cases, I would tend even more directly to let them look simply to Christ. They will know the rest and are humbly open to it. If their prayer is almost wordlessly contemplative, then they can read the text and ponder it a little, with suitable scripture, mainly outside of the prayer times.<sup>9</sup>

In presenting the Two Standards along the lines mentioned, I

think people can be drawn into the way forward now with Christ. They have the right framework within which the matter of the Election can be approached with that disposition of complete openness to what is more pleasing to the Divine Goodness (Exx 151) outlined in the meditation on the Three Classes of Men immediately following.

The secret of the Two Standards meditation is to be with Christ, to receive a real appreciation of the way of being placed with him. It is to desire to be poor and looked down upon, as he was. It is to experience these in some measure, as he allows, and perhaps to experience in some dark way of faith that he is alongside. This is the secret found and being lived, it seems true to say, in the joy of a Mother Teresa of Calcutta and which she wishes all to share. If one can help an exercitant to see a little of this, then that is enough. The Triple Colloquy can therefore be prayed with humility and longing over the remainder of the Second Week, and it will not be absent either as the rest of life begins to unfold.

## NOTES

<sup>1</sup> On the importance of the ignatian approach to the choice of a way of life, see the recent treatment by Hans Urs von Balthasar, *The christian state of life* (San Francisco, 1983).

<sup>2</sup> Hugo Rahner is good on all this, in *Ignatius the theologian* (London, 1968); see his discussion of the meaning of the First Week, and then of the Two Standards, in ch III, 'The christology of the Spiritual Exercises', pp 59-93, 113-125.

<sup>3</sup> See von Balthasar, *op. cit.*, pp 9-10, 54-61, 210-224.

<sup>4</sup> See the quotation from Ignatius given in Hugo Rahner, *op. cit.*, pp 119-120.

<sup>5</sup> On this aspect of the application of the senses, see Rahner, *op. cit.*, pp 195-207.

<sup>6</sup> See Marion A. Habig (ed), *St Francis of Assisi, writings and early biographies* (Chicago, 1972), pp 1318-1320; ch 8 of the *Little flowers of St Francis* is entitled, 'How St Francis taught Brother Leo that perfect joy is only in the cross'.

<sup>7</sup> It is valuable and consoling to note that, in the more purely contemplative tradition, the attainment of the third degree of humility is shown as directly corresponding to the soul's deep growth in the spiritual life. On this, see R. Garrigou-Lagrange, *The three ways of the spiritual life* (London, 1938), pp 63, 71, 77-78: 'St Catherine of Siena, the author of the *Imitation*, St Francis of Sales and all the spiritual writers reproduce the same doctrine on the degrees of humility, corresponding to the degrees in the love of God. All books on ascetics likewise say that we must rejoice in tribulations and in being calumniated; but, as St Teresa remarks, this presupposes great purgations, the purgations of which St John of the Cross speaks, and can result only from faithful correspondence with the grace of the Holy Spirit' (p 78).

<sup>8</sup> I remember Colin Maloney, late of the Society of Jesus at Regis College in Toronto, and an inspired teacher on the Exercises, remarking that the worst thing would be to make the Two Standards a philosophic treatment of wealth, poverty, etc. — no, he said, it is to appreciate revelation, to taste Christ, and to live out of that experience.

<sup>9</sup> See my article, 'The prayer of faith, spiritual direction, and the Exercises', in *The Way*, October 1985.