

# THE TWO STANDARDS IN SCRIPTURE

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THE LINK BETWEEN the Two Standards meditation and scripture seems to be very clear according to contemporary scripture scholars who write about the Exercises.<sup>1</sup> Also, those writers to whom we are indebted for providing retreatants and directors with suitable scripture texts for each day of the Exercises do not run out of scripture texts for the Two Standards.<sup>2</sup> All of us I am sure, whether as retreatants or directors, have picked up some way or other our own favourite scripture texts for this meditation. However, this is the time to question these because it is very difficult to find suitable texts from scripture which adequately capture the key elements of the exercise. We are on sure ground when we use the text of scripture for the various mysteries in the life of Jesus and for the passion and resurrection of Jesus. But when we work through the scripture texts usually suggested in the many aids to the Exercises and the scripture articles on the Two Standards, we can find that some key elements of the exercise as intended by Ignatius have escaped both them and us.

An overall glance at those parts of scripture most frequently linked with the Two Standards meditation discloses *three* main groupings of biblical texts. By far the most common are those which refer to the struggle of Jesus against the forces of evil,<sup>3</sup> often represented by Satan. This takes place above all during the temptations or testing of Jesus in the desert, as well as during his public life as portrayed in the stories of exorcisms, healings and even in his clashes with adversaries. These put him to the test and are thus seen at times to be influenced by the forces of evil. Some parables and sayings in the gospels, as well as some passages from the pauline writings and the Book of Revelation about the conflict between good and evil in the world and in christian living, fall into this group. For example: the parables of the sower and of the wheat and the weeds; the combat between the angels under Michael and the dragon, Satan; various descriptions of the power of evil

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at work in the world as the prince of this world, as the evil one or as the source of lawlessness prowling about like a roaring lion.<sup>4</sup> Paul expresses this continuous struggle between good and evil as opposition between the fruits of the Spirit and the flesh and, more fundamentally, between the saving activity of Jesus and evil rooted in the disobedience of Adam.<sup>5</sup>

A second group of scripture texts is taken to illustrate three steps leading to a closer following of Christ in the Two Standards: poverty as opposed to riches,<sup>6</sup> insults as opposed to honour,<sup>7</sup> then humility as opposed to pride.<sup>8</sup> A third group similar to these is more Christ-centred. Without contrasting him with the forces of evil, they simply point to the example of his poverty in his public ministry<sup>9</sup> and to the fact that he is a human like ourselves since he was subjected to temptation.<sup>10</sup> A more general motif is sometimes added here: Jesus is so central to our lives that no opposing force can separate us from him (Rom 8, 38–39).

Do these biblical perspectives, namely, the struggle of Christ and christian disciples against the forces of evil and the following of Jesus in poverty, dishonour and humility after his example, adequately capture the main force and insights of the Two Standards? We need not be surprised if they do not. While it is true that in general the Exercises and the personal experiences of Ignatius which shaped them are in substantial agreement with scripture, nevertheless the meditation of the Two Standards was one of the basic elements of a special, personal grace received at Manresa. Also, some elements in the meditation were more directly influenced by spiritual writings other than scripture: for example, the *Flos sanctorum* of Jacobus de Voragine. The account of the life of Augustine in this work develops the tradition about the opposing camps of Babylon and Jerusalem. Clearly, texts from scripture can fall short of expressing adequately either the personal experience of Ignatius or the various currents of spirituality which influenced him or a particular and very specific stage in the movement of the Exercises such as is described in the Two Standards.

In order to choose suitable scripture texts we need first of all to pick out the key components of this exercise. Just at this point and also through the continuing days, Ignatius is concerned with the immediate prerequisites for a God-inspired decision either as regards discerning life-choices or deepening one's life-choice and moving towards living it more fully. The intention of Ignatius is

to be found in the grace to be asked for: knowledge or light for the mind, 'a *knowledge* of the deceits of the evil one, *help* to guard myself against them . . . and . . . a *knowledge* of the true life exemplified in Jesus, and the grace to *imitate* him'.<sup>11</sup> The emphasis here seems to be more on knowledge and light, whereas the Three Classes is more like a reality test for the will, a meditation to *choose* what is better (Exx 149). But taking these together with the Three Degrees of Humility, what Ignatius is talking about (and has been from the beginning of the Exercises) is freedom. He is interested in the retreatant begging for light and strength to deal with the distortions, biases, hidden unfreedoms and delusions that will threaten a good and sound choice, often under the appearance of good (Exx 332). What Ignatius wants are people who are sufficiently free to be interiorly led by the Spirit.

The Christ-centred colloquy (Exx 147) confirms more precisely the grace asked for. The retreatant asks to be received into the following of Christ and his value-system which leads to freedom and life. This consists in spiritual poverty (and actual poverty, if such is the call), humiliations and humility, thus becoming aware of and guarding against a value-system characterized by the will to possess, the will to be esteemed and self-interest or pride. The focus is the drawing power of Christ and his ways and values as he calls us to leave the unfreedoms that we learn to recognize in the will to possess, to be esteemed and in self-interest; as he calls us to follow him in open spiritual freedom (poverty) and total vulnerability (insults, contempt) which lead to unselfish love (humility). The *knowledge* requested in the petition (Exx 139) means recognizing the life of falsehood which leads to pride or egoism in order to embrace the true life manifested in that humility (unselfish love) towards which poverty and humiliation are directed. The whole spectacular scene of the two camps is just a means towards leading us to a *knowledge* of the life of falsehood and of the true life in Jesus. This involves discerning and recognizing obstacles within ourselves, for the combat terrain is primarily within. The adversary is my wicked self, sometimes the accessory to the insinuations of the enemy of human nature. What Ignatius seeks through these warlike images is rather the union with Christ poor and suffering than the defeat of the evil one. The way he proposes is not violence against an adversary but rather a *knowledge* which discerns the deceits and sees the truth, a knowledge that takes up

as 'weapons', in a very improper sense, poverty and humiliations in the company of Jesus.<sup>12</sup>

Therefore, the two central points for which we need to look for roots in scripture should be about:

(a) a knowledge or light granted by the Spirit which discerns distortions, biases, hidden unfreedoms that threaten good and sound choices, sometimes under the guise of an angel of light; (b) a knowledge of the true life as exemplified in Jesus which enables us as Christians to choose rightly so as to imitate and follow him, particularly in a spirit of humility (unselfish love), spiritual freedom (poverty) and in suffering companionship with him (humiliations). Consequently, we need to ask: is there anything in scripture that corresponds to the dispositions Ignatius sees as prerequisites for discernment: to illusions, delusions, bias, darkness, to the stratagems and patterns of what Ignatius calls the enemy, to Christ as the light enabling Christians to choose rightly, to his way as the way to holy choices and christian living?

Some texts of Paul about discernment and wisdom speak of a knowledge granted by the Spirit which helps Christians to choose what is better and to distinguish between false standards of 'the world' and those of God in Christ. Paul uses the word 'discern' (*dokimadzein*) not only with reference to choosing between good and evil (cf Rom 2,18) but also with reference to seeking the better course.<sup>13</sup> Christian life is a continuing discernment, an attention always on the alert. 'Do not be conformed to this world but be transformed by the renewal of your mind, that you may discern (*dokimadzein*) what is the will of God, what is good and acceptable and perfect' (Rom 12,2). This is a frequent theme (cf Eph 5, 7-11, 17; Phil 1, 9-11).

Although Paul mainly speaks about acceptance in word and action of basic christian faith, yet he also includes the idea of growing more and more as a Christian, of going from good to better. Besides, 'discerning' embraces knowledge, decision, action and experience. His call to the Philippians to discern 'what is excellent' and to the Romans to discern what is 'the will of God, what is good and acceptable and perfect' means testing these and accepting them as tested. These two passages from Paul's letters to the Romans and Philippians have been taken by Aquinas as the basis for developing his theology of moral discernment, of discerning wisdom as an important exercise of christian charity

and wisdom under the influence of the Spirit.<sup>14</sup> Discernment as described by Paul differs from the discernment of spirits in the First Letter of John (1 Jn 4,1-6) which is perhaps the most frequently cited scripture text as regards discernment. But this type of discernment refers to distinguishing between true and false teachings and not to decisions about right living.<sup>15</sup> For Paul the gift of love (cf Phil 1, 9) — and this includes God's love for us, our love of God and of one another — is a prerequisite for finding and doing God's will as a Christian. It is poured into our hearts by the Holy Spirit. This love would correspond to the humility or unselfish love mentioned in the Two Standards and developed more fully in the Three Kinds of Humility.

In these Two Standards we are invited to imitate Christ 'better' (Exx 147) and in the Three Classes 'to choose what is better' (Exx 149). Paul's wish that 'your love may abound more and more with knowledge and all discernment so that you may discern what is excellent' is about something more than adherence to a general movement towards what is good. There is a sensitivity always on the alert and at the same time a spiritual maturity:

So that we may no longer be children tossed to and fro and carried about with every wind of doctrine, by the cunning of people, by their craftiness in deceitful wiles; rather, speaking the truth in love, we are to grow in every way into him who is the head, into Christ (Eph 4,14-15).

Paul speaks to the Corinthians (1 Cor 1,18-3,4) of spiritual maturity in terms of the wisdom which comes from the Holy Spirit and also from Christ, who is 'the wisdom of God'. The person of Christ is the adequate presentation of the divine intention for humanity and so the only valid goal of all human aspirations towards wholeness (1 Cor 1,24). He reflects what humanity can and must become. He does not merely display what authentic humanity is but he also enables others to achieve it. His personality radiates a transforming love which shows him to be the power of God. Paul's contrast between the wisdom of this age and the wisdom of God in Jesus, described as the foolishness and weakness of God, and his contrast between the 'unspiritual' and 'spiritual' person offer a helpful parallel to the Two Standards. Paul opposes the standards of God in Jesus to those which still dominate the lives of the Corinthians in varying degrees.

The 'standards' chosen by God in Jesus are the way of the cross and the fact that God acts towards society in unexpected, unconventional ways. Ordinarily in human experience the wise, the powerful and the wealthy are those who effect change in society. One would have expected God to choose them as his instruments. But in order that his power might be recognized, God chose the foolish, the weak, the lowly, the despised, the poor as members of the community in Corinth to implement his purpose. Also, the message of Paul was not to be measured by the current standards of wisdom, by the persuasive force of logic or the attraction of a popular speaker, which Paul apparently was not, but by the power of God and the Spirit of Jesus acting through Paul's limitations. 'No human being should boast in the presence of God. He is the source of your life in Christ Jesus, whom God made our wisdom' (1 Cor 1,29). The wisdom given in Christ makes us free. We are no longer forced to accept certain standards and conventions of judgment and we are capable of becoming what God intended us to be. It is from God that we receive all that we are and all that we enjoy (1 Cor 1,29,31).

The Spirit gives this wisdom to the mature, 'spiritual' person. The obstacles to this wisdom are: the difficulty in accepting the meaning of the cross for christian living, judging life by the standards of wealth, reputation and power and the desire to look for 'signs' (miracles, cf 1 Cor 1,22). The expectations of miracles can be made to look very religious, but it is in reality born of scepticism. It refuses the risk of trust and insists on linking christian commitment to security. These obstacles may be related to the false value-system described in the Two Standards: the will to possess, the will to be esteemed and pride or selfish love. Paul calls them 'worldly standards', merely 'human wisdom' because they belong to the value-system of the pagan environment of the Corinthians. They are based on a 'wisdom of this age', that is, on conventional standards of judgment, as opposed to that wisdom of God which is Christ.<sup>16</sup>

The temptations in the desert also contrast the standards or ways of Jesus with those of the enemy of human nature. This scene has been more closely linked with the Two Standards by writers than any other part of scripture. For example, Hugo Rahner interprets the temptations in relation to the human desire for possession, for self-esteem and that exclusive service of the heavenly

Father, which is the principal aim of the Exercises.<sup>17</sup> This view he finds confirmed by the fact that the sixth day of the Second Week is taken up completely with the contemplation of the temptation of Christ in the desert. Ignatius explicitly emphasises that the meditation should be concluded with the triple colloquy of the Two Standards (Exx 161) just as in the meditations which immediately precede (Exx 156, 159).

In fact the scene does not offer us a parallel to the Two Standards as close, concrete and complete as the passages from St. Paul on discernment and wisdom. The account of the temptations is not so specific about the human desire for possession, for self-esteem and our exclusive service of the heavenly Father, even if it does contrast the stratagems of Satan with the ways of Jesus and speak indirectly about the influence of the evil one on human life. The scene portrays the victory of Jesus over the forces of evil, represented by Satan, and describes Satan's stratagems against Jesus in his specific mission as the true Messiah and Son of God, while at the same time it holds out hope to Christians in their struggle against the forces of evil. Jesus experiences what Israel, God's son in the Old Testament, experienced in the desert. But Jesus, the true Israel and the true Son will conquer and prove his sonship where the old Israel failed.

The temptation of bread hints at a temptation to play a political and social Messiah by feeding a hungry mankind. But Jesus replies that he trustfully waits for God's help. He is nourished by total surrender to God's word, which creates and sustains humanity in all its needs. Secondly, Jesus refuses to misuse God's gift of protection. True trust includes an obedience which does not force God's hand (as Israel did in the desert). Instead of revealing his filial power to perform miracles, Jesus reveals his filial authority to interpret scripture correctly. Finally, the cosmic struggle between God and Satan reaches its climax when Satan presents himself as a god to be worshipped. The temptation is the basic temptation of Israel to idolatry, to putting a creature in the place of God. And so Jesus, with the authority that flows from the Son's unshaken union with the Father, sends Satan packing with the fundamental commandment given to Israel: monotheism.

The temptations contrast the ways of Jesus in his mission with the false expectations of people in his regard as one who would work prodigies and who would be clearly seen to triumph like a

temporal and political leader. By these temptations there is presented to Jesus the ideal of a temporal and political messianism, compounded of wealth, of glory and extraordinary power. He rejected it to adopt the way of abandonment to God in humility and in absolute obedience to his will.<sup>18</sup> The account, then, may be linked with the Two Standards. It can illustrate the ways of Jesus, his life of service in humility, trust and dependence on the will of his Father in a general way, as an example to the retreatant.

But a further link may be made. These false expectations about Jesus, represented by Satan, were also of human origin. They were based on contemporary views of *power* and *honour* which were contrary to the ways or standards of Jesus. Such human expectations and delusions, which were not the ways of God for Jesus, the gospel authors see as inspired by the power of evil, Satan.<sup>19</sup> 'Get behind me, Satan', Jesus says to Peter (Mt 16,23). Peter, as a specially favoured disciple of Jesus, as 'the rock', has received the keys of the Kingdom. But he is still unfree. His concept of a glorious Messiah automatically excludes the idea of suffering and death. What Peter fails to realize is that by espousing the idea of a glorious Son of God exempt from suffering, he is repeating the temptation of Satan: 'If you are the Son of God, then use the power attendant on your divine status to avoid suffering and to win an easy kingdom'. Peter is puffed up about the revelations and the powers he has received and he thinks the thoughts of men, of Satan, not of God. He conceives of the Messiah and Son of God according to earthly dreams of easy glory, instead of according to the mystery of the cross. The sons of Zebedee, too, along with their mother shared the same illusory dream in their request for the best places next to Christ in his Kingdom (Mt 20,21; Mk 10,37). Similarly, Jesus had to free his disciples from a false notion of power, from their false understanding of the Kingdom and the ways of God for him. Their view was influenced by contemporary standards which Jesus condemned (Mt 20,25-28).

In order to be drawn into closer companionship with Jesus, disciples had to be freed by him from a system of values influenced by their world and forces of evil which conflicted with the ways of God for Jesus. They had to learn companionship with a suffering Jesus, the true way to glory and a life of service based on humility rather than domineering power. These ways of Jesus and disciples correspond to the 'steps' of the Two Standards (146). In general,



those parts of scripture which present Jesus as constantly doing the Father's will and enabling people to choose rightly by freeing them from biases and a false system of values correspond more with the key elements of the Two Standards than those which simply describe the opposition between good and evil in the world.

The Fourth Gospel, for example, presents Jesus as living in constant search of the Father's will in his mission.<sup>20</sup> Also, the opposition between Christ and the enemy in the Two Standards corresponds to the conflict between light and darkness, so central to this gospel. Jesus is the light because he discloses to us what God is like and what we can become. Darkness stands for unbelief or lack of understanding with regard to Jesus or lack of love. It is an area dominated by Satan. However, this contrast may not seem to be a helpful parallel to the key elements of the Two Standards. Ignatius specifies the ways of Satan more concretely than the Fourth Gospel in terms of the will to possess, the will to be esteemed and pride. Secondly, the Exercises at this stage suppose that a choice has been made between Jesus and Satan, between light and darkness.

However, the Fourth Gospel was designed to root believers deeper in their commitment to Jesus as they try to live out their faith in a community situation of conflict and confusion. Also, as a general framework for the Two Standards meditation we can contemplate Jesus as drawing people of good will more and more into the light by freeing them from biases and false understanding which prevent them from seeing and welcoming the light. For example, Nicodemus (Jn 2,23-31; 7,50-52; 19,39) is afraid for his own reputation and comes to Jesus by night; he is carried away by a false enthusiasm about Jesus's miracles. Jesus draws him more into the light by calling him to faith in a beloved Son who is to be lifted up on the cross. Nicodemus gains courage, speaks out, calling for justice, and eventually follows him as a disciple at the time of Jesus's death. Peter also has to be freed from a false enthusiasm and trust in his own power of the sword to serve Jesus, from a failure to understand the way of the cross (Jn 13,36-38; 18,10-11; 21,15-19). The blind man's eyes are opened to the light of day and to Christ the light, who leads him progressively to a deeper commitment which means the loss of his reputation and also his friends since he is expelled from the synagogue. This had personal and social consequences. It meant isolation from the

community (Jn 9). On the other hand, obstacles to the light are presented by the Pharisees in this struggle between light and darkness. They become more and more 'blind' (9,41) because of their *pride* in their knowledge of the law, a knowledge which oppresses poor and deprived people such as the blind man. In addition, the disciples are brought more into the light by Jesus who has to explain to them that they suffer from a delusion and prejudice shared by jewish society in his day: blind people were outside the pale of God's love, they were accursed by God. Their blindness was due to their own sin or the sin of their parents (9,2-3). Throughout the gospels, besides warning people about the danger and delusion of riches, Jesus had to set right the prejudices against the poor, even among people of general good will, which characterized a value-system counter to the loving ways of God in Jesus. For example, the followers of John the Baptist had set false standards for a Messiah in this regard. 'Go and report to John what you have seen and heard. The blind recover their sight, cripples walk, lepers are cured, the deaf hear, dead men are raised to life, and the poor have the good news preached to them' (Lk 7,20-22).

The contrast between light and darkness, then, does correspond to that between the Two Standards in a general way. The various obstacles to the light such as reputation, trust in one's own power, the blindness of pride and prejudices against the poor and the deprived, which are in conflict with God's unconditional love, can be related to the ways of the enemy of human nature in the Two Standards: the will to possess, to be esteemed and pride or lack of unselfish love.

The way of Jesus in the gospels is the way to deeper understanding, to holy choices and christian living, to the 'true life' as Ignatius calls it. Paul encourages the Philippians to let the spirit and mind of Jesus pervade their lives more and more (Phil 2,5). The mind and attitude which belonged to Christ should overflow more and more into those who are in Christ because they are constantly led by the Spirit, not the 'spirit of this world' but 'that Spirit which is from God' (1 Cor 2,11; Rom 8,14). The Two Standards meditation encourages us to make choices according to this 'mind' or *sensus Christi* under the guidance of the Spirit.

## NOTES

<sup>1</sup> E.g., Lyonnet, S.: *The meditation on the Two Standards and its scriptural foundation* (Program to adapt the Spiritual Exercises, Jersey City, N.Y.); Martini C.: *The Ignatian Exercises in the light of St. John* (Anand Press, India, 1981), pp 155-66; Stanley, D.: *A modern scriptural approach to the Spiritual Exercises* (Institute of Jesuit Sources, Chicago, 1967), pp 140-146, and *The call to discipleship: the Spiritual Exercises with the Gospel of Mark* (*The Way Supplement* no 43, 1982), pp 107-119.

<sup>2</sup> E.g., Murray, P.: *A scriptural retreat arranged according to the Spiritual Exercises of St. Ignatius* (Program to adapt the Spiritual Exercises, Jersey City, N.Y.) pp 18-21; Veltri J. and English, J.: *A game plan for the thirty days Spiritual Exercises*, (Loyola House, Guelph 1973), p 7 and Veltri, J.: *Orientations*, vol 1 (Loyola House, Guelph, 1979), p 93.

<sup>3</sup> Mt 4,1-11; cf Heb 10,1-18; Mk 3,22-27; 8,11-13; 10,2-9; 12,13-17.

<sup>4</sup> Mt 13,10-30; Apoc 12; Jn 12,31; 17,15-16; 2 Thess 2,7; 1 Pet 5,6-11; Jas 4,7-8.

<sup>5</sup> Gal 5,13-26; Rom 5,18-21.

<sup>6</sup> Lk 9,25; 16,13-14; 1 Jn 2,15-16; 1 Tim 6,9-10.

<sup>7</sup> Mt 5,10ff; 10,17-23.

<sup>8</sup> Mt 18,5.

<sup>9</sup> Mt 8,18-22.

<sup>10</sup> Heb 2,14-18; 4,14-5,10.

<sup>11</sup> Exx 139 (ed L. J. Puhl).

<sup>12</sup> Cf le Blond, M.: 'Deux Étendards', *Christus*, no 33, 1962, pp 78-96; Guilian, M.: 'Le combat toujours nécessaire', *Coll. Christus*, no 21-*Prière et action*, 1966, pp 71-90.

<sup>13</sup> Guillet, J.: 'Paul on the discernment of spirits', in *A companion to Paul*, ed M. Taylor, (Alba House, N.Y.), pp 165-173.

<sup>14</sup> Cf Mahoney, J.: *Seeking the Spirit: essays in moral and pastoral theology*, (London, Sheed & Ward, 1981), pp 63-80.

<sup>15</sup> Aquinas says of the relation between moral discernment and charity: 'He who has charity has a right judgment both of what can be known and can be done' (*In phil. lect.* 2).

<sup>16</sup> It is in Paul's second letter to the Corinthians that we find the statement which Ignatius adapts to describe illusions that can sidetrack us from making right choices: 'It is the mark of the evil spirit to assume the appearance of an angel of light' (Exx 322). But in Paul the original saying refers to false teachings and teachers, 'false apostles, deceitful workmen, disguising themselves as apostles of Christ. And no wonder, for even Satan disguises himself as an angel of light' (2 Cor 11,14). This says nothing directly about distinguishing between true and false enthusiasm, about a spiritual choice between good and better. Paul is alluding to the later Jewish belief that Satan had changed himself into an angel of light at the time of the deception of Eve and he uses this belief to prove the possibility that Satan's servants have been changed into or disguised as servants of the gospel.

<sup>17</sup> Cf Rahner, H.: *Ignatius the theologian* (Chapman, London, Dublin, 1968), pp 113-125.

<sup>18</sup> Cf Lyonnet, S.: *art.cit.*, p 12.

<sup>19</sup> Human biases which were obstacles to the following of Jesus are often seen by biblical authors to be the work of Satan. New Testament and early Christian writers like Origen and Cassian commonly attribute good thoughts to a good spirit and evil thoughts to an evil spirit, i.e. the devil, yet they were aware that many thoughts and interior impulses come from human nature itself. 'We should be aware', says Cassian, 'that our thoughts have three possible sources — God, the devil and ourselves' (Cassian, *Conferences*, 1 ch 19; cf J. de Guibert, *The theology of the spiritual life* (London, 1954), p 130).

<sup>20</sup> Jn 5,30.44; 8,29.50.