

Introduction to the Consideration of Different States of Life [135]

The example which Christ our Lord gave of the first state of life, which is that of observing the Commandments, has already been considered in meditating on His obedience to His parents. The example of the second state, which is that of evangelical perfection, has also been considered, when He remained in the temple and left His foster father and His Mother to devote Himself exclusively to the service of His eternal Father.

While continuing to contemplate His life, let us begin to investigate and ask in what kind of life or in what state His Divine Majesty wishes to make use of us.

Therefore, as some introduction to this, in the next exercise, let us consider the intention of Christ our Lord, and on the other hand, that of the enemy of our human nature. Let us also see how we ought to prepare ourselves to arrive at perfection in whatever state or way of life God our Lord may grant us to choose.

TWO STANDARDS [136-147]

Prayer: the usual preparatory prayer. I will beg God our Lord for grace that all my intentions, actions, and operations may be directed purely to the praise and service of his Divine Majesty.

First prelude: This is the history. Here it will be that Christ calls and wants all beneath His standard, and Lucifer, on the other hand, wants all under his.

Second prelude: This is a mental representation of the place. It will be here to see a great plain, comprising the whole region about Jerusalem, where the sovereign Commander-in-Chief of all the good is Christ our Lord; and another plain about the region of Babylon, where the chief of the enemy is Lucifer.

Prayer of petition: This is to ask for what I desire. Here it will be to ask for a knowledge of the deceits of the rebel chief and help to guard myself against them; and also to ask for a knowledge of the true life exemplified in the sovereign and true Commander, and the grace to imitate Him.

There are a couple things that we can remark right at the beginning: first, the word that Ignatius uses for *standard* is *bandera*, meaning, *flag*. The standard that Ignatius is referring to is “a military flag carried on a pole or hoisted on a rope.” To be under someone’s standard, then, meant to follow them in the midst of a battle. This is a great image, because, as Job says, “The life of man upon earth is a warfare.” There’s a war going on, and we can’t be neutral or sit on the sidelines: as Christ Himself says, “Whoever is not with me is against me, and whoever does not gather with me scatters” (Mt 12:30). Christianity is not a spectator sport.

Secondly, this meditation has two parts: first, we examine the battle flag of Satan: what is it that he does, and how does he try to get us to follow him? We need to consider this in order to know how to defend ourselves. Likewise, we need to look at Christ, and His Standard, so we can know how to place ourselves under it, and follow Him all the days of our lives.

Thirdly, this meditation is particularly useful as we consider making an election, or even just how to reform our lives. Here we have Christ presented as the model, and we need to know Him in order to love Him and follow Him more closely.

Calveras tells us that Ignatius wants us to accomplish three things: first, *to learn*, according to Christ's true doctrine, *how we should dispose ourselves* in order to reach perfection in whatever state of life He calls us, namely, through highest spiritual poverty and the desire for insults and humiliations in order to obtain humility, and from there to reach all other virtues; second, *to know Christ's intention*, in the interior inspirations that He gives us, which is to bring us to humility, and to know *Satan's intentions* in his suggestions, which is to give rise to a certain pride in us, and hence to be able to discern, from these effects, how to discern which spirit is acting, and; third, *to correct our nature judgments*, which look upon humiliation and poverty as things opposed to our excellence and happiness, and replace them with the conviction that in Christ's love and desires is where the true life is to be found, and in Him we will find perfection and freedom of spirit.¹

Let us begin, then, with the consideration of Satan's standard:

[140] First Point: "Imagine you see the chief of all the enemy in the vast plain about Babylon, seated on a great throne of fire and smoke, his appearance inspiring horror and terror."

The fire signifies the destruction he has brought upon himself and is trying to impose upon the whole world. True, God allows him to use his power against us in order to try our love. Yet God does not suffer us to be tempted above our strength, but bestows abundant graces and easy victory on them that call upon him with humility and trust.

The smoke signifies the darkness in which Satan covers his evil designs. His victims must be kept in ignorance and perplexity; they must not be clear in their own minds, nor yet go to others for instruction and counsel. Only the children of light are safe against him. Confusion doesn't come from God; it's the devil's way of masking his designs.

[141] Second Point: "Consider how he summons innumerable demons, and scatters them, some to one city and some to another, throughout the whole world, so that no province, no place, no state of life, no individual is overlooked."

What is Satan doing unceasingly at every moment of time? Jealous of us who are called and destined for heaven, he is determined to drag us into his own misery. Saint John Chrysostom tells us that each one of us has a particular demon who works assiduously for

¹ Calveras, *Practica intensiva*, 252.

our damnation, and will hang around us right up until the end. Saint Peter says, “Your opponent the devil is prowling like a roaring lion, looking for someone to devour” (1 Pt 5: 8).

[142] Third Point: Consider the address he makes to them, how he goads them on to lay snares for men and bind them with chains. First they are to tempt them to covet riches (as Satan himself is accustomed to do in most cases) that they may the more easily attain the empty honors of this world, and then come to overweening pride.

The first step, then, will be riches, the second honor, the third pride. From these three steps the evil one leads to all other vices.

Riches represent whatever can be found in the world apart from God. It can be things or peoples, objects that we have as our treasures. It could be comforts or an inordinate attachment to a particular person, place, or work, under the pretext of good, and certainly the attachment to our own ideas or consideration of things. It could even be my talents and skills, my looks, my personality, my feelings . . . anything that’s not God.

Then what happens? If I am rich, I have no need of God, as we hear in the Book of Revelation (3:17): “You say, ‘I am rich and affluent and have no need of anything,’ and yet do not realize that you are wretched, pitiable, poor, blind, and naked.”

Why don’t they realize their poverty? Because the world keeps piling up its empty honors. They build themselves up on false riches, things that aren’t really worth anything, and then the world gives them praise for it.

This leads to pride, since when a person is proud, they won’t submit their minds or wills to others, not even to God. They become a law unto themselves. The good things of others are displeasing to him; meanwhile, whatever he does has his approval. Pride deprives man of supernatural help. Saint Peter says, “God resists the proud.” (1 Pt 5: 5).

Let us examine that passage briefly: the Greek word for resists is ἀντιτάσσομαι (antitássomai), and the term is very strong: to means, literally, “squared off,” to “reject the entire make-up of something, i.e. its whole arrangement – from its very ‘set up’ (organization) to the final way it is ‘ordered.’” The word itself is a very old military term, “used in antiquity of organized resistance, like an army assuming a specific battle-array position to resist in ‘full alignment’; to disagree (oppose) intensely.”

“If it is a terrible thing for a man to be forsaken by God, what is it when God begins to resist him? [This divine resistance must fill us with terror]. God is the sole fount of our holiness, because He is the Author of every grace. Now what grace is to be hoped for from God, if God not only does not give Himself to us, but rather resist us, rejects us? What is there then that is so evil, so contrary to God in pride, for God so mightily to thrust it far from Him?”²

² Adapted from Bl. Columba Marmion’s *Christ, the Ideal of the Monk*.

The opposition or antagonism between God and the proud stems from the very nature of God's holiness. God is the beginning and the end, the First and the Last, the Alpha and the Omega. Everything comes from Him, flows from Him, and is received from Him. He deserves all the glory, and that glory is His alone. Through the prophet Isaiah, God tells us: "I am the LORD; . . . my glory I give to no other."

"Now what is it that the proud man does? He attempts to rob God of this glory which God alone merits and of which He is so jealous, in order to appropriate it to himself. The proud man lifts himself up above others, he makes himself the center; he glories in his own person, in his perfection, his deeds; he sees in himself alone the principle of all that he has and all that he is; he considers that he owes nothing to anyone, not even to God, He would deprive God, of that Divine attribute of being the First Principle and Last End. Doubtless, in theory, he may think that all comes from God, but, in practice, he acts and lives as if all came from himself."

"You see to what a degree pride is opposed to the soul's union with God; there is not, says St. Thomas, any sin, or tendency, that bears more clearly the character of an obstacle to Divine communications. And as God is the principle of all grace, pride is the most terrible of all dangers for the soul; while there is no surer way of attaining holiness and of finding God than humility. It is pride that above all prevents God from giving Himself; if there were no longer any pride in souls, God would give Himself to them fully."

Pride pulls us out of our place, as it were. It makes us the center of attention, and prevents God from working in our souls. Saint Therese of Lisieux said, "The beginning of all holiness is humbly admitting that without God we can do nothing, but that with, in, and through Him, everything is possible!"

The devil's strategy, then, is to get people to become attached to earthly things. He urges them to acquire say material wealth, which is the cheapest kind of riches, or acquire education. How clever the devil is. Or acquire mastery in the use of their emotions, or cultivate gifts in the social order, or, the devil will even tempt people to acquire spiritual riches. But whatever the possession, whether as cheap a thing as money, or special things say as, secular knowledge or even spiritual wisdom, the beginning is to become wealthy and thus to attain to recognition, praise, honor.

Attachment to the things of this world gradually makes a person, not only satisfied with what he or she possesses, but hungry for acceptance, recognition, praise, and honor. And once, as Ignatius says, once a person becomes a victim of empty honors, then pride follows as a matter of course. Because once a person falls into pride, there is no limit to that person's malice. Proud people are the agents of the devil. He uses them to seduce others. In fact, he uses them to work with him.

Second Part: The Standard of Christ

[143] In a similar way, we are to picture to ourselves the sovereign and true Commander, Christ our Lord.

[144] First Point: “Consider Christ our Lord, standing in a lowly place in a great plain about the region of Jerusalem, His appearance beautiful and attractive.”

Notice how beautiful the scene is, how calm Christ is. He is in a low place, that is, a place of humility, since humility is the first and most important virtue for the followers of Christ.

[145] Second Point: “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.”

[146] Third Point: “Consider the address which Christ our Lord makes to all His servants and friends whom He sends on this enterprise, recommending to them to seek to help all, first by attracting them to the highest spiritual poverty, and should it please the Divine Majesty, and should He deign to choose them for it, even to actual poverty. Secondly, they should lead them to a desire for insults and contempt, for from these springs humility.

Hence, there will be three steps: the first, poverty as opposed to riches; the second, insults or contempt as opposed to the honor of this world; the third, humility as opposed to pride. From these three steps, let them lead men to all other virtues.”

Christ’s strategy is the direct opposite of Satan’s. It begins by inspiring His followers and future apostles in every age, in every state of life to practice the first beatitude, “blessed are the poor in spirit,” detachment of heart from earthly possessions. And even, if it is God’s will, attracting them to actual poverty.

In other words, the first requirement is poverty: not just in terms of money, but poverty of spirit: the Greeks had two words for a poor person. The first meant the one who was poor, but had enough money to get by. However, that’s not the word that Christ uses here. He uses the word, *ptochos*, meaning the one who is absolutely destitute, who doesn’t even have enough to get by. This is our standing with respect to God. We have absolutely nothing that is our own, and hence the first condition is that the person who wants to serve Christ in winning souls for His Divine Majesty is himself, at least internally, detached from everything and I mean everything, and I mean everything, in this world, money is the most obvious but not only. This is so fundamental in the apostolate that in two thousand years there have been no exceptions: the only persons that Jesus Christ uses to spread His gospel are the people detached from the things of this world. As He Himself tells us, “Without me you can do nothing.”

You cannot play both sides. You cannot love, as Christ tells us, both God and mammon.

Then Christ inspires His followers to just the opposite of the devil’s instigation. Christ inspires His followers to actually desire, under the influence of grace, to be scorned or rejected. You must want “to be scorned, despised, ignored, rejected.”

The key to all of this is humility; as Saint Vincent de Paul said, “The most powerful weapon to conquer the devil is humility. For, as he does not know at all how to employ it, neither does he know how to defend himself from it.” It is, in the words of Saint John Vianney, when asked what the three most important virtues are, replied: “The first most important virtue is humility, the second humility, and the third, humility.” As Søren Kierkegaard wrote, “God creates everything out of nothing - and everything which God is to use He first reduces to nothing.” To be engaged in God’s service, we must be humble, completely detached from everything.

[147] Colloquy [actually, three colloquies]: A colloquy should be addressed to our Lady, asking her to obtain for me from her Son and Lord the grace to be received under His standard, first in the highest spiritual poverty, and should the Divine Majesty be pleased thereby, and deign to choose and accept me, even in actual poverty; secondly, in bearing insults and wrongs, thereby to imitate Him better, provided only I can suffer these without sin on the part of another, and without offense of the Divine Majesty. Then I will say the Hail Mary.

Second Colloquy: This will be to ask her Son to obtain the same favors for me from the Father. Then I will say, *Soul of Christ*, that is, the *Anima Christi*.

Third Colloquy: This will be to beg the Father to grant me the same graces. Then I will say the Our Father.