

## Three Classes of Men [149-157]

*This is a meditation for the same fourth day to choose that which is better*  
(note, this is the subtitle Ignatius himself gives it –  
that the Spanish is *el mejor*, which could also be translated as *best*)

### Usual Preparation Prayer.

**[150] First Prelude: The history:** This is the history of the Three Classes of Men. Each of them has acquired ten thousand ducats [a ducat was a gold or silver coin used for trade back in the day], but not entirely as they should have, for the love of God. They all wish to save their souls and find peace in God our Lord by ridding themselves of the burden arising from the attachment to the sum acquired, which impedes the attainment of this end.

**[151] Second Prelude: The composition of place:** This is a mental representation of the place. Here it will be to behold myself standing in the presence of God our Lord and of all His saints, that I may know and desire what is more pleasing to His Divine Goodness. – Note that this setting is the one that Ignatius uses for the most important meditations; when there's something really important, really key, he says to place ourselves in the presence of God and all the saints. Calveras notes that this composition of place has nothing really to do with the three classes of men, but rather everything to do with me, and my choices.<sup>1</sup>

**[152] Third Prelude: The petition:** This is to ask for what I desire. Here it will be to beg for the grace to choose what is more for the glory of His Divine Majesty and the salvation of my soul. – Note the emphasis on the will, “the grace to choose.” The point here is on the aspect of *will*, the choice.

Calveras says essentially we are undertaking this meditation to “completely uproot all the particular affections that exist in our hearts: a) so we can be entirely prompt and diligent to fulfill God's will in everything He asks of me, and b) in order to be well-disposed to enter into the elections and to seek and embrace God's will, for which it is necessary to get rid of all disordered affections.”<sup>2</sup>

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Many commentators on the Spiritual Exercises call this meditation “a test of sincerity.” Ignatius himself gives the meditation to the subtitle “to choose what is best.” We could say that the Two Standards gives us an objective standard, the way

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<sup>1</sup> Calveras, *Ejercicios Intensivos*, 269.

<sup>2</sup> Ibid., 267

that things should be. However, this meditation on the three classes of men [or women, if you prefer] is the subjective test, the test of my sincerity, of my willingness to follow through with that standard.

We are to consider three people, each of whom has acquired a sum of money. It's not like they did anything illegal or wrong to get it (since then they'd be obligated to give it back), but nonetheless they didn't do any discernment beforehand; it wasn't acquired only for the love of God. Maybe they inherited it, maybe it was a gift, maybe it was the National Ducat Lottery, whatever. Calveras thinks that maybe it referred to common practice of those who would sail to the colonies and make their living and then return to Spain, using that money to retire on; if they gave it up, it means they'd have to go back to work in their old age, and hence why they find it hard to give up the money. The point is that they have this thing, this object, and they also have an attachment to it, and they know that they need to get rid of the *attachment* they have to said thing. This is important: God might not be calling them to give up the thing itself, but they *need to be detached from it*. They need to get rid of the attachment to it, and, as Ignatius points out, they all *want* to get rid of the attachment and so find peace and save their souls. But, part of wanting, if it's really a desire, is that it becomes action. Let's see what each of the three classes do:

**[153] "The First Class:** They would like to rid themselves of the attachment they have to the sum acquired in order to find peace in God our Lord and assure their salvation, but the hour of death comes, and they have not made use of any means."

The first Class make procrastination the rule of their conduct. Although they do not positively refuse to employ the means necessary for their reform, they indefinitely put off employing them. They *would like to . . .* as Ignatius says. "It would be nice if I could get rid of this attachment." "I would *like* to be detached, but . . ." This is the class of the dreamers or the procrastinators, who just sit around and think of ways to be detached, but who never put it into action.

This class only wants to be rid of the attachment, and are unwilling to use any means to that effect. They fail in applying the suitable means that must be taken to attain a given end. A variety of reasons may account for this: 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.

We have a model of this in the rich young man (Mk 10:17-22): he knows exactly what he must do, and yet “his face fell, and he went away sad, for he had many possessions.” Attachment, yes; effort to leave it, no. The danger, as Christ Himself tells us, is that “Not everyone who says Lord, Lord, will enter the kingdom of heaven but he who does the will of my Father” (Mt 7:21).

For those of us who have been in religious life for some time, it’s particularly worthwhile to consider what Blessed Joseph Allamano, the founder of the Consolata missionaries, says. In one of his writings to his congregations, he breaks religious down into three groups. We can consider the first here: “The first group is that of those who make for themselves a great idea of perfection, who know the need for it, and have great desire for it, but that’s also where they stop, and they do not put into practice the means that lead to holiness. It’s one thing to know, however, and another to put into practice; it’s one thing to know the need for perfection and another to try to achieve it. One thing is the desire, and the other the fact. It’s true that Saint Teresa exhorts us to have great desires, but here she means efficacious desires, those accompanied by works. Hell is full of ephemeral desires and resolutions to convert later. . . . In certain communities, there are always some certain individuals who are always at the same level of virtue or, rather, lack of virtue, from the moment they enter religious life until the end of their lives. They had desires for perfection when they entered, when they entered in the novitiate, when they professed vows . . . and they remain the same as before, with the same defects of pride, laziness, lack of mortification. Certainly, they are not an example to the community, who simply puts up with them, and who doesn’t weep when they leave or when they die. They pass their days without taking advantage of the innumerable graces that accompany them, and in the end, they find themselves with empty hands and a terrible rendering of accounts that must be made. They are like the dried fig tree that the Gospel speaks of, or like the land that didn’t produce fruits after the dewfall and the rains. Happy the community that knows how to opportunely get rid of such ones! Such ones, who know how to exploit all the protections of religious life, live more time than others in detriment to discipline and religious peace. This is, regrettably, the story of one monastery. . . . May God grant that this never happen in our Institute!”

**[154] “The Second Class:** They want to rid themselves of the attachment, but they wish to do so in such a way that they retain what they have acquired, so that God is to come to what they desire, and they do not decide to give up the sum of money in order to go to God, though this would be the better way for them.”

The second Class too desire to get rid of the inordinate affection. They expect, however, that God should suit Himself to their desire to let them keep what they have gained; they are not determined to give it up in order to go to Him, even though this would be the best state for them. We could say that their motto is: "God, ask me to do what *I* want, and I'll do what you ask." "Ask me to do what *I* want, and I'll do what you ask." God is supposed to come to them. This is the class of the compromiser, the pretender, the one who dodges God's will.

The second class will compromise: they want to be rid of the internal impediment but 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. 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.

Imaginary detachment and real attachment, want of straightforwardness and a policy of compromise, are the distinguishing marks of the second Class. Like the first Class they wish to get rid of their inordinate affection for the thing acquired. Unlike the first Class, however, they are sincerely willing to do a deal for this purpose, always provided they are not required to sacrifice what they have gained.

Think of Pilate in the Gospels, a man attached to power, attached to his fears, attached to so many things. He washes his hands, but in vain. He wishes he could save Christ, but, in the end, he does nothing but condemn Him. The danger is that, as we read in the Book of Revelation (3:15), God tells us, "I know that you are neither cold nor hot. I wish you were either cold or hot. So, because you are lukewarm, neither hot nor cold, I will spit you out of my mouth."

Again, returning to Blessed Allamano: "The second group is made up of those who aren't content with mere desires; they do something, and take steps along the path to perfection, but that's it. They try to become perfect, but in their way, trying to strike a deal with the Lord. They are not generous in their response to the divine callings, they won't sacrifice certain inclinations, they are not indifferent to their tasks, they don't strip themselves of the inclination towards their family members; they are bound to small comforts, and lack the courage to test the effects of poverty.

Jesus doesn't accept these half-hearted measures; He doesn't want these reservations, and He withdraws from them. Hence, such souls do not enjoy true peace in this life, and they gather a lot of material for purgatory. Unfortunately, in communities there are usually this sort of people."

**[155] "The Third Class:** These want to rid themselves of the attachment, but they wish to do so in such a way that they desire neither to retain nor to relinquish the sum acquired. They seek only to will and not will as God our Lord inspires them, and as seems better for the service and praise of the Divine Majesty. Meanwhile, they will strive to conduct themselves as if every attachment to it had been broken. They will make efforts neither to want that, nor anything else, unless the service of God our Lord alone move them to do so. As a result, the desire to be better able to serve God our Lord will be the cause of their accepting anything or relinquishing it."

Straightforwardness and earnestness are the characteristic traits of the third Class. They really want to get rid of their inordinate affection and to find God in peace, cost what it may. It's possible that God may not demand that they actually sacrifice the ten thousand ducats, but merely to purify their attachment to it.

But how can they be sure that God's love alone moves them to keep the money, and not rather the love of self, under the disguise of God's honor and glory? As far as lies in their power, they first give up in the money, and then, proceed to consider, whether, for the sole reason of serving Him better, it is God's Will that they should take it back. In other words, they live like it's gone, disappeared, vanished.

An example: Fr. Fuentes tells the story of a wealthy man who took the Exercises with Fr. Fuentes preaching. He had a large sum of money that he didn't know whether God wanted him to keep, or to give to charity. So, Fr. Fuentes told him, "Write a letter to the bank, with all the instructions explaining to which charity the money should go, etc., a letter such that, if I mailed it to the bank, the money would be set off to charity." So the man wrote the letter, and Fr. Fuentes said, "Ok, give it to me. If you discern that God wants you to get rid of the money, then I'll mail the letter. If you discern He wants you to keep it, I'll destroy the letter." So, the man did as he was told. During the Exercises, the man discerned that God wanted him to keep the money, so Fr. Fuentes destroyed the letter, but during those days the man lived as if the money were already gone.

That is the third class of man. 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.

Such souls are firmly and solidly established in God and His Holy Will, and enjoy complete freedom and peace. They are fit instruments in God's hands. They generously follow Christ wherever He calls them, even in poverty and humiliations, and choose in everything that which is more for the glory of his Divine Majesty and for the salvation of their souls. Far from being sad, their life is one of constant Joy—no matter whether it is the joy of possessing things for God, or the even greater joy of sacrificing them for his love. In giving up all things, they soon realize they have found the All-Good.

Of this group, Allamano writes: "The third group is made up of those who spare no means to become saints; they allow for no delay, and they fight without rest. Of them Saint Ignatius says: 'With great and generous souls in the service of God, they set all their minds and efforts.' They sacrifice everything, especially their good will. This is how they become saints! This isn't so difficult; again, I say, it's enough to take the first step with courage. Referring to these three groups, Saint Robert Bellarmine says that the first are the sick who don't want to take their medicine; the second accept only sweet and flavorful medicines, and the third reject nothing, no matter how bitter it is, provided it cures them. My thoughts are directed to your future, and I ask: will you be part of the third group? Or will some of you come to be part of the second, or the first group? It's a question of having a firm and resolute will."<sup>3</sup>

We can give a couple of rules to see if we're inordinately attached to something. Let us consider:

If the object occupies my mind at times that should be free of such pre-occupation, like prayer or necessary duties like study, caring for my children or spouse; 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 point where it affects my spiritual obligations, there's an attachment that's out of order.

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<sup>3</sup> Lorenzo Sales, *La vida espiritual. Conversaciones del P. José Allamano con sus misioneros*, Madrid 1977, pp. 149-150. It's clear that the background of this description is taken from the meditation on the "Three Classes of Men" from the Spiritual Exercises of Saint Ignatius of Loyola. Cited in *Duc in Altum!* By Fr. Fuentes.

If I find myself habitually taking some happiness in some possession, to the point where I tend to despise or pity others for lacking what I have, this is a sign of inordinate attachment.

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. Recall that Saint Augustine said peace is “a tranquility in order”; it’s a sort of calm that comes when things are in the right place, when things are made right, and everything is where it should be. A disordered attachment sets things out of place and out of order.

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, again, I have a disordered attachment.

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.

If I am inclined to envy others for some kind of talent, production, or property which I feel outshines or obscures my own, disordered attachment.

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.

**[156] Threefold Colloquy:** I will make use of the same three colloquies employed in the preceding contemplation on Two Standards.

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.

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

**[157] Note:** It should be noted that when we feel an attachment opposed to actual poverty or a repugnance to it, when we are not indifferent to poverty and riches, it will be very helpful in order to overcome the inordinate attachment, even though corrupt nature rebel against it, to beg our Lord in the colloquies to choose us to serve Him in actual poverty. We should insist that we desire it, beg for it, plead for it, provided, of course, that it be for the service and praise of the Divine Goodness.