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The Discernment of the Deceits of the Devil *in angelum lucis* according to St. Ignatius of Loyola and St. John of the Cross

Summary

The discernment of motions in the soul is raised, from the dawn of the Church, as a first necessity for the spiritual life.

Motions that come from God pass through our soul, but there are also tendencies that are born of our own nature, and there are others that are suggested to us by the devil, whom St. Ignatius calls “the enemy of human nature”. It is therefore urgent to learn to discern where the different motions come from, to support them, or to combat them. In this field, because of its particular difficulty, special attention should be paid to the deceptions of the devil “sub angelo lucis”, that is, those who are under the appearance of good or virtue.

St. Ignatius of Loyola, in his *Spiritual Exercises*, gives fundamental *Rules* in this regard, and in other meditations helps to understand the need to clarify the thought and rectify the intention. St John of the Cross in his works completes this Ignatian reflection on the confusion created by the devil “sub angelo lucis”.

Keywords: Ignatius of Loyola, John of the Cross, the devil, obedience, mortification

Streszczenie

Rozpoznawanie diabelskich pokus według św. Ignacego Loyoli i św. Jana od Krzyża

Rozpoznawanie diabelskich pokus rozwijało się od zarania dziejów Kościoła jako istotny element życia duchowego. Na duszę ludzką oddziałują natchnienia, które pochodzą od Boga, ale są też także te, które rodzą się z naszej natury, a także te,

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które są nam sugerowane przez diabła, którego św. Ignacy nazywa „wrogiem natury ludzkiej”. Dlatego tak ważne jest nauczenie się rozpoznawania, skąd pochodzą różne natchnienia, aby je pielęgnować lub odrzucać. W tej dziedzinie, ze względu na szczególną trudność, należy zwrócić szczególną uwagę na oszustwa diabła „sub angelo lucis” (pod pozorem „anioła światłości”), to znaczy te, które wyglądają na dobro lub cnotę.

Święty Ignacy z Loyoli w swoich *Ćwiczeniach duchowych* podaje podstawowe *Reguly* rozeznawania, a w innych opracowaniach pomaga zrozumieć potrzebę wyjaśnienia myśli i skorygowania intencji. Święty Jan od Krzyża w swoich dziełach uzupełnia myśl ignacjańską na temat zamieszania wywołanego przez diabła pod pozorem „anioła światłości”.

Słowa kluczowe: Ignacy Loyola, Jan od Krzyża, diabeł, posłuszeństwo, umartwienie

This is a presentation on an important aspect of the doctrine of spiritual discernment: The discernment of a special temptation known as the deceit of the Devil under the appearance of an angel of light, *in angelum lucis*. First, there is an explanation of this subject with biblical and patristic roots. Second and more in depth, there is an exposition on how this subject is taught by Saint Ignatius of Loyola and Saint John of the cross.

Some of the most important texts in the whole Patristic tradition (and perhaps in the whole Christian tradition) with respect to the discernment of the motions in the soul are the long discourses of St. Anthony as reported by his disciple St. Athanasius. In those, “we are given for the first time (or one of the first times) a series of fundamental rules for the discernment of spirits which over time will become the great wisdom of the Christian desert.”² In one of the passages of these extensive allocutions, which make up the bulk of the renowned *Vita Antonii*, we read the following rule:

First, therefore, we must know this: that the demons have not been created like what we mean when we call them by that name; for God made nothing evil, but even they have been made good. Having fallen, however, from the heavenly wisdom, since then they have been groveling on earth. On the one hand they deceived the Greeks with their displays, while out of envy of us Christians they move all things in their desire to hinder us from entry into the heavens; in order that we should not ascend up there from whence they fell. Thus there is need of much prayer and of discipline, that when a man has received through the Spirit the gift

² García M. Colombás, *El monacato primitivo*, Madrid 2004, p. 55.

of discerning spirits, he may have power to recognize their characteristics: which of them are less and which more evil; of what nature is the special pursuit of each, and how each of them is overthrown and cast out.³

In fact, the Church has always understood that not everything that takes place in the soul comes from God. Movements can be the result of the devil who acts externally and in different ways, or the result of our nature which works internally with its own inclinations. Any of these three can cause intentions and desires that seek fulfilment. Therefore, it becomes necessary for the soul to discern carefully where the movements (or “spirits”) which are moving the person to act come from, in order to act uprightly. This is why St. John cautions: “do not trust every spirit but test the spirits to see whether they belong to God.” (1 John 4:1)⁴ The criteria which helps the work of this discernment is copiously contained in teaching of the masters of the spiritual life in every age. The capacity to put these teachings into practice, enlightening themselves and others (which is a real “art”⁵) is what sets the authentic spiritual guides apart from the rest.

Something particularly necessary in this area is the proper discernment of the movements which the devil stirs up under the pretense of some good intention, abusing in this way the soul’s fervor or good desires, and proposing his own works “under the pretense of good.”⁶ St. Paul had already spoken of false prophets who acted deceptively, “who masquerade as apostles of Christ.” This should not be surprising “for even Satan masquerades as an angel of light (2 Cor 11:13–14).” Christian spirituality has taken this Pauline expression to designate those temptations in which the devil presents his deceits to a soul, usually taking advantage of a person’s charitable life by urging towards something with the appearance of virtue since, on account of the person’s relatively good spiritual condition, it is better to trick him than directly propose

³ *Life of St. Anthony*, 22. Quotes from *Vita Antonii* are taken from <http://www.newadvent.org/fathers/2811.htm> (12.02.2020).

⁴ Biblical citations are taken from the USCCB’s NABRE, <http://www.usccb.org/bible/books-of-the-bible/index.cfm> (12.02.2020).

⁵ “ars est artium regimen animarum” (St. Gregory the Great, *Regula pastoralis*, I, 1).

⁶ St. Catherine of Siena, *The Dialogue of St. Catherine of Siena*, Vancouver 2009, p. 58.

something sinful.⁷ In order to keep the soul from erring in the endeavor for holiness, the Apostle explains that it is important to be familiarized with this tactic of the enemy and the appropriate means of perceiving and rejecting it. For, even if he advises the practice of virtue, the devil's recommendations should never be followed, in order never to get trapped in his snares. St. Thomas points out this risk when commenting on the above cited text of St. Paul:

But it should be noted that Satan sometimes transfigures himself so that he can be seen, as by St. Martin, in order to deceive men. But for this the discerning of spirits, which God conferred in a special way on St. Antony, is necessary and sufficient. One is able to know that it is Satan by the fact that a good angel urges one to good works from the very beginning and continues to do so, but a bad angel pretends good things in the beginning, but later, in order to fulfill his desire and accomplish what he intends, namely, to deceive, he induces and instigates to evil.⁸

1. St. Ignatius of Loyola

In his *Spiritual Exercises*, St. Ignatius of Loyola offers a series of norms that are decisive for discernment and refute this type of diabolic deception which we have been discussing. They are in consonance with the

⁷ "They arouse us from our sleep to prayers; and this constantly, hardly allowing us to sleep at all. At another time they assume the appearance of monks and feign the speech of holy men, that by their similarity they may deceive and thus drag their victims where they will. But no heed must be paid them even if they arouse to prayer, even if they counsel us not to eat at all, even though they seem to accuse and cast shame upon us for those things which once they allowed. For they do this not for the sake of piety or truth, but that they may carry off the simple to despair; and that they may say the discipline is useless" (St. Athanasius, *Life of St. Anthony*, 25).

⁸ St. Thomas Aquinas, *Commentary on the Letters of Saint Paul to the Corinthians*, transl. by F.R. Larcher, B. Mortensen, and D. Keating, ed. J. Mortensen and E. Alarcón; *Latin/English Edition of the Works of St. Thomas Aquinas*, vol. 38, Wyoming 2012, 571–572; *Ad II Cor.*, c. XI, l. 3, n. 407. "Notandum autem est, quod Satanus transfiguratur se aliquando visibiliter, sicut beato Martino, ut deciperet eum, et hoc modo multos decepit. Sed ad hoc valet et necessaria est discretio spirituum, quam specialiter Deus contulit beato Antonio. In hoc tamen potest cognosci, quod Satanus sit, quia bonus Angelus in principio hortatur ad bona, et perseverat in eis, sed malus in principio quidem praetendit bona, sed postmodum volens explere desiderium suum, et quod intendit, scilicet decipere, inducit et instigat ad mala."

Biblical and Patristic tradition and along the same lines as the Thomistic explanation. In situations such as these, the *Rules for the Discernment of Spirits* which are “more suitable for the second week” are applied.⁹ The fact that these meant to be useful for those who are already in the second week allows us to see that they are considered temptations which normally befall those who have achieved victory over sin to a certain extent, and “have a great desire to advance” in the service of His Divine Majesty.¹⁰ Therefore, it is a deception proper to the illuminative way, that is to say, to that of the proficient. However, this does not mean that it cannot be experienced by those in other states of the spiritual life nor that the advanced are only tempted in this way. St. Ignatius explains: “Commonly, the enemy of our human nature tempts more under the appearance of good when one is exercising himself in the illuminative way. This corresponds to the Exercises of the Second Week.”¹¹ Saint Ignatius will also explain that humility and obedience are the most fitting weapons to use against the demon of false good intentions.¹²

The Ignatian text has a very clear foundation, namely, the effects on the soul of the actions of God and the good angel as opposed to those of the bad angel. He presents these effects in the first rule:

⁹ St. Ignatius of Loyola, *Spiritual Exercises* [SE], [328–336]. The *Rules for the Discernment of Spirits* are described by the saint as “Rules for understanding to some extent the different movements produced in the soul” (SE [313]). Quotes from *Spiritual Exercises* were taken from <http://spex.ignatianspirituality.com/SpiritualExercises/Puhl> (10.02.2020).

¹⁰ Cf. San Ignacio de Loyola, *Directorio autógrafa para dar Ejercicios*, c. 2: “Directorio de los Ejercicios de la segunda semana de nuestro Padre Ignacio”, n. 14; *Obras de San Ignacio de Loyola*, Madrid 19915, p. 313. Translation is ours.

¹¹ SE [10]. Timothy Gallagher considers the application of these rules in a more restrictive way: “The rules assist *this* spiritual person to overcome *this* specific form of deception. The criteria are the following two: the *person* –one who is “exercising himself in the illuminative life, which corresponds to the Exercises of the Second week”; and the *form of deception* – the enemy is tempting this person “under the appearance of good” (T.M. Gallagher, *The Discernment of Spirits. When do the Second Week Rules Apply?*, “The Way” 47/1–2 (2008), p. 129).

¹² Cf. R. Garrigou-Lagrange, *The three ages of the interior Life*, transl. by S.M. Timothea Doyle, O.P., v. 2, Illinois 1989, p. 245–246: “The lack of humility and obedience is a certain indication that it is not God who guides us.”

It is characteristic of God and His Angels, when they act upon the soul, to give true happiness and spiritual joy, and to banish all the sadness and disturbances which are caused by the enemy. It is characteristic of the evil one to fight against such happiness and consolation by proposing fallacious reasonings, subtilities, and continual deceptions.¹³

From this first advertence, fundamental for the rest of the norms, it follows that the fruit of the action of the enemy in the soul is *sadness and disturbance*, which arise on account of the confusion and disorder of the proposed operation, although – as St. Ignatius will later say – it will appear like a virtuous work. The disturbance and sadness are the first element of discernment of all diabolic action because they are inherent to the devil’s irrevocable intention: to turn the will on itself, separating it from its true end and order. One author points out:

True, it could occur that the father of lies (as Our Lord called the devil in John 8:44 because he is a liar and the father of lies), transfigure himself into an Angel of light, and, consequently, the first impressions of the diabolic suggestion do not lead us to believe it is a temptation. But diabolic action, as secret and devious as it might be, cannot not replicate the effects of divine grace, because to the extent that it replicates them it is not a temptation. So, by necessity the evil condition of the diabolic tempter has to be soon manifested as contrary to the action of the Divine Spirit, going against the spiritual consolation that God and his angels infuse into us.¹⁴

In the fourth rule, St. Ignatius directly touches on the way the enemy of human nature tempts the soul under the appearance of good. He describes it in this way:

It is a mark of the evil spirit to assume the appearance of *angelo lucis*. He begins by suggesting thoughts that are suited to a devout soul, and ends by suggesting his own. For example, he will suggest holy and pious thoughts that are wholly in conformity with the sanctity of the soul. Afterwards, he will endeavor little by little to end by drawing the soul into his hidden snares and evil designs.¹⁵

¹³ SE [329].

¹⁴ L. Teixidor, *La primera de las reglas de discreción de espíritus más propias de la segunda semana*, in “Manresa” VIII (1932), 38. Translation is ours.

¹⁵ SE [332].

The object which the devil presents in these temptations is something good in itself, and in conformity with virtue: “holy and pious thoughts.” Therefore, it is particularly dangerous. However, St. Ignatius points out two characteristics that always betray the presence of the real author of the deceptive proposition, *confusion* of the intellect’s discourse and the *disorder* of the intention to which the work is directed: “his hidden snares and evil designs.” Sadness and disturbance are the effects of these two characteristics of the devil’s action.

Back in the first rule, St. Ignatius mentioned “fallacious reasonings, subtilities, and continual deceptions” with which the devil obstructs the eye of reason: “It is enough to consider the very multiplicity of similar words to realize the multiplicity of thoughts that one will often find in his conscience at the moment of the temptation.”¹⁶ St. Athanasius said that the devil, as soon as St. Anthony had begun his ascetic life, “raised in his mind a great dust of debate, wishing to debar him from his settled purpose.”¹⁷ St. Ignatius himself in fact, points out in the following rule that the soul “must carefully observe the whole course of thoughts” including its beginning, middle and end. That is to say, those parts are to be examined in order to determine their origin.¹⁸ He adds in the sixth rule that if the person finds out he was tricked by the enemy, he can profit if he...

...consider[s] the series of good thoughts, how they arose, how the evil one gradually attempted to make him step down from the state of spiritual delight and joy in which he was, till finally he drew him to his wicked designs. The purpose of this review is that once such an experience has been understood and carefully

¹⁶ L. Teixidor, *La primera de las reglas...*, 39–40. Translation is ours.

¹⁷ St. Athanasius, *Life of St. Anthony*, 5, op. cit.

¹⁸ “We must carefully observe the whole course of our thoughts. If the beginning and middle and end of the course of thoughts are wholly good and directed to what is entirely right, it is a sign that they are from the good angel. But the course of thoughts suggested to us may terminate in something evil, or distracting, or less good than the soul had formerly proposed to do. Again, it may end in what weakens the soul, or disquiets it; or by destroying the peace, tranquility, and quiet which it had before, it may cause disturbance to the soul. These things are a clear sign that the thoughts are proceeding from the evil spirit, the enemy of our progress and eternal salvation” (SE [333]).

observed, we may guard ourselves for the future against the customary deceits of the enemy.¹⁹

The intellectual confusion that accompanies temptations from the devil *sub angelo lucis* traps the well-intentioned but inattentive soul. However, this should not make the person believe that the ‘mortal enemy of our human nature’ is not trying to accomplish the destruction of that good intention. Rather, carrying out the work proposed by the devil, even if it is good in itself or appears good, *denotes already a disorder in the soul’s intention*, from the moment in which the confusion of the intellect prevents the person from recognizing that disorder with all its implications. The devil’s suggestion of a virtuous work is always accomplished by the person who does it closing in on himself since the intention of the devil is perverted from the beginning. It is precisely that deviation of the work’s intention onto the person’s own self-satisfaction which makes it dark and full of complications and restlessness.

St. Ignatius, who at one point fell into temptations of this sort,²⁰ complements in a way his rules on this matter with two meditations that are key in the *Exercises* and which also constitute the soul in the second week and are effectively directed to discern the deceits of the devil and to rectify the intention against every affection which the enemy could use as a base against us and our resolution for holiness. These are the meditations known as “Two Standards”²¹ and “Three Classes of Men.”²² More exactly, the exercise of the two banners is ordered, in part, “to ask for a knowledge of the deceits of the rebel chief and help to guard myself against them.”²³ That of the classes of men, on the other hand, has us “beg for the grace to choose what is more for the glory of His Divine

¹⁹ SE [334].

²⁰ Cf. San Ignacio de Loyola, *Autobiografía*, c. 3, 26, in: *Obras de san Ignacio*, op. cit., p. 117. According to Bakker, Leo, *Libertad y experiencia. Historia de la redacción de las Reglas de discreción de espíritus en san Ignacio de Loyola*, Bilbao 1995, p. 106, the narration of how St. Ignatius overcome that temptation under the appearance of good, marks, in his biography, the passage from his life as a beginner to that of a proficient.

²¹ SE [136–148].

²² SE [149–157].

²³ SE [139].

Majesty and the salvation of my soul.”²⁴ Regarding this, especially keeping in mind the *tactic of Satan* as presented by St. Ignatius, a commentator writes:

No wonder St. Ignatius is wary of the wiles of the enemy and of our ignorance and weakness due to which the most subtle of self-loves creeps into even our service of God, which *Sometimes a way seems right, but the end of it leads to death!* (Prov 16:25). Under the appearance of service, honor, and love of God, we can (perhaps unconsciously at first, but with the danger of doing so knowingly later) seek our own welfare, honor, and love. This indulgence with the spiritual sin is more dangerous than when the devil attacks us openly with the temporal.

How then does St. Ignatius guard the soul against these traps? By revealing in this meditation the *matter* in which such traps are most easily hidden, the immediate *ends* to which they tend, their *ways* of presenting themselves and interacting with the soul, and the *effects* that these suggestions produce in the soul as good as they may seem. Thus warned and cautioned about the matter to which it entails, the end to which it tends, the way to protect oneself, and the fruit that each movement leaves in his dispositions and resolutions, the soul can recognize (or at least sense) when and to what point the enemy of the human nature attempts to insert his deceits into the soul.²⁵

2. St. John of the Cross

In the writings of St. John of the Cross, “the great teacher of the ways that lead to union with God,”²⁶ there is also doctrine relevant to the temptation that we are discussing. The recommendations of the Mystical Doctor serve to complement (principally with recourse to obedience) and make explicit (by means of a more direct exhortation to the sacrificial virtues) the Ignatian doctrine that we have mentioned. It is certain that St. John of the Cross would have known the text of the *Spiritual Exercises* since he was educated in Humanities with the Jesuits in Medina del Campo where he had Fathers Gaspar Astete and Juan Bonifacio as two

²⁴ SE [152].

²⁵ E. Hernández, *Esquemas prácticos sobre la meditación de dos banderas*, “Manresa” 46 (1936), p. 139. Translation is ours.

²⁶ St. John Paul II, *Homilía en la celebración de la palabra en honor de san Juan de la Cruz*, Segovia (4 november 1982), n. 3, “Acta Apostolicæ Sedis” 75 (1983) 1, p. 294. Translation is ours.

of his teachers.²⁷ The Ignatian *Rules for Discernment* were not unfamiliar to him even if he does not mention them in any of his works.

The contribution of his teachings refers directly to the confusion of the intellect that is made by the devil under the appearance of good along with the twisted intention which closes the soul in on itself. The remedies which he gives to discern and fight in these cases are in fact, obedience (which, illuminates the work) and the cross which is manifested in humility and mortification (which, rectifies the intention).

St. John of the Cross said that the devil is the “mightiest and most astute enemy.”²⁸ Almost one hundred times he uses the verb ‘to deceive’ [engañar] in his writings and, with few exceptions, the devil is the subject as if it were his proper office and activity.²⁹ These deceits of the enemy are made under the appearance of good works or new truths, differently revealed: “To deceive and introduce lies the devil first lures a person with truths and verisimilitudes that give assurance; then he proceeds with his beguilement [engañando].”³⁰

Commenting on the *Spiritual Canticle* that says:

Seeking my Love
I will head for the mountains and for watersides,
I will not gather flowers,
nor fear wild beasts;
I will go beyond strong men and frontiers³¹,

he saint explains that God gives Himself to those that search forcefully and “through works that she [the soul] may not be left without finding him. Many desire that God cost them no more than words, and even

²⁷ Cf. Crisógono de Jesús, *Vida de san Juan de la Cruz*, c. 2, in: *Vida y obras completas de san Juan de la Cruz*, Madrid 1964, p. 35–37.

²⁸ St. John of the Cross, *The Dark Night of the Soul*, Bk 2, c. 21, n. 4. The citations from St. John of the Cross are from *The Collected Works of St. John of the Cross*, transl. by K. Kavanaugh, O. Rodriguez, Washington 1991, p. 446.

²⁹ Cf. J.L. Astigarraga, A. Borrell, J.F.M. de Lucas, *Concordancias de los escritos de san Juan de la Cruz*, ed. F. Javier, Rome 1990, p. 697–699.

³⁰ St. John of the Cross, *Ascent of Mount Carmel*, transl. by D. Lewis, Bk 2, c. 27, n. 4, in: St. John of the Cross, *Collected Works*, op. cit., p. 254.

³¹ St. John of the Cross, *Spiritual Canticle*, Stanza 3, in: St. John of the Cross, *Collected Works*, op. cit., p. 471.

these they say badly. They desire to do for him scarcely anything that might cost them something.”³² Included as a fundamental part of that “work” of searching for God is confronting wild beasts, strong men, and frontiers which are images for the enemies of the soul and are there “threatening and scaring her” to obstruct her path.³³ There he calls demons *strong men* on account of the great force that they exert against the soul “and also because their temptations are stronger and their wiles more baffling than those of the world and the flesh.” Based on scriptural passages, the remedy for these is *prayer and the cross* in which there is humility and mortification since “A soul that must overcome the devil’s strength will be unable to do so without prayer; no will it be able to understand his deceits without mortification and humility.”³⁴

More directly related to our topic is a text from the *Precautions*, directed specifically to religious to guard them against the world (three precautions), the devil (three precautions), and one’s own sensuality (three precautions). In the advice regarding the fight against the devil, the remedy which was given in the *Spiritual Canticle* (prayer and the cross through humility and mortification) is made more specific with the practice of obedience (St. Thomas even says that “the manner and sign of [someone’s] humility is obedience.”³⁵) Obedience acquires a fundamental role in identifying the deceptions of the devil and to not succumb to them. This is especially true when it seems that something good is being suggested, because “among the many wiles of the devil for deceiving spiritual persons, the most common is deceiving them under the appearance of good rather than of evil, for the devil already knows that they will scarcely choose a recognized evil. Thus, you should

³² St. John of the Cross, *Spiritual Canticle*, Stanza 3, 2; St. John of the Cross, *Collected Works*, op. cit., p. 490.

³³ Cf. St. John of the Cross, *Spiritual Canticle*, Stanza 3, 6–10; St. John of the Cross, *Collected Works*, op. cit., p. 492–493.

³⁴ St. John of the Cross, *Spiritual Canticle*, Stanza, 9; St. John of the Cross, *Collected Works*, op. cit., p. 493.

³⁵ Saint Thomas Aquinas, *Commentary on the Letters of Saint Paul to the Philippians, Colossians, Thessalonians, Timothy, Titus, and Philemon*, transl. by F.R. Larcher, B. Mortensen, ed. J. Mortensen and E. Alarcón; *Latin/English Edition of the Works of St. Thomas Aquinas*, vol. 40, op. cit., 28; *Ad Phil.*, c. 2, l. 2, n. 65.

always be suspicious of what appears good, especially when not obliged by obedience.”³⁶ The text is as clear as day:

without the command of obedience, you never take upon yourself any work... however good and full of charity it may seem, whether for yourself or for anyone else inside or outside the house. By such a practice you will win merit and security, avoid possession, and flee from harm and evils unknown to you, for God will one day demand an account. If you do not observe this precaution in little things as well as big, you will be unable to avoid the devil's deceiving you to a small or great degree, no matter how right you think you are. Even if your negligence amounts to no more than not being governed by obedience in all things, you culpably err, since God wants obedience more than sacrifice (1 Sm. 15:22). The actions of religious are not their own, but belong to obedience, and if you withdraw them from obedience, you will have to count them as lost.³⁷

The other precautions ‘directly against the devil’ do not deal immediately with the subject that we are considering. However, it can be mentioned that they emphasize the importance of humility and charity in order to understand and refute the deceits of the evil one. Yes, there is a further indication in the writing entitled *Counsels to a religious on how to reach perfection*. There St. John of the Cross explains the dispositions of those who do not want to be deceived. The text can serve as a counterweight to any temptation, because it is a practical guide to religious and Christian behavior:

To practice the third counsel, which concerns the practice of virtue, you should be constant in your religious observance and in obedience without any concern for the world, but only for God. In order to achieve this and avoid being deceived, you should never set your eyes on the satisfaction or dissatisfaction of the work at hand as a motive for doing it or failing to do it, but on doing it for God. Thus you must undertake all things, agreeable or disagreeable, for the sole purpose of pleasing God through them.

To do this with fortitude and constancy and acquire the virtues quickly, you should take care always to be inclined to the difficult more than to the easy, to the rugged more than to the soft, to the hard and distasteful in a work more than to its delightful and pleasant aspects; and do not go about choosing what is less a cross,

³⁶ St. John of the Cross, *The Precautions*, 10, in: St. John of the Cross, *Collected Works*, op. cit., p. 722.

³⁷ St. John of the Cross, *The Precautions*, 11, op. cit., p. 722–723.

for the cross is a light burden [Mt. 11:30]. The heavier a burden is, the lighter it becomes when borne for Christ.

You should try, too, by taking the lowest place always, that in things bringing comfort to your brothers in religion they be preferred to you. This you should do wholeheartedly, for it is the way to becoming greater in spiritual things, as God tells us in his Gospel: *Qui se humiliaverit exaltabitur* (Whoever humbles himself will be exalted) [Mt. 23:12].³⁸

Conclusion

When it comes to spiritual discernment, both Saint Ignatius and Saint John of the Cross understand the importance of being aware of this specific kind of temptation. They both agree that as careful as Satan is to lay his snares, much more effective are the means with which persons can enlighten and rectify their souls, mainly, the virtues of humility and obedience, so that the “trail of evil”³⁹ of the enemy of human nature is exposed and overcome.

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³⁸ St. John of the Cross, *Counsels to a religious on how to reach perfection*, 5–6, in: St. John of the Cross, *Collected Works*, op. cit., p. 727.

³⁹ SE [334].

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