

Reflections on the Two Standards

Rick Kunkle

Grace: I ask for the gift of being able to recognize the false lights of Lucifer (a name which means bearer of light) and for the help not to be led astray; I also ask for what I desire: a graced knowledge of true human living exemplified in Jesus Christ, my Lord and my God, and the grace to live my life in his way.

Prior to the Ignatian Institute 2001 – The Two Standards and Culture – I had not reflected on the Meditation on Two Standards. I was drawn to the theme of the Institute because of the struggle to live out my beliefs in my North American culture. As is often the case, I experienced both affirmation and challenge at the Institute. I would like to share some of my reflections from the Institute and the Meditation on Two Standards and how they relate to my own journey. As I write this in late October, I have gone back to the Meditation on Two Standards in light of recent events in our world. I conclude with some thoughts from this later reflection.

One of the themes that ran through the conference was the conflict between the way of Christ and the secular ways of our contemporary culture. Many of the presentations at the Institute contrasted cultural values, beliefs and lifestyle with Christian ones. The presenters painted a picture of a culture that values individualism and maximizing choice. By feeding on our insecurities, our culture tells us that fulfillment is achieved through possessions. We have become a culture of consumers. There are whole segments of our population that are outcasts; people who do not experience love, and who lack hope. In our workplaces we are competitors, projecting power and authority. The first part of the Meditation on Two Standards says, “So Lucifer’s strategy is simple and seems so light-filled and clear in its direction: riches (or “this is mine”), to honor (or “look at me”), to pride (or “I AM...”). By these three steps, the evil one entices people to all other vices.” It seems that our culture very much reinforces these steps.

I have been working simplifying my lifestyle. I have tried to reduce my consumption and the amount of stuff in my life and in my family’s life. While there is much more I could do to simplify my life and to reduce my consumption, I do know that as I remove the distractions in my own life, I become more available to do God’s work and be with God’s people in the world. I am less tempted by riches, honor, and pride. And I found that being at the Institute with other people dealing with these issues in their own lives was very affirming. I was energized by their Christian stories of vulnerable love, affirmation, gratitude, trust, and hope. These Christian stories contrast with the stories of our culture. They are stories of interdependence rather than autonomy; and stories where the deepest joy is in relationships, rather than possessions. So I left the Institute very much encouraged to pursue the path I am on.

But I also left the Institute challenged, particularly by some things that Father Greg Boyle, S.J., shared. He told many stories about his experiences with members of gangs in Los Angeles. He reminded us that we are called to action. He told us that the Beatitudes are not just a spirituality, but they are a geography. What is important is where you stand. And this is the question that has challenged me. Where do I stand? It is not merely what I believe or what I say, but where I place myself to put into action what I believe. This has caused me to reflect on a deeper level. A simple lifestyle is a good first step. But, the second and more important part of the Meditation on Two Standards calls us to look at Jesus Christ and live our lives in His way — in poverty, humility, and with nothing but what God provides. Father Greg Boyle reiterated this in his closing talk, “Our call is to



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serve and it's not just a call to do good but to embrace the strategy of Jesus, to stand where He stands and to proclaim the good news with our lives."

So how do I respond? Where do I stand? I suppose the first thing I have realized is that this is not a question to passively reflect on. It must be actively pursued in my life's experiences. And it is not something that I am going to accomplish on my own. I must rely on my brothers and sisters to support and guide me. Communal discernment for mission within our Christian Life Community clearly is an important part of this. And ultimately it is God who will grace me with poverty and humility. God will provide all that I need. And I must recognize that my life journey is in progress.

I am already responding to the question of where I stand through the choices I have made. I am a father, husband, son, and engineer. As one speaker noted, the most counter-cultural thing he does is to raise his children. Likewise, living out as best I can the ideal of Christian marriage presents another very counter-cultural image, a different standard. Supporting and caring for our parents with my wife and siblings is another place I stand. And I strive in my work to conduct research that contributes to a better world. These are some of the places I stand now. It is not always easy to live out my call in each of these areas of my life. I sometimes fail to place my desires on Jesus. I experience conflicts among what I believe are my many responsibilities. There is never enough time. Yet, I know that Jesus continues to call me from where I am. By resisting the temptations of our culture, I believe I am more able to be where He is calling me to stand with Him. The events of September 11 and those that have followed have caused me to reflect on the Meditation on Two Standards in a different light. As I write this in late October, I wonder how I am called to respond. What is the Christian standard? Is there a response that flows from humility and powerlessness and that is rooted in love?

Amongst all that is occurring I have been searching for hope and vision for a better world. After hearing a short excerpt from Martin Luther King's acceptance speech for the 1964 Nobel Peace Prize, I have been drawn to his words and to the image of a world that his life represents. In his Nobel lecture he states that the most pressing problem facing humankind "is a sort of poverty of the spirit which stands in glaring contrast to our scientific and technological abundance. The richer we have become materially, the poorer we have become morally and spiritually. We have learned to fly the air like birds and swim the sea like fish, but we have not learned the simple art of living together as brothers." He goes on to state that this problem of "spiritual and moral lag" expresses itself in three larger problems – racial injustice, poverty, and war. He concludes by saying: "The oceans of history are made turbulent by the ever-rising tides of hate. History is cluttered with the wreckage of nations and individuals that pursued this self-defeating path of hate. Love is the key to the solution of the problems of the world."



A CLC get-together during the Institute. The group represents CLC members from the Northwest, California and St. Louis.

Back: Paula Burgan, Diane Del Chiaro, Rick Kunkle, Mary Ann Mennemeyer, John Leveck, S.J., Larry Gooley, S.J., Mary Ann Bigelow, Bob Sullivan, S.J.,

Middle: Sheila O'Connor, Pat Carter

Front: Ralph Rivas, Kathy Hicks

And he does not view love as passive:

“When I speak of love I am not speaking of some sentimental and weak response which is little more than emotional bosh. I am speaking of that force which all of the great religions have seen as the supreme unifying principle of life.”

The importance of forgiveness is expressed in Archbishop Desmond Tutu’s book about apartheid in South Africa entitled, *No Future Without Forgiveness*. These concepts are foreign to most secular political philosophies, yet they are central elements of our Christian beliefs. They are clearly a different standard.

So where do I stand? Certainly it is difficult to stand apart. Yet I believe what is most important is to present and live out a vision, a different worldview, that flows from our Christian standard. And this vision must be rooted in faith and hope in the goodness of humankind and of God’s creation.

Father Greg Boyle, S.J., illustrates these ideas at a more local level in a brief editorial he wrote about police force treatment of gangs for the Los Angeles Times entitled “We Have Met the Monster, and It Is Us.” He writes about the rogue Rampart Division cops and those they victimized. He indicates that the underlying problem to this police brutality is a spirit that dehumanizes and demonizes the other. The police officers “see themselves called to chase monsters.” Yet, “no human being is a monster. A gang member can be a lot of things from mixed-up kid to a psychopath. But a ‘monster’ he is not.” And we in society get caught up in this monster chase. It is very easy to dehumanize our enemies to justify our actions.

I remind myself that we are all children of God. That we are called to love one another since love comes from God. And I continue to try and receive and embrace the words that Father Greg Boyle, S.J. used to conclude his talk – “Dorothy Day writes, ‘The greatest challenge of the day is how to bring about the revolution of the heart, a revolution which has to start with each one of us.’ When we begin to take the lowest place, to wash the feet of others, to love our sisters and brothers with that burning love, that passion which led to the Cross, then we can truly say, ‘Now I have begun to live as though the truth were true, standing in the right place, standing with Christ, singing the song without the words, and never stopping at all.’”

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Questions for Reflection

- 1. Share from you reflections, two effects of our culture on your daily living.*
- 2. How are you challenging these two effects and what do you expect to accomplish?*
- 3. Rich has told us the events of September 11 have caused him to reflect on the Two Standards in a different light. What is your reaction to September 11 and the Two Standards and our Culture?*