

poverty of Jesus as described in the Gospel. Barbara is, consequently, in precisely the spiritual situation envisioned by *Second Rules*, 3.

She and the director whose responsibility it is to assist her need to be aware that when spiritual consolation with preceding cause is experienced by persons in the second spiritual situation, "both the good angel and the bad can console the soul." She and her director must not unreflectively assume that because Barbara is experiencing spiritual consolation with respect to something good and holy — the Gospel poverty of Jesus — all discernment is complete. Her thoughts regarding further simplification of her material lifestyle may in fact be of God — but the discernment is not yet clear simply because Barbara hears this call in a time of spiritual consolation.

Second Rules, 3, invites Barbara and her director to consider whether this spiritual consolation is of the *good spirit* "for the profit of the soul, that it may grow and rise from good to better," or of the *bad spirit* so that "later on" he may "draw it to his damnable intention and malice." If Barbara follows her drawing to a more radical poverty, will she grow stronger in love and progress more surely toward the vocational choice God desires? Or might she be harmed "later on," when excessive efforts to adopt Gospel poverty too quickly ultimately diminish her energy for the spiritual life?

Second Rules, 3, then, explains why persons in situations like Barbara's need to discern experiences of spiritual consolation with preceding cause: such experiences may be of either the good or the bad spirit. In this specific context — the second spiritual situation and spiritual consolation with preceding cause — the bad spirit, like the good, can inspire good and holy thoughts and desires. In *Second Rules*, 4, Ignatius will begin to supply the means by which persons like Barbara may discern with surety which spirit is at work in such spiritual consolation.

Chapter Four

True or False Light? (Rule 4)



Give me, I pray you, Lord, in the name of Jesus Christ, your Son and my God, that love that does not fail so that my lantern, burning within me and giving light to others, may always be lighted and never extinguished. — St. Columban

"As an Angel of Light"

How then will persons in the second spiritual situation know whether the spiritual consolation that moves them is of the good or bad spirit? How will the Patricia who is drawn to work with the refugees, the Charles who is energized by his ministry to the young, the Barbara who is attracted to radical Gospel poverty, and others like them, know whether their spiritual consolation and the thoughts that arise from it are of the good or of the bad spirit? In *Second Rules*, 4, Ignatius describes with clarity the tactic of the bad spirit in dedicated persons such as these; once familiar with his tactic, they will be the better equipped to recognize and reject it should the bad spirit attempt to deceive them in this way.

In *Second Rules*, 4, Ignatius writes:

Fourth Rule. The fourth: it is proper to the bad angel, who takes on the appearance of an angel of light, to enter with the devout soul and to go out with himself; that is, to bring good and holy thoughts, conformed to such a just soul, and afterwards, little

by little, he endeavors to go out, bringing the soul to his hidden deceptions and perverse intentions.

Before commenting on the text of this rule we will consider an experience of a person in the second spiritual situation. We will then explore *Second Rules*, 4, in the light of this experience.

Good and Holy Thoughts from God?

David is a religious priest in his midforties. Though there have been times of struggle over the years, he has always sought to be a faithful religious and priest. Two years ago, however, his life took an unexpected and difficult turn. At that time, David's provincial superior asked him to be pastor of a large parish and its related elementary school. Both parish and school were experiencing grave turmoil due to the unwise leadership of the former pastor. David accepted the request and began his service as pastor. His human sensitivity and authentic spiritual life made him an instrument of healing, and slowly the parish gained new life. Yet the process was painful beyond anything David could have imagined. On various occasions, he himself, as pastor, became the target of the anger and sense of betrayal felt by the parishioners.

As this was occurring, David's mother fell seriously ill and, after six months of decline, passed away. David accompanied her throughout those months and celebrated her funeral Mass. During this time of deep sorrow, David was almost driven to pray in a whole new way; at times, it seemed that God was his only refuge in the midst of the pain and isolation he felt.

The human and spiritual crucible through which he was passing, and the new depth of his prayer, began to effect a change in David. He had always tried to serve with dedication, but now the parishioners began to sense a new spiritual vitality in him. David's natural gift for public speaking, coupled with this new spiritual growth, made him a highly effective preacher. His words spoke of God in a living way to the parishioners and seemed to meet them exactly where they too

carried the burdens of life. David acquired a new serenity and trust in God, and his presence increasingly became a source of hope for those who were troubled. Gradually, a new spiritual energy awakened in the parish.

As the months passed, David's homilies, born of his own struggles and prayer, began to draw more people to the parish. David himself gained new spiritual energy from his ministry of preaching; his daily prayer in preparation nourished him spiritually, and the fruitfulness of his words encouraged him in his priestly vocation. Difficult though the recent years had been, David was profoundly grateful to God for the spiritual newness they had engendered in his life.

One day, some people in the parish asked David to lead them on a weekend retreat. He did so, and the retreat was rich in spiritual fruits. David began to comprehend, with new clarity, the power in God's Word to move hearts and foster spiritual growth. More than ever before, David understood and loved the prophetic role of his priesthood.

Others in the parish asked for similar retreats, and David began to offer these quarterly. These too proved a great blessing for the parish. The seminary rector, aware of David's gift, asked him to meet with the seminarians and assist in their training for preaching. David gladly accepted, and these meetings proved welcome to the seminarians. The following year, the rector asked him to serve as professor of homiletics for the seminary and David agreed, knowing the value of the task. He shared with his students his own conviction that "the people of God is formed into one in the first place by the Word of the living God," and that "it is the first task of priests... to preach the Gospel of God to all."¹ He had never felt happier or more fulfilled in his priesthood.

David also prepared his daily homilies carefully, and attendance at the daily Mass in the parish steadily increased. Pastors in neighboring parishes, hearing of his fruitful retreats, asked him to offer such retreats in their parishes as well. David accepted these requests when possible and these retreats also proved blessed for those who attended.

As his preaching ministry expanded, David struggled, not always successfully, to maintain his habitual rhythm of daily prayer. He was also correspondingly less involved in the meetings of parish committees and in the life of the parish elementary school. Opportunities to interact with his fellow priests in the parish, of whom he was the religious superior, also grew more infrequent. David was aware of these changes but knew that he could not do all things and that, clearly, the proclamation of God's Word was his primary task as a priest.

When, at a certain point, a conflict developed in the parish school, David was too busy to be present; serious problems arose, of which he learned only after the fact. The parents of the school children were divided, and an air of tension spread in the parish.

One of his fellow priests asked to speak with David and shared his perception that, because David was too busy, important matters in the parish's life had been left unattended, and that harmful consequences were arising. The priest also voiced his concern that, because David was so frequently away from the parish, the quality of life in common among the priests themselves had also lessened, and that here, too, problems were surfacing. He expressed his hope that David would address the growing tensions in the parish and reserve more time for the priests in the community. As he listened, David grew angry; he replied that he was dedicating his energies to the primary work of the priest — preaching God's word — and pointed to the obvious fruitfulness of what he was doing. His fellow priest remained silent.

David found life in the rectory more strained after that meeting. Prayer too became more difficult, God seemed more distant, and the joy that David had formerly felt in ministry was diminished. Weary of the strain, David began to consider requesting a transfer to a different ministry. Perhaps, he reflected, he had already done what he could and had no more to offer in his present parish assignment.

Troubled and unsure of how to proceed, David spoke with his spiritual director. The director invited David to take a day away from the parish and to reflect upon all that had happened in recent years. David did so. He remembered the first difficult years in the parish and the grace that God had given him through those struggles. He recalled

how preaching had become for him a source of spiritual joy and growth. For the first time, however, David began to wonder whether there was not, in fact, an imbalance in his life and whether his fellow priest had not spoken truly in their conversation. He realized that in the pursuit of one good thing he had neglected other important things and that others were suffering as a result. As he reviewed the past months, David also recognized that he had lost his earlier peace. He admitted to himself that his thought of leaving the parish might have arisen more from his present heaviness of heart than from any real lessening of his ability to serve the parish.

David now perceived his need to find a healthier apostolic balance in his life. He met once more with his director and shared the fruits of his day of reflection. The director confirmed the wisdom of these thoughts and together they explored how David's intense focus on preaching, while fruitful for many, had also become an obstacle to his leadership in the parish and a source of tension with his fellow priests. Together they discussed the changes David might make toward resolving these difficulties and recovering his own peace of heart. David returned to his daily life in the parish with new clarity and a renewed sense of hope. The other priests were gratefully aware of the new balance in David's life, and, as David addressed the problems in the school, the tensions in the parish gradually diminished.

This narrative describes a time of rich spiritual growth in David — "He had never felt happier or more fulfilled in his priesthood." Yet, at a certain point, David's spiritual energy for and dedication to a "good and holy" thing created tensions around and within him. Had David not spoken with his director and not gained deeper insight into his situation, his dedication to this "good and holy" thing might have led to serious spiritual harm to himself, to his fellow priests, and to the parish as a whole. What went wrong? What can David learn from this sequence of events? Is there a way to understand this and similar experiences so as to avoid the danger of such spiritual harm? These are questions for all persons in the second spiritual situation; they are the questions Ignatius addresses in *Second Rules*, 4.

Unmasking the Tactics of Deception

The fourth rule describes what "*is proper to the bad angel*" — the way he characteristically operates — in the second spiritual situation in which he seeks to deceive generously dedicated persons "under the appearance of good" (*SpirEx*, 10). When, Ignatius says, the bad spirit attempts to deceive such persons — the Patricia who cares for the refugees so deeply, the Charles who works among the young so effectively, the Barbara who loves poverty so ardently, the David who preaches so fruitfully, and other faithful persons like them — he "takes on the appearance of *an angel of light*." These words recall Paul's teaching that "even Satan masquerades as an angel of light" (2 Cor 11:14), imitating the work of the good spirit.

Ignatius explains that when the bad spirit takes on the appearance of an "angel of light" his tactic is "to *enter* with the *devout soul*" and then "to *go out* with *himself*," that is, to "begin by going the way of a devout person and end with that person going his way."² The bad spirit begins by bringing "*good and holy thoughts*" that are "*conformed to such a just soul*." Then, "*afterwards*," and "*little by little*," he "endeavors to *go out*," that is, to end, by "bringing the soul to his *hidden deceits* and *perverse intentions*."³

The spiritual growth of his years of trial appears to shape David into such a "devout" and "just" soul; he has very likely become a person of the second spiritual situation whom the bad spirit will attempt to deceive through spiritual consolation and "under the appearance of good." Thus, the bad spirit does not tempt David "obviously and openly" (*SpirEx*, 9) through spiritual desolation, but rather "takes on the appearance of an angel of light" and brings David "good and holy thoughts" that are "conformed to such a just soul."

The bad spirit *begins* his tactic of deception with precisely such good and holy thoughts: the importance of preaching as "the first task of priests," the good to be accomplished through energetic dedication to such preaching, the need for prophets in the midst of God's people, and similar "good and holy" thoughts. Such thoughts are manifestly "conformed" to the David who now ardently believes in and loves the

ministry of preaching.⁴ As David's ministry of preaching bears fruit in the parish, in the seminarians, and in others beyond his parish, he feels "happier" and "more fulfilled" than ever in his priesthood. The bad spirit, taking on the appearance of an angel of light, begins or "enters *with*" the ardently dedicated David.⁵

We may note that these "good and holy thoughts" with respect to the importance of preaching, although genuinely good and holy in themselves, *in this concrete application* bear the stamp of the enemy's "apparent reasons, subtleties, and persistent fallacies" (*Second Rules*, 1). The prophetic role of preaching God's Word is indeed of primary importance in the ministry of a priest. When, however, this *prophetic* role is lived in such fashion that other key dimensions of priestly ministry are neglected — in David's case, the role of the priest as *shepherd* of his people — then we encounter the subtle twisting of the truth typical of the enemy.⁶ David, energized by the fruitfulness of his ministry of preaching, does not advert to the imbalance that now exists in his priestly life and to the spiritual diminishment this imbalance is causing in his people, his fellow priests in the parish, and himself: plainly, there is now something only *apparently* true in his "good and holy thoughts."⁷

Once the *beginning* of the bad spirit's attempt to deceive through "good and holy thoughts" has occurred, there then follows an "*afterwards*" in which the bad spirit endeavors to lead the dedicated person astray "little by little," in such fashion that the person *is not aware of what is happening*. For David, this "afterwards" embraces many months as, "little by little," he is led from spiritual joy and fruitful work in his parish to turmoil of heart and struggles in a parish once more divided. When David continues to expand his preaching ministry — from homilies at Mass to parish retreats, seminary teaching, and retreats for other parishes — "little by little," other problems arise. Unless dedicated persons are discerning, this "little by little" tactic of the bad spirit is indeed effective in hiding such spiritual diminishment from the awareness of these persons themselves; as long as they fail to perceive what is occurring, this process of diminishment will continue.

Finally, Ignatius says, the bad spirit “endeavors *to go out*,” that is, to conclude the process of diminishment, by “bringing the soul to his *hidden deceits* and *perverse intentions*.” In the first spiritual situation, the enemy’s deceits were “manifest” (*First Rules*, 13); in the second spiritual situation, his deceits are “hidden”: even as they work, these deceptions may remain unnoticed by dedicated persons like David, precisely because they arise from “good and holy thoughts” that are “conformed” to such spiritually ardent persons.

The “perverse intentions” of the bad spirit are revealed progressively as David’s experience unfolds. Those intentions evidently include the undermining both of the healing that God has worked in the parish through David and of David’s own rich spiritual growth in these years.⁸ Because David speaks with his director, reaches new clarity, and makes wise changes — because he *discerns* his spiritual situation with the help of his director — the enemy’s “hidden deceits” are unmasked and his “perverse intentions” are ultimately frustrated.

Beginning, Middle, and End

In the text of *Second Rules*, 4, Ignatius’s emphasis on *thoughts* is evident: the bad spirit brings “good and holy *thoughts*.” In the two preceding rules (*Second Rules*, 2–3), Ignatius focused on *spiritual consolation*, with and without cause. In *Second Rules*, 4, and in the following two rules (*Second Rules*, 5–6), Ignatius centers on the *thoughts* that give rise to consolation with preceding cause, or that spring from such consolation.⁹ In David’s case, these are good and holy thoughts regarding the importance of preaching and the good to be accomplished through energetic dedication to such preaching.

The category of *time* is fundamental to the bad spirit’s use of good and holy thoughts in the second spiritual situation.¹⁰ A *beginning* takes place when the bad spirit first *enters* with such thoughts. The *end* occurs when the bad spirit *goes out*, having accomplished — if the person has not been aware of, understood, and rejected his tactics — his perverse intentions. Between the beginning and the end

is a *middle* time in which the good and holy thoughts unfold *little by little*, causing a gradual spiritual diminishment.¹¹

A simple paradigm will highlight these three steps in the development of the bad spirit’s deceptive thoughts as described in *Second Rules*, 4:

BEGINNING
MIDDLE
END

Because a clear understanding of these three successive steps is essential for the rules to follow (*Second Rules*, 5–7), we will exemplify them explicitly in the experience of David recounted above.

David’s time of trial in parish ministry and in his own family leads him to profound spiritual growth: his prayer deepens, his proclamation of the Word gains new vitality, his ministry bears increasingly rich fruits, and he is happier and more fulfilled than ever in his priestly calling. It would be difficult to doubt that God is powerfully at work in David during this time.

At a certain point, however, something different *begins*. As the months pass, a time comes when the good and holy thoughts and the spiritual consolation they cause are no longer working for David’s good and for the good of his parish: the bad spirit has entered the process with his “hidden deceits.” This is the *beginning* of which Ignatius speaks in *Second Rules*, 4.¹²

After this beginning, as time passes, David is led “little by little” toward the bad spirit’s “perverse intentions.” Filled with spiritual consolation and good and holy thoughts, David accepts one commitment after another in his ministry of preaching. With time, problems begin to arise: the well-being of the parish suffers, life in common with his fellow religious is diminished, and David loses his spiritual peace. This is the *middle* of the enemy’s deceptions, the gradual development of his “hidden deceits” toward their final goal.

The *end* of this process, in the bad spirit’s perverse *intention*, is clearly the undoing of God’s fruitful work in David and, through him, in the parish. The end of this process occurs *in fact* when David, with

the help of his director, accurately discerns his spiritual experience and rejects the bad spirit's no-longer-hidden deceptions. No irreparable harm has been done, and there is every reason to hope that David, having learned from this experience, will be less likely to be deceived in this way again.¹³ Had David and his director not discerned as they did, however, it is very possible that this process might indeed have ended with the fulfillment of the bad spirit's "perverse intentions."

Beginning, middle, and end: discernment in the second spiritual situation must carefully examine the bad spirit's tactics in each of these three successive steps. In fact, Ignatius's next three rules, *Second Rules*, 5–7, will be dedicated to just this purpose. He will discuss, first, the step in which the discernment is clearest, that is, the *end* (*Second Rules*, 5); he will then treat of the *middle* (*Second Rules*, 6), and, finally, of discernment in the *beginning* itself of the good and holy thoughts (*Second Rules*, 7).¹⁴ In our next chapter, we will explore the signs by which the *end* may be identified as of the good or the bad spirit.

Chapter Five

The End Reveals the Beginning (Rule 5)



God's grace resounds in our lives like a staccato. Only by retaining the seemingly disconnected notes do we acquire the ability to grasp the theme.

— Abraham Heschel

Where Do These Good and Holy Thoughts Lead?

How then may dedicated persons in the second spiritual situation — when the enemy is attempting to deceive "under the appearance of good" — know whether the good and holy thoughts that arise in them are of the good or of the bad spirit, and so whether God does or does not will the projects suggested by these thoughts? As we have seen, the fact that these thoughts occur in time of spiritual consolation does not resolve the ambiguity since, in the second spiritual situation, both the good and the bad spirit may give spiritual consolation with a preceding cause (*Second Rules*, 3).

In *Second Rules*, 4, Ignatius has already supplied the foundations for resolving this ambiguity: when the bad spirit gives consolation with preceding cause and good and holy thoughts, he *begins* in conformity with these dedicated persons and then, *little by little*, attempts to bring them to his own harmful *end*. Now, in *Second Rules*, 5, Ignatius focuses specifically on the *end* to which these good and holy thoughts lead, and indicates how, through attentive observation of