

Test the Spirits

1 John 4:1-6

WHAT WE FOUND

The apostle of love commanded suspicion of a very particular kind: "do not believe every spirit, but test the spirits" (4:1), because the spiritual realm is real *and* contested. The test is the Incarnation: "every spirit which confesses that Jesus Christ has come in the flesh is of God" (4:2), the letter's opening paragraph (heard, seen, touched) turned into a criterion. The spirit of antichrist, planted in Session Four, "is in the world already" (4:3), and it always negotiates against the flesh of Christ, because a Christ-idea costs nothing and saves nothing.

Deuteronomy 13 stunned us: even a sign that *comes true* does not validate a prophet who leads toward other gods; signs do not validate content, content judges signs, and God permits the dazzle as a test of our love. John's second criterion completes the kit: "Whoever knows God listens to us" (4:6), the apostolic we of 1:3. Confession and communion, one gift: every believer tests, with the received creed, in the apostolic Church. And the posture is victory, not anxiety: "he who is in you is greater than he who is in the world" (4:4), already, perfect tense. Train like a bank teller: deep familiarity with the genuine Christ is the best counterfeit detection.

The saints supplied the toolkit: St. Polycarp, John's own student, applying this very test a generation later; St. Ignatius on trajectories, angels of light, and never renegotiating in desolation; St. John of the Cross on the danger of craving private revelations when everything has been said in the Son.

VOICES OF THE CHURCH

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St. Polycarp of Smyrna *Letter to the Philippians, 7*

Polycarp, disciple of John himself, quotes tonight's test almost verbatim within a generation: everyone who does not confess that Jesus Christ has come in the flesh is antichrist, and whoever does not confess the testimony of the cross is of the devil. The apostle's own student, applying the apostle's own test, shows the criterion working exactly as designed: handed on, and used.

VOICES OF THE CHURCH

St. Ignatius of Loyola *Spiritual Exercises, Rules for Discernment*

Ignatius mapped the interior weather John commands us to test: for the soul moving toward God, the good spirit consoles, strengthens, and moves toward faith, hope, and love, while the enemy disturbs, discourages, and proposes shortcuts (for the soul sliding away from God, Ignatius warns, the roles reverse: the enemy soothes and the good spirit stings the conscience); and the enemy, Ignatius warns, can appear as an angel of light, beginning with holy thoughts and bending them slowly toward ruin. His counsel is Johannine to the core: watch the whole trajectory, test the tail of the serpent, and never renegotiate in desolation what was

resolved in consolation.

VOICES OF THE CHURCH

St. John of the Cross *Ascent of Mount Carmel, Book II*

John of the Cross, Doctor of the Church and no stranger to mystical experience, is severest exactly where enthusiasts are loosest: visions, voices, and private revelations, even genuine ones, are not to be sought or leaned upon, for the appetite for them opens the soul to deception, and everything necessary has already been spoken in God's one Word, his Son. His rule protects what 4:2 protects: the sufficiency of Christ come in the flesh over every private supplement.

LIVE IT THIS WEEK

1.

Run the two tests, confession and communion, on one spiritual voice you follow (a podcast, an account, an author), on paper, this week. Keep what passes; unfollow what fails. Tell one group member the result.

2.

Memorize 1 John 4:4 and pray it aloud at your most anxious recurring moment this week: he who is in you is greater.

3.

Spend fifteen minutes with the genuine article daily this week, the Gospel of John, one chapter a day, as bank-teller training: familiarity with the real Christ is the best counterfeit detection there is.

MEMORY VERSE

"Little children, you are of God, and have overcome them; for he who is in you is greater than he who is in the world." (1 John 4:4, RSV2CE)

BEFORE NEXT SESSION

Read **1 John 4:7-21** and *bring your sealed sheet*, do not open it. Next session, the letter completes the sentence it has been holding since chapter one. Count how many times the word love appears in the passage; bring the number.

Catechism Connection: CCC 801; 88-90