

CHAPTER XII DISCERNMENT

Definition

Discernment is a technical term for understanding the forces which work within one and identifying among these the Spirit of God so that one may make Christian decisions and allow one's life to be shaped in a Christian way. In the early church this was often a matter of discernment of "spirits", trying to understand whether the dynamics experienced were of God or produced by some other "spirit", perhaps an evil one. Though it is still important to recognize that evil forces may play a role in one's life, we would now speak of many of these "spirits" in psychological terms. To speak of these "spirits" in psychological terms does not mean that they should also be considered "bad", but rather that they are parts of us of which we are not adequately aware, which operate somewhat independently of conscious control, and which can affect our desires and decisions. What is part of our humanity can be dealt with much better if we regard it as a natural and normal part of being human. We cannot deal with what we repress and run from. Thus the issue might be rephrased: Is God leading me to do this or is this merely the dynamics of my own psyche? Therefore an understanding of the human psyche is important in dealing with discernment and a treatment of discernment is appropriate when dealing with understanding the psyche.

Thus the two primary purposes of discernment are to seek to understand the will of God and to come to understand the dynamics (psychological and spiritual) operating within one's life. Both are important concerns.

Discernment and Evil

Discernment of the factors of life and of the will of God may include the discernment of evil. What is within the psyche, however destructive it may seem, should not be regarded as evil. To regard the dynamics which come from one's own life history as evil only makes it difficult to heal and transform them. It does not produce good results in changed behavior. However, consideration is needed as to whether there is a personal force of evil outside the psyche which would seek to use us, to use what is inside us, and to use the destructive possibilities of the contexts in which we live. The tragedies of the history of this century would seem to indicate that evil is more than accidental, or caused by circumstances or a few "sick" persons.

There are some principles which I think can be used when judging the involvement of Evil beyond what is intrapsychic (within the psyche) or systemic (in the systems of our world). In doing this one must look carefully at one's theology and spirituality to be sure that one has a sound basis from which to judge Evil and does not over-moralize internal dynamics which are normal for someone's history. Discernment of the involvement of Evil would not only help one to understand why one feels the way one does, why life is the way it is, but why there may be so much resistance to God and what God would call one to do.

1. *The plus factor.* In some of human experience there seems to be a *plus factor*, meaning that something is there which cannot be explained from what one ordinarily considers to be the constituents of one's life and context. One knows where much of one's "baggage" and many of one's issues come from and why some things happen. However there is still an unexplainable element, either in the frequency and intensity of the problems or in the causative factors. When

one attempts to deal constructively with life or engages in healing processes, there are results which would be expected. However, these results may not happen.

It is possible to explain this in various ways. In terms of personal struggles, it can mean that there are biochemical problems which distort the conscious and unconscious processes (such as in schizophrenia and some forms of depression). It also can mean that some factor has not yet been discovered in a person's life, and if it were only discovered, healing or change would be possible. However, it can mean that there may be a determining *plus factor* outside the person, if one allows for this in one's world view. Such a factor seems to "piggy-back" on the intrapsychic dynamics, augmenting them and making them insoluble. Such a factor seems to emerge in life when there is too much that is wrong, too many unexplainable events. This factor from outside must be judged in terms of what it seems to intend, and here it may become clear that the source is Evil.

2. *Insoluble resistance*. There are many reasons for resistance to what seems good, spiritual, and healthy, which can be understood in terms of intrapsychic or systemic (e.g., familial) dynamics. However, when there is unusual resistance the sources of which cannot be discovered, as implied above, Evil may be the *plus factor*.

3. *Voices, urgings and images*: The complexes and contents of the psyche express themselves to us in various ways. We may project on others what is in us so that our reactions towards others become clues to what is in us. We may dream dreams, see images or pictures within our minds, or hear voices. Some persons will feel or sense urgings. These are ways in which the contents and complexes of the psyche *normally* make themselves known, communicate themselves to us. By no means is this, by itself, a sign of mental illness. This often comes from the memory of what was once experienced or is the convenient expression of the dynamics of the psyche. One can discern from these phenomena what is within one. Now voices usually seem to sound like someone, seem to come from someplace, seem to belong somewhere. Images are usually connected with one's life history or inner process. We usually have a sense that voices, images and urgings come from inside us. However, *when there is a sense that they come from outside us and if they would urge us to destructive actions*, then it is important to consider whether this originates in Evil.

4. *Receptivity*. There are persons whose lives seem to be rich with religious or parapsychological experiences and who seem easily to pick up the experiences and feelings of others (i.e., they are receptive). I have known persons who were very receptive to experiences and influences from the outside. This often enables such a person to have significant spiritual experiences, but it also means that their psyche could be easily penetrated by Evil and sensitivity to this is needed..

5. *Rationalization of surrender to destructive feelings, no matter what*. Destructive feelings may powerfully exist because of personal history. From the perspective of one's history and one's rights it can be rationalized that one should act upon them. I have seen this when a person in childhood was deprived of love, affection, or security, often accompanied with additional abuse. Such a person seeks that to which s/he feels entitled, of which s/he will not now be deprived, in a relationship sometimes inappropriate. I have seen persons destroy their professional life, their family and that of another, because of this. Or there is the anger one feels because of what has been done to one. If only one could do to others what has been done, then one would be free and the inner turmoil would be satisfied. Personal consequences seem to become less and less important, or the compulsion to action becomes so strong that the consequences are not even in awareness. There is only the need to act. In coping with such powerful feelings, it is important to realize that Evil is an "abuser", using persons destructively for its own end. Usually persons once

abused do not wish to be abused *again*.⁵⁵¹

6. *Is it un-loving.* In the New Testament love is the primary fruit of the presence of God's Spirit. Thus a sign of Evil in life could be unloving and destructive desires, feelings, and behaviors. Here one must distinguish between legitimate anger which comes from experience of abuse within personal history and destructive feelings which seem to have the "plus factor" mentioned above.

Discernment Difficult - God Will Go With Us Wherever

In our discernment and decision making it is important to know that our loving God will go with us in different directions than God might have wanted if what we choose is not harmful and destructive. It is difficult to be absolutely sure that one knows the will of God. Even Paul said, "I think I have the Spirit of God," implying that he was not absolutely sure (I Cor. 7:40); and after working out his understanding of the way God's plan of salvation would work out (on which he based his mission strategy), he comments: "How unsearchable are his judgements and how inscrutable his ways." (Rom. 11:33) That it is difficult to discern the will of God does not come from God's unwillingness to communicate, but from the ontological difference between humanity and God which makes it difficult for humans to see and hear what God wishes -- we are just not on the same level as God. Then too there is what one might call the "distraction factor" of life in this world. I believe we come into this world as children, much more open to God and human spirituality than we are as we grow older. As we grow older we lose faith in our imagination and become so absorbed in the tasks of growing up and managing life responsibilities that we may even forget that we have any spiritual dimension at all. Thus a major adult task is to become open to the spiritual dimensions of life, to know one has a soul, and to learn to listen for God's direction and messages.

Discernment and Christian Vocation

If discernment is wanted regarding vocation, perhaps in some form of ministry, it is important to note that ministry and mission ultimately belong to the whole people of God. Baptism then is a type of ordination to ministry. We all have various gifts and fulfill various possibilities in ministry and mission -- depending upon gifts, context, and time available. Ministry is both within the church and within the world. Those who decide on full time, professional ministry, are deciding to do full time what they would do part time. To decide for the professional ministry is **never** a decision as to **whether** to do ministry or not, but rather a decision as to **how** to do ministry. Really all will need to decide on how to do ministry which belongs to all.

In considering the discernment of call to some form of ministry, give due consideration to the call that the church may bring to you. Because you are baptized and have committed yourself to God, the church has a right to assume that some form of ministry will be a part of your Christian life. It then has the right to talk with you about its needs and your possible role in ministry.

Scripture The Spirit, and Discernment

We might wonder why we can't work out all our answers from the Bible, or especially from the teachings of the New Testament or Jesus. However, the Bible just is not designed to give us final answers on many issues and sometimes presents a variety of answers on the same issue. Writers of different New Testament

⁵⁵¹. Those who have been deeply hurt or disempowered may often see Evil as an ally which empowers them. This is the rationale often for belonging to a Satanic cult. However, Evil does not empower by love, self-sacrifice, and sharing life with us (as presented in the Gospel about God in Christ and the Spirit), but by using persons for its own purposes. Evil uses and abuses, performing a spiritual rape upon those who open themselves to it.

books arrived at different understandings of the same issues. Even the Gospels present Jesus and his teachings in various ways.

To deal with discernment we must think about the role of God's *Spirit* (a term that the early church used to speak of God's continuing Presence) in arriving at answers. The role of the Spirit, affirmed in most of the New Testament traditions, has implications that are often neglected. Usually the Spirit is relegated to the role of inspirer and interpreter of tradition already established -- or the creative impulse of early Christianity which is thought **not** to be active in the same way since the days of the apostles or the early church's councils. In this way all authority is always placed within the tradition of the early church, especially the Bible. On the other hand, if taken seriously, the Spirit means that things are never settled and the church is continuously engaged in rethinking in the light of God's engagement with the present age (the Spirit). One must respect the tradition, but cannot idolize it in any form. *Only God is God and God keeps on being God by not abdicating to the tradition.*

The biblical tradition may be seen as follows: The divergent traditions of Judaism which bear witness to God and God's relationship to life are converged, clarified and evaluated in terms of a unique action of God in history in Christ. However, this self-disclosure of God is itself rendered ambiguous and multiform by the humanly and culturally-conditioned perceptions of those who witnessed it, bore witness, and transmitted this witness. *Though God in Christ is an unambiguous reality, its perception is not.* It was then left to the church, under the guidance of the ongoing activity of God (the Spirit), to do two things:

- 1) to clarify the misconceptions by distinguishing, in the light of ongoing history, where the God-in-Christ-event had not been adequately understood or had been actually misunderstood in the light of cultural and religious presuppositions;
- 2) to be open to the speaking of God to newly developing issues and circumstances not adequately anticipated or treated in the tradition.

In the light of both, the first century Christians and churches that produced the New Testament literature reflected a variety of views, while seeking to remain faithful to God's intention. They struggled with the diversity both within and between Christian communities.

While the variety of the Bible may not help us to arrive at clear answers, it does serve to bring us close to the God who in the Spirit would guide us. Thus various passages in the Bible may open up a "*window of opportunity*" for God to speak to us.

Principles for Discernment

Regarding discernment, both the Johannine and Pauline traditions in the New Testament affirm the following:

1. *The role of the Spirit must be recognized.* One cannot make the error of Pharisaic Judaism in tying God's activity and revelation to the written word, the Law, what was given in the past. God wishes to provide guidance and direction in the present. (I Cor. 14, John 16:12-15)
2. *One must stand within the available tradition of the Christ event, recognizing Jesus as Lord and listening to what he taught.* There seems to be some recognition that the tradition on Jesus himself was varied so that some "critical" decisions were probably necessary to know what Jesus wished, taught and did (e.g. the handling of the tradition about Jesus in the Gospels). The Old Testament seems to have been largely seen as prophesying the action of God in Christ and the witness of the early church and not to have been used as witness independent of or parallel to the Christ event.

(for example I Peter 1:10ff, II Cor. 3:12ff. II Tim. 3:16-17 is an exception) In some cases Christ, or the Spirit of Christ, was seen as operative in the Old Testament history (similar to the way Jews viewed personified "Wisdom"). To stand within the Christ event was then not only to relate to Christ and his life, but also to stand within the streams of Old Testament history and their fulfillment. See the information below on the *Ignatian Exercises* concerning meditating on the life of Christ.

3. *A quality of life (particularly "love") should be manifested* if one claims to be acted upon by God's Spirit and to experience God's guidance. (I Cor. 13, I John 4:7ff)

4. *Community discernment of perceptions of God's will and truth were important.* (I Cor. 14:26ff) One needs the help of others to understand.

5. Especially in the authentic Pauline materials there is *a recognition of the limited nature of all human perception* (I Cor. 13:8-13) *and the danger of the ego-centered use of knowledge* (I Cor. 8:1-3).

To this one should add:

6. *Prayer.* Prayer is not merely praying for solutions or answers. It is a way of carrying on a dialogical relationship with God in which we share with God our life and concerns, seek direction, and desire to be open to God's presence and leading. It is a living with God sufficient to make us sensitive to God's purposes. In Jesus' ministry, particularly in the Gospel of Luke, there is a rhythm of retreat for extended prayer and then engagement in ministry and action which can present a paradigm for us.

There are additional approaches that one might consider in the desire to discern the will of God:

7. *Visualize in a meditation the choices* you must make in following what seems to be God's will. This would mean visualizing what you would be doing, what would happen, what would be the nature of your life, if you made a certain choice. You should enter the scene of your visualization as much as possible to sense the situation and feel the feelings involved with each choice. It is good to visualize opposite options and to sense the contrasts involved in each.

8. *Imagine that someone comes to you asking what you are asking.* Imagine the advice that you would give to that person.

9. *Explore the patterns of life* which seem to be guiding you *and that which seems to be indications of God's directions to you.* It is very difficult to discern God's will from a single experience. However, when patterns of experience appear over a time, it is more likely that that is the direction you should follow. Be sure to include patterns of advice from your various religious communities, pastor, or spiritual director.

10. *Consider what are your personal needs* and how much the decision you feel led to make will satisfy your personal needs. If you seem to be lead to make a choice by your personal needs, this raises a question which you must examine: Am I doing this because God wants me to or because I have need to? However, if your needs are influential this does not mean that God may not be calling you, but you must ask the question. God may also call us through our needs and through our healing wounds we may be able to help others.

11. To process information from your life and God's guidance takes time. Things are not usually immediately clear. Thus you will need *time and patience.* As you go through the process you will begin to get a sense of what works best for you and the amount of time you must allow for the process. This will be helpful for the next time that you do this.

12. When it is important to make a decision and there is no clarity about what decision should be made, it may be possible to gain help from *the lot.* There are various forms of this. One form is to

take three slips of paper, one with NO on it, one with YES, and one blank. You may wish to place Bible verses on the NO and YES slips which indicate a positive and a negative response. It is important to have one blank, which would indicate that there is no answer at this time. Pray about what you wish to discern and then, mixing the papers, select one. This should not take the place of the above methods nor should one understand the answer given to infallibly present the will of God for you. It merely provides an additional source of information on the basis of which you must ultimately decide.

Some helpful Scripture

One valuable use of Scripture is to select several passages for meditation and exploration which will hopefully allow the texts to become the occasion for spiritual movement in one's life. For example, if persons were seeking to allow their own calling to be deepened and desired to gain some direction from God, much as is done in the Ignatian exercises, they might be asked to meditate on and pray through Matthew 19:16-23, Matthew 13:4-17, and Matthew 14:22-33. I would share with you my reactions to these three passages.⁵⁵²

In Matthew 19 a person asks about the good deed necessary to have eternal life. Jesus is called "good teacher," but he directs the questions away from mere moral teaching, the good deed necessary, to the One before whom all action takes place by saying that only God is good. Eternal life is in relation to God, not dependent upon certain select actions. Jesus then challenges this person generally to keep the commandments, and the question comes back, "Which?" Jesus answers with most of the ten commandments which are usually considered the "second tablet," dealing with responsibility to others, adding also a reference to loving the neighbor. The first tablet, according to tradition, contained the commandments relating to one's responsibility to God, the second being seen as based on the first. This is perhaps why Jesus immediately directed attention to God, not to himself or certain actions. The person then, indicating that all these commandments have been followed, asks, "What do I still lack?" Jesus answers, "If you would be perfect (in the sense of brought to the goal which God intends for you), go, sell what you possess and give to the poor, and you will have treasure in heaven; and come, follow me." The surrender of wealth is secondary to the primary focus of "come, follow." Jesus does not say where. It is a venture in faith. The person sorrowfully departs, it is said "because he had great possessions." But the person has two problems. One is that life with God is sought in certain actions rather than life with God being *life with God*, thus relationship is really avoided. The second is that the person is possessed by possessions and is not free for the radical decision to follow, especially where the implications of following are not clear and only to be found in the venture. But God does not give up. In the following verses Jesus comments that although "it is difficult for a rich man to enter the kingdom of God with God all things are possible." I must then consider whether I would be willing to hear Jesus' call, to explore where my evasions and resistances lie, and to consider whether I would follow him into ventures not yet defined.

In Matt. 13:4-17, though the parable is about "listening," it is also about the generosity of the sower, and a lack of concern for productivity and receptivity. The sower is who he is and does what he does without concern for results. It is almost as if he must sow, whatever the consequences. The results are not uniform or immediate, and in the soils there are many kinds of resistance. Even the good soil is not equally productive. But productivity or chance of success is not the issue. The seed must be sown and the sower must sow.

⁵⁵². My attention was called to the use of these three passages in a retreat done by John Westerhoff III.

The verses which follow seem to shift the focus towards the receptivity of the soils, their ability to hear and understand. This is particularly true when one gets to the interpretation of the parable in verses 18 following. However, the original parable focuses on the sower. Why does the sower sow so generously and foolishly? Action is not to depend upon productivity and receptivity. One's life must be acted out as an inner necessity and divine call. If the acting out of life depends on what may happen, there is no freedom to be, to maintain one's own integrity. Jesus acted with integrity.

But how does one know when one's freedom and integrity become distorted and abusive of others? The answer seems to lie in the seed. The sower did not sow himself, but the seed. His freedom was to be himself as a sower. In the interpretation of the parable the seed is "the word of the kingdom," that is to say, the "message of God's reign and presence." Sowing the seed was then a pointing beyond self to God in the integrity of one's own being.

If I were to be the farmer, I would have to know my seed and myself as sower and then sow it in freedom, without consideration of response. In the sowing, my life would become open. I would become visible to others. This visibility is both a freedom and a vulnerability.

The broadcasting of the seed, without distinction, is also an act of love and graciousness. The possibilities of God's kingdom must fall, as the rain, upon the just and unjust. The complex conditions of the soils were not chosen by the soils, though the later interpretation makes them responsible. I would feel that God had some expectations of all the soils. It was only clear that there would be no response after there was no response.

To be able to toss one's seed is not only an act of freedom and integrity, but a celebration. The seed is celebrated as one lifts it up and trusts its destiny to God. There is a joyous trust in God and life. The earth into which the seed falls is ultimately into God, who is creator of the world. Thus beyond the soil into which it falls, it always falls into the fertile ground of God.

Regarding Matthew 14:22-33, after the feeding Jesus stays with the crowd, forcing his disciples to go on ahead. How did they think he would join them? He dismisses the crowd and, alone, he prays. The passage does not indicate this as an act of exhaustion, but seeking the re-creativity and transcendence of solitude.

By evening the boat was far from land, beaten by waves, the wind against them. Note the drama of vs. 25, "And in the fourth watch he came, walking on the sea." His disciples were terrified. He says, "Take heart, it is I; have no fear." In their terror over the sea and the apparition he calls upon them to have no fear. Why? "It is I." His presence is the difference.

Peter impulsively says, "Lord, if it is you, bid me come to you on the water." Peter's faith seems simple. "Let me do what you do." Jesus says, "Come," an invitation he extends in many contexts. Peter plunges into the storm and in fear begins to sink. He cries out, "Lord, save me," and Jesus "immediately" reaches out his hand and catches him: "O man of little faith, why did you doubt?"

When Jesus entered the boat the wind ceased, but then the test of faith was over. The test came in the storm, not in the quiet. The act of faith was Peter's request for an invitation to come into the storm. Jesus says, "Come." Peter ventures and then when he encounters the storm he cries out to be saved, and Jesus takes him by the hand. Jesus speaks of his little faith and doubt, but is that not the way faith is: little faith and doubt, dauntless before the storm but quavering within it. And then one must ask for this hand of Jesus and accept that one's faith is little. *But it is faith.* It is what caused Peter to enter the storm. It was the act which enabled Jesus to reach out.

The confession, "Truly you are the son of God," sounds grandiose, but arises naturally in the context of the stilling of the storm. But is this its primary meaning? Is not Jesus son of God because he reaches out his hand to those of little faith who are sinking in their storms, son of God because in this action he does as God does?

Could I be different if I were Peter? Likely not. I would perhaps be much too cautious to ever venture into the storm. I might never have stepped from the boat. Perhaps by the time I had thought it over the storm would have been over. But if there is no venture, how can it be discovered that there is help in a storm, even if one can't walk on the water. Perhaps I must pray for some of the impulsiveness of Peter. Perhaps I must be one of those of "little faith." If I wait for great faith I may never do anything.

Thus these three stories take one through the experience of Jesus' call and raise questions about what stands in the way, present the need to act in integrity and freedom without consideration of results, and call for venture with "little faith." How well these three stories raise the issues of the calling and life directions which we seek to discern.

Ignatius of Loyola and the *Spiritual Exercises*

As Christians we confess "Jesus as Lord." This confession, and our belief in his resurrection, causes us to recognize him as our contemporary Lord, Guide, Shepherd, Leader, Head of the church. Thus we not only look to the Spirit (Presence) of God, but to the continuing activity of God's Son who does the same things he did in his historical ministry (see Gal. 4:6). As indicated above, to know what Jesus did and said historically we need to make some judgements and decisions about what is said about Jesus in the Gospels (and even in the Epistles). Though we can't always be sure of everything Jesus taught and though what he taught was related directly to the needs of his time rather than ours, we get to know him as a person through studying the Gospels. The person of Jesus shines through. Gaining a sense of the living person of Jesus we also gain a familiarity with him so that we can try to hear what he would say to us today -- even on issues that may not have final answers or might not even be discussed in Scripture. To allow Jesus to lead us and help us with our lives and decisions, to help us discern, it is important to let him become a part of our lives. The Ignatian *Exercises* have become a classical way to do this, and so I summarize them for you.

The *Spiritual Exercises* of St. Ignatius

The *Spiritual Exercises of St. Ignatius* represent a concern in the history of Christianity and spirituality to work with the Gospel narratives so that they become the occasion for meeting Jesus in whom the grace and love of God may be encountered and God's call heard. In this way the Gospel materials and the Christ described in the Gospels may engage the Christian in a process of formation. What I wish to suggest is that *this devotional approach to the Gospels should be seen as a legitimate method, alongside the others, for the interpretation of the Gospels*. Perhaps it is our most important method if we intend to be more than historians in our approach to the Gospels.

Ignatius was born in 1491 to a wealthy and noble family in Spain. His life was focused on the secular values of his time: the glories of knighthood and the mysteries of women. In a battle against the French he suffered a serious leg injury and spent months at Loyola recuperating. He asked for reading, and the only two volumes in the castle were the *Life of Christ (Vita Jesu Christi e quatuor Evangeliiis et scriptoribus orthodoxis concinnata)* by Ludolph the Carthusian and the *Book of the Lives of the Saints (Flos Sanctorum)*. He spent five to six months reading these books, and as he shares in his Autobiography, he underwent a series of inner experiences where the ideas of chivalry would fill his mind for a while and then the story of Christ and the saints would likewise. As he found that these experiences produced

various feeling states, he began to formulate his principles of discernment from his experience. Distinctive was that fact that his religious experiences would leave him feeling good *after* the experience, but his fantasies about knighthood and women satisfied him only during the fantasy, but left him feeling empty afterwards. A very special experience was a vision of Mary and the child Jesus, which left him with a distaste for the world.

Through Ludolph's *Life of Christ* "the message proposed to the mind of Ignatius at Loyola was, in large measure, that of God's revelation, expressed through the multiplicity of the Gospel scenes, and made explicit in its broad lines by the theology of Ludolph..."⁵⁵³ His conversion had occurred and like a good knight he set out to effect his salvation and imitate the saints. He was no longer attached to the world, but he still had to learn to surrender himself to the working of God on whom his salvation and further education was dependent.

Ludolph's *Life* belonged to a specific form of devotional literature current in the late Middle Ages, often entitled *Mysteria Vitae Christi* (*Mysteries of the Life of Christ*). They divided the scenes in the Gospels into sections for the purpose of teaching the art of meditation. Thomas Aquinas included in the Christological part of his *Summa Theologica* a series of articles on the principal events of the life of Christ, neglected in subsequent Christological treatises.⁵⁵⁴

In 1522 at Montserrat, Ignatius took a side road leading to Manresa where he intended to stay for a few days, but he remained there more than ten months. At first his life there was filled with penances and prayers and satisfaction, but a period of great instability and inner turmoil developed, but gradually he discovered God's mercy and began to meditate again on the life of Christ. Writing in his autobiography in the third person he says of this period:

God treated him at this time just as a school master treats a child whom he is teaching. Whether this was on account of his coarseness or his dense intellect or because he had no one to teach him, or because of the strong desire God himself had given him to serve Him, he clearly believed and has always believed that God treated him in this way. Indeed, if he were to doubt this, he thought he would offend His Divine Majesty.⁵⁵⁵

It is here that he had a number of illuminations, such as a vision of the Trinity in the form of three musical keys, of creation as "something white from which some rays were coming," how Christ was present in Eucharist, of the humanity of Christ, of Mary. In these experiences the images seem to have been vague, but the experience profoundly affected his understanding..⁵⁵⁶

When one examines the *Spiritual Exercises* it becomes clear that, as Ignatius himself indicates, they reflect the process of his own experience, the process by which God formed and educated him. Behind their words "there exists in truth a whole world view, the world enclosed in Ignatius' heart, the world full

⁵⁵³ Gilles Cuwwon, S.J., *Biblical Theology and the Spiritual Exercises*, translated by Mary Angela Roduit, R.C., and George E. Ganss, S.J., St. Louis: The Institute of Jesuit Sources, 1988, p. 22.

⁵⁵⁴ . David Stanley, S.J., "Contemporary Gospel-Criticism and 'The mysteries of the Life of our Lord' in the *Spiritual Exercises*", in George R. Schner, ed., *Ignatian Spirituality in a Secular Age*, Waterloo, Ontario: Wilfred Laurier U. Press, 1984, p. 28.

⁵⁵⁵ . Ibid., p. 26.

⁵⁵⁶ . Ibid., pp. 27ff.

of brightness and warmth which he constructs with the help of some illuminations he received during his mystical encounter with God.”⁵⁵⁷

Their focus is on the choosing of a vocation to which the heavenly King, Christ calls (elects) one, though the Exercises are often now not used for that purpose. The first Direction or Annotation is:

1. This expression “Spiritual Exercises” embraces every method of examination of conscience, of meditation, of contemplation, of vocal and mental prayer, and of other spiritual activity that will be mentioned later. For just as strolling, walking, and running are bodily exercises, so spiritual exercises are methods of preparing and disposing the soul to free itself of all inordinate attachments, and after accomplishing this, of seeking and discovering the Divine Will regarding the disposition of one’s life, thus insuring the salvation of his soul.⁵⁵⁸

At the beginning of the first week the “Principle and Foundation” is stated:

Man is created to praise, reverence, and serve God our Lord, and by this means to save his soul. All other things on the face of the earth are created for man to help him fulfill the end for which he is created. From this it follows that man is to use these things to the extent that they will help him to attain his end. Likewise, he must rid himself of them in so far as they prevent him from attaining it.⁵⁵⁹

The *Exercises* are divided into four sections called “Weeks,” though some Weeks provide for more than seven days. The complete Exercises take traditionally about 30 days. Various modifications of this have developed and are encouraged within the Directions or Annotations themselves. In the outline presented below please note the intentional design of the Exercises and their components, and the spiritual development they are intended to produce.

First week -- consideration of and meditation on sin

This week provides one with awareness of one’s own sin and a process for dealing with this with awareness of the consequences of sin and the great mercy of God. These exercises are intended to produce perceptible changes in the person.

There should be examination of conscience three times a day

Ex. 1 at midnight - Sin of Angels (Gen. 6), sin of Adam and Eve, sin of one who went to hell because of mortal sin

[Each Exercise has somewhat the following form:

-- Preparatory Prayer

-- Several Preludes -- to imaginatively set the scene for the meditation

⁵⁵⁷ . Hugo Rahner, *The Spirituality of St. Ignatius*, p. xi, quoted in Giles Cusson, S.J., *Biblical Theology and the Spiritual Exercises*, translated by Mary Angela Roduit R.C. and George E. Ganss, S.J., St. Louis, The Institute of Jesuit Sources, 1988, p. 52.

⁵⁵⁸ . *The Spiritual Exercises of St. Ignatius*, translated by Anthony Mottola, with an Introduction by Robert W. Gleason, S.J. Garden City, NY: Doubleday, Image Books, 1964, p. 37.

⁵⁵⁹ . *Ibid.*, p. 47. Please note that since the word “man” appears in my text of the Exercises and I did not have access to a translation using inclusive language, I have retained the wording of the text and would hope that the reader would understand “man”: inclusively.

- Several Points -- the foci of the meditation
- A colloquy -- where the matters are imaginatively discussed with Christ, God, and at times with Mary. This is closed with the Lord's Prayer.]

[In the First Exercise of the First Week instruction is given on the use of the imagination in the preludes:

It should be noted at this point that when the meditation or contemplation is on a visible object, for example, contemplating Christ our Lord during His life on earth, the image will consist of seeing with the mind's eye the physical place where the object that we wish to contemplate is present. By the physical place I mean, for instance, a temple, or mountain where Jesus or the Blessed Virgin is, depending on the subject of the contemplation. In meditations on subject matter that is not visible, as here in meditation on sins, the mental image will consist of imagining, and considering my soul imprisoned in its corruptible body, and my entire being in this vale of tears as an exile among brute beasts. By entire being I mean both body and soul.] ⁵⁶⁰

- Ex. 2 immediately on rising - Review of my sins, self-abasement, comparison of my sinfulness with God's goodness, and amazement at how creation and God has served my needs in spite of this
- Ex. 3 before or after Mass, but before dinner- Repetition of 1 and 2 with colloquies with our Lady, with the Son of God, with our Eternal Father.
- Ex. 4 at Vespers - a "resume" of 3, including colloquies.
- Ex. 5 - Meditation on Hell, with thanks for God's mercy

[The times for prayer in monasticism, the Hours or Offices, were as follows. Many of the names come from the names for the hours of the day, the reckoning of which began with the first hour at 6:00 AM. Ignatius makes use of this structure.

6 am - Prime
9 am - Tierce
Morning Prayer - Lauds
12 Noon - Sext
3 pm - Nones
5 pm - Vespers
12 pm - Compline Matins]

Including :

Additional Directions on how to do the Exercises
Four Observations on Penance [interior which is our sorrow for sins and exterior which is the punishment we inflict on ourselves for sins, performed to produce three effects: a) to satisfy for past sins, b) to overcome ourselves, c) to seek some grace, to grieve for pain caused Christ, or to seek solution for some doubt.]

Second week -- The life of our Lord Jesus Christ, up to and including Palm Sunday

⁵⁶⁰. Ibid., p. 54.

Presented with the call of the Heavenly King, his earthly life is contemplated. Each night and morning one deals with a passage from the life of Christ, reinforced in three succeeding periods of contemplation. In the Contemplation on the Two Standards, one is confronted with a choice for Christ or Lucifer.

Exercise: Imagine the call of an earthly king and then the call of our Heavenly King. Twice a day, when rising and an hour before dinner or supper.

Day 1 - The Incarnation and Nativity

[This is in the form of five one hour Contemplations at assigned times. This establishes a pattern for the other days. The first two Contemplations are on stories from the life of Jesus, the first to be at Midnight and the second when rising in the morning. The next two are repetitions of the first two and therefore seek to reinforce them and continue their effect. These have the general pattern of recalling to mind the history of the subject of the Contemplation, making a mental representation of the place where the story takes place, and then asking for what is desired out of this Contemplation. The fifth focuses especially on applying the five senses to the first two, thus more fully developing one's experience of them. The instructions for the fifth are:

The first point is to see the persons in my imagination, contemplating and meditating in detail the circumstances surrounding them, and I will then draw some spiritual profit from this scene.

The second point is to hear what they are saying, or what they might say, and I will reflect within myself to draw some fruit from what I have heard.

The third point is to smell and taste in my imagination the infinite fragrance and sweetness of the Divinity, and of the soul, and of its virtues, and of all else, according to the character of the person I am now contemplating. And I will reflect within myself to draw spiritual profit therefrom.

The fourth point is to use in imagination the sense of touch, for example, by embracing and kissing the place where the persons walk or sit, always endeavoring to draw some spiritual fruit from this.]

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Day 2 - Presentation in Temple and Flight into Egypt

Day 3 - How the Child Jesus was obedient to his parents

Day 4 - Two Standards: Christ and Lucifer

Including:

Meditation on three classes of men with differing attitudes towards attachments.

Day 5 - Departure of Christ from Nazareth to Jordon and Baptism

Day 6 - How Christ went from the River Jordon to the desert and the events that took place at this time. Temptation

Day 7 - How St. Andrew and others followed Christ

Day 8 - Eight Beatitudes of the Sermon on Mt.

Day 9 - Christ appears to disciples on waves of sea

Day 10 - Our Lord preached in the Temple

Day 11 - The Resurrection of Lazarus

Day 12 - Palm Sunday

[Notable among the passages that Ignatius omits are much of Jesus' teaching: his parables, instructions on prayer, his novel ethical teaching; the question about the greatest commandment; the new commandment in the Last Supper. There is no mention of important passages which imply Jesus self-understanding including Peter's Confession. He was more concerned with the humanity of Jesus. He has little about Jesus' fellowship with sinners and the marginalized. For Ignatius Jesus seems to teach by his actions and he is constantly on the move from one location to another, modeling a type of pilgrim ministry that Ignatius chose rather than choosing a cloistered order.]

Including:

- The three modes of humility
- Introduction to making a choice of a way of life
- Whether choices, immutable or mutable, are valid.
- Three occasions when a wise and good choice can be made.
- Directions for amending and reforming one's life and state.

Third week -- the Passion of Christ our Lord

(The daily pattern for week two is followed. There are two Contemplations on stories of Jesus, followed by two repetitions of the two Contemplations and then the fifth exercise is the application of the senses.)

Day 1 - How Christ went from Bethany to Jerusalem, including the Last Supper; Mysteries from the Last Supper to the Garden
Day 2 - Events from Garden to house of Annas; Events from house of Annas to house of Caiphas
Day 3 - House of Caiphas to that of Pilate; Events related to Herod
Day 4 - Herod to Pilate; remaining half of what took place in house of Pilate
Day 5 - House of Pilate to nailing to cross; Raising of the cross to His death
Day 6 - Taking down from the cross to burial; Burial to where our Lady was after burial.
Day 7 - Contemplation of entire Passion

Including:

- Rules to be Observed in the Future in the Matter of Food
- distinguish between what is beneficial and what is harmful in abstinence, take care not to become sick, let the understanding be occupied with the Lord and less with the sustenance of the body.

Fourth week -- the Resurrection and Ascension

Strangely, a First Contemplation is discussed, dealing with how Christ died, descended into hell, and then appeared to his mother. No further Contemplations are given, though the "Mysteries of the Life of Our Lord" listed in this week provide stories of the Resurrection which begin with the Second Apparition and end with the Thirteenth and then the Ascension. The appearance to Mary (which is not biblical) must constitute the First. There also is no explanation of how to fit the "Contemplation to Attain Divine Love" and the "Three Methods of Prayer" into the Fourth Week.

Including:

- Contemplation to Attain Divine Love.
- Prayer:

Take, O Lord, and receive all my liberty, my memory, my understanding, and my entire will, all that I have and possess. Thou hast given all to me, to Thee O Lord, I return it. All is Thine; dispose of it according to Thy will. Give me Thy love and Thy grace, for this is enough for me.

Three Methods of Prayer

1. On Ten Commandments, seven capital sins, three powers of the soul and five senses of the body. Concern with progress of soul rather than method.
2. Contemplating the meaning of each word of a prayer
3. Rhythmical recitation - Full attention to a single word of prayer between each breath

The Mysteries of the Life of Our Lord - meditations on selected biblical passages from the life of Christ. These passages seem to somewhat fit the recommendations for the Contemplations of weeks Two to Four.

Rules (Included at the end of the Exercises):

Rules for the Discernment of Spirits for first and second week for “understanding to some degree the different movements that are produced in the soul...”, interpreting consolations and desolations, understanding how God and the “enemy” work..

Rules for the Distribution of Alms

Notes Concerning Scruples

Rules for Thinking with the Church (so that one’s experience and direction is not merely individualistic)

Ignatius states that the exercises are "methods of preparing and disposing the soul to free itself of all inordinate attachments, and after accomplishing this, of seeking and discovering the Divine Will regarding the disposition of one's life, thus insuring the salvation of his soul." The accomplishing of this is to be the work of God and Christ and not the leader. In words which are appropriate to all spiritual directors he says: ". . . in these Spiritual Exercises it is much better and more fitting in seeking the Divine Will, that our Lord and Saviour should communicate Himself to the devout soul, inflaming it with His love and praise, and disposing it to the way in which it can best serve Him in the future. Thus, the one who gives the Exercises should not lean either to one side or the other, but standing in the middle like the balance of a scale, he should allow the Creator to work directly with the creature, and the creature with its Creator and God."⁵⁶²

The helpfulness of Ignatius' *Exercises* to many over the centuries clearly indicates the importance of becoming acquainted with the stories about Jesus and allowing the living Jesus to appear to us from them so that he can be our guide in the many complex issues of life. Even if God had chosen to cause Scripture to be produced to give us explicit guidance on everything, God could not have included the answers to 20th century questions in the Bible written long ago. How much better to know that both God and Jesus will help us to understand what is right and appropriate in the complexity of our lives, working with us as persons rather than a bunch of rules! How much better to know that God always goes with us and loves us

⁵⁶² *The Spiritual Exercises of St. Ignatius*, transl. by Anthony Mottola, NY: Image Books, Doubleday, 1964, pp. 37, 40-41. Books are available to help those using the exercises, such as Marian Cowan, John Carroll Futrell, *The Spiritual Exercises of St. Ignatius of Loyola: A Handbook for Directors*, NY: Le Jacq Pub., 1982.

when decisions are not clear and some decisions involve both bad and good. We cannot be understood, loved, and supported by a set of rules.

CHAPTER XIII THE SPIRITUAL DIRECTION OF OTHERS

Whenever one seeks to share with another one's perceptions and experiences of life and its transcendent dimensions, one is in some sense engaging in spiritual direction. It may be very informal and perhaps non-directive, but what is shared may have a directive potency relative to the way the hungers and needs of others respond to it. Thus it becomes apparent that much of what goes on in the life of the church may be spiritually directive without being formally so. The Pastor particularly functions as spiritual director of her/his people through preaching, counseling, administrating, whether it is intentional or not. Even the Pastor who has lost confidence in the transcendent dimension of life functions as spiritual director by pointing to one's own void. Thus it is not that this was not happening before we became more conscious of the need to speak of it, clarify it, and (particularly as Protestants), to affirm it. Rather in the climate of the renewed concern for spiritual direction do we have the opportunity to think carefully about how it may be implemented and the spiritual life-process which we would wish to implement. That this can take place through many in the life of the church cautions us that we must not create a new "priesthood" of professional directors, a new elite to take the place of the old intellectual and professional elite of the clergy. Rather must this be seen as belonging to the whole church as ministry and priesthood belong to the whole church. Those who become somewhat professional in this area do so for the whole church and for the facilitation of the whole church. Thus it should be of the very nature of this renewal of interest in spiritual direction that it provide for the training and service of gifted lay persons. One of the humbling elements of both the Gospel and the spirituality of the church is that one is ultimately dependent on what is given by God, not merely the development of skills and intellect. Paul's comment to the Corinthians is worth remembering here:

God chose what is low and despised in the world, even things that are not, to bring to nothing things that are, so that no human being might boast in the presence of God. He is the source of your life in Christ Jesus, whom God made our wisdom, our righteousness and sanctification and redemption; therefore, as it is written, "Let him who boasts, boast of the Lord."⁵⁶³

Though there may be "spiritual directors" who function well with little formal training, the potential deceptiveness of spiritual experience, the unconscious tendency to intrude one's self into the process, and the danger of propagating inappropriate anthropologies and theologies necessitate education, development of skills, and a solid relationship to a Christian community and its traditions.

It may be helpful to examine Paul's understanding of spirituality here for he consciously theorizes about it in I Corinthians 12-15.

Paul indicates that for many of the Corinthians previous "spiritual experience" was deceptive. (12:2). Thus they must avoid both individualism and subjectivism. They must see themselves as related to the Christian community (12), possessing their varied spiritual gifts for its sake (12:7), and manifesting love (13). They also must align their spiritual experience with the historical Jesus, the tradition of his life and ministry, and be willing to confess him as contemporary Lord (12:3). The preaching of the Gospel, or Christian communication, is understood as speaking out of the experience of God's Spirit (presence/participation) to

⁵⁶³ I Cor. 1:28-31.