

College of Saint Benedict and Saint John's University

DigitalCommons@CSB/SJU

School of Theology and Seminary Graduate
Papers/Theses

School of Theology and Seminary

1998

Grounded in Love: An Investigation of the Fundamental Ignatian Teaching on Discernment within the Tradition of Askesis

Edward Horski

College of Saint Benedict/Saint John's University

Follow this and additional works at: https://digitalcommons.csbsju.edu/sot_papers



Part of the [History of Christianity Commons](#), and the [Religious Thought, Theology and Philosophy of Religion Commons](#)

Recommended Citation

Horski, Edward, "Grounded in Love: An Investigation of the Fundamental Ignatian Teaching on Discernment within the Tradition of Askesis" (1998). *School of Theology and Seminary Graduate Papers/Theses*. 1173.

https://digitalcommons.csbsju.edu/sot_papers/1173

This Graduate Paper is brought to you for free and open access by DigitalCommons@CSB/SJU. It has been accepted for inclusion in School of Theology and Seminary Graduate Papers/Theses by an authorized administrator of DigitalCommons@CSB/SJU. For more information, please contact digitalcommons@csbsju.edu.

GROUNDING IN LOVE: AN INVESTIGATION OF THE FUNDAMENTAL
IGNATIAN TEACHING ON *DISCERNMENT* WITHIN THE TRADITION OF
ASKESIS

by

Edward Horski

5 Rivercrest Dr. Apt 308
St. Cloud, MN 56303

A Paper Submitted to the Faculty of the School of Theology of Saint John's University,
Collegeville, Minnesota, in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements for the Degree of
Master of Arts in Spirituality.

SCHOOL OF THEOLOGY
Saint John's University
Collegeville, Minnesota

October 24, 1998

This Paper was written under the direction of

Columba Stewart, OSB.

Columba Stewart, OSB, Director

Edward Horski

has successfully demonstrated use of

Spanish

in this paper.

Columba Stewart, OSB.

Columba Stewart, OSB, Director

5 November 1998

Date

GROUNDING IN LOVE: AN INVESTIGATION OF THE FUNDAMENTAL
IGNATIAN TEACHING ON *DISCERNMENT* WITHIN THE TRADITION OF
ASKESIS

Description of the Project:

An investigation into the fundamental logic and foundation for the spiritual exercise of discernment as found in St. Ignatius of Loyola's manual the *Spiritual Exercises*. The paper further seeks to situate Ignatius' teaching concerning the fundamental ground of spiritual discernment against the broader and more ancient desert tradition of *askesis*, which also includes teachings on the practice and theory of discernment. Towards this end, comparisons and contrasts are made between St. Ignatius of Loyola's teaching and those of St. Antony and John Climacus. Differences are noted and Ignatius is credited with having nuanced the tradition of spiritual discernment by grounding the whole exercise in a mystical experience of God's love as the ideal foundation for authentic discernment of God's will. Ignatius refers to this fundamental phenomenon as "*consolación sin causa*."

This paper may be duplicated.

Edward Horski

Edward Horski

October 30, 1998

Date

This paper is dedicated to *Evangeline*

The theology hidden in the simple words of the Exercises belongs to the most important fundamentals of contemporary western Christianity. In fact, it has yet to be fully assimilated by the Church's academic theology and prevailing practice of piety; therefore, it still has an important future. Although it is obvious that the process sketched in Ignatius' Exercises for making a total life-decision arises from the basis of traditional Christianity and Roman Catholic conformity to the Church, the Spiritual Exercises intend to allow the person to experience a radical immediacy to God which, for Ignatius, ultimately supports and embraces everything Christian and ecclesial. Ignatius is convinced that such a "mystical" immediacy to God is really possible.¹

Presumably, a religiously oriented person is concerned about God's will in relationship to their concrete decisions. Indeed, God's will ought to be the ground of human decisiveness since God cares intimately about the individual and their life direction.² Finding a rationale as well as authentic means or techniques for discerning God's will is an issue that many religious people, especially given our context of constantly changing values and social options, ought to be concerned about.³ Moreover, because of the plurality of religious experience abounding in our time, a specifically Christian method for discerning "the will of God" at the level of the individual appears both urgent as well as practical.⁴ St. Ignatius of Loyola (1491-1556), in his

¹ Karl Rahner, the "Forward," in Harvey D. Egan, *The Spiritual Exercises and the Mystical Horizon* (St. Louis: The Institute of Jesuit Sources, 1976): *xiii*.

² Michael J. Buckley, "The Structure for the Rules for Discernment of Spirits," *The Way*, Supplement 20 (Autumn 1973):19-37. Buckley writes: "A fundamental conviction founds and supports the history of religious consciousness and commitment: God himself will direct a man's life. Within the religious context . . . God offers not only finality, but consistent direction. So the pressing question lies not about general purpose or willing providence, but about concrete means; how does God direct human life to himself? What are the means of contacting or of being guided by God? Where does one locate this directing power of God?" (*ibid.*, 20-21).

³ John English, *Choosing Life* (New York: Paulist Press, 1978): 5. English writes: "There are three modern phenomenon [sic] which can have great importance in Christian decision-making. The three I have in mind are these: the new-sensitivity to interior spiritual activity, the growing sense of the importance of the historical in personal matters, and in an impersonal world, the felt need to make wise personal decisions."

⁴ Buckley, "The Structure for the Rules of Discernment," 20. He notes: "Western man is submitted to a variety of religious experiences and a heterogeneity of religious traditions beyond anything which has entered his civilization since the fourth century. Variety and heterogeneity have become characteristics proper to our times, whether one refers to them in terms of future shock or as the collapse of the modern world. They offer the Church a unique *kairos*, standing amid the confluence and even chaos of so many religious traditions, both within and without the Christian community"

Spiritual Exercises,⁵ provides insight as to the fundamental character or essential ground for personally discerning God's will in one's life. The ultimate concern for realizing the will of God in the religious person's life involves the "discernment of spirits."⁶ Ignatius' *Spiritual Exercises* can be viewed within the context of the tradition of Christian spiritual discernment as an effective rationale for truly encountering God and discerning God's intimate will for the individual.

This paper is an attempt to understand the fundamental value of the relatively contemporary and more familiar method of Ignatian discernment in light of its common heritage in the more ancient Christian tradition of "spiritual exercise," that is, *askesis*, which is the discipline of being purified at the core of one's personality.⁷ This paper will consider two general meanings often attached to the idea of "God's will;" then it will consider the experiences of Ignatius that gave birth to the discipline of the *Exercises*, whose larger purpose is to discern the will of God.⁸ Our look at Ignatius will include an overview of the experiences and sources that influenced him which, in turn, is revealing about the essential spirituality/*askesis* of the *Exercises* in terms of the issue of spiritual discernment. It will note some Ignatian contrasts with

⁵ St. Ignatius of Loyola, *The Spiritual Exercises*, trans., George Ganss (Chicago: Loyola University Press, 1992). I will refer to the salient parts of the *Exercises* after the established and common use of brackets and numbers, e.g. [23].

⁶ Athanasius, *The Life of Antony in Athanasius: The Life of Antony and the Letter to Marcellinus*, trans., Robert C. Gregg (New York: Paulist Press, 1980): chp. 88. Athanasius notes about the Egyptian father of monasticism that "This too was great in Antony's asceticism—that possessing the gift of discerning spirits, as I said before, recognized their movements and knew that for which each one of them had a desire and appetite."

⁷ Jules Toner, *A Commentary on St. Ignatius' Rules for the Discernment of Spirits* (St. Louis: The Institute of Jesuit Resources, 1982):7. Toner writes: "Where, then, do we find a person who by the gifts of the Spirit is a teacher in his own right of the way to recognize the diverse spirits that move us, and also the way to hold ourselves always open to the Holy Spirit? We think of Cassian, Gregory, Bernard, Thomas a Kempis, Teresa, John of the Cross, Francis de Sales, and the like. We think, too, of St. Ignatius of Loyola. Other masters may surpass his teaching in value and influence regarding other matters of Christian spiritual life. But when there is a question of discernment of spirits and discernment of God's will, Ignatius' name comes to mind as at least one among the preeminent teachers—and perhaps as one of unparalleled influence."

⁸ William A. Barry, *Allowing the Creator to Deal with the Creature: An Approach to the Spiritual Exercises of Ignatius of Loyola* (Mahwah: Paulist Press, 1994): 77. Barry notes that "Historically the purpose of the Exercises has

the more ancient methods of “exercise,” particularly Antony and John Climacus, with regards to the fundamental issue of discerning God’s will; finally, it will consider his fundamental criterion, rationale or grounds for the possibility of finding God’s will at the level of the individual, namely, “consolation without cause.”

The Second Vatican Council voiced a universal call to Christian perfection.⁹ This call necessarily involves the individual Christian person (if he/she tries to respond to the call) in a process of discerning “God’s will” as part of a life of perfection. Consequently, however, the question immediately surfaces as to what is meant by “God’s will.”

For some, the will of God might represent a single divine dictum that God has ordained as the only life-option for an individual. This may, to mix a couple of images, look like leaving the Delphic oracle with an ambiguous statement in mind while rubbing a magic lamp with religious fervor. From this point of view, God wants you to do a specific something and you only have so many chances to get it right, to figure it out; if you find out what that is and accomplish it, you will be doing the will of God. Thomas Merton sums this understanding of the will of God as “Stern, practical, legalism. Man face to face with demands of the divine will.”¹⁰ Given the constantly changing context and demands of Christian life, such an oversimplified understanding of the will of God might lead one to either despair of ever unlocking the mystery of God’s will in one’s life, or tend to engender an over-zealous and presumptuous spirituality that considers itself as having found God’s will “once and for all.” Neither of these outcomes are very fruitful in helping the Christian individual to realize an intimacy between their life and

been understood in two different senses. One tendency stressed the aim of union with God; the other stressed the discovery of God’s will.”

⁹ Walter M. Abbot, ed., *The Documents of Vatican II: Dogmatic Constitution on the Church* (Piscataway, NJ: New Century Publishers, Inc., 1966): no. 40. “Thus it is evident to everyone that all the faithful of Christ of whatever rank or status are called to the fullness of the Christian life and to the perfection of charity.”

God's will that, in reality, is perpetually dynamic. In short, two basic outcomes can tend to surface from a more static view of God's will. On the one hand the question of the will of God in one's life tends to recede into the background of daily, practical life and becomes practically a non-issue; on the other hand, it takes precedence in the misguided zeal of a type of "Crusading Christian." In either case, such an understanding of God's will tends to leave us beside ourselves rather than finding our life truly and vitally realized in God.

Perhaps a more profound and realistic notion of God's will is also one which corresponds more closely to what we shall see is the Ignatian ideal. From this vantagepoint, God's will is seen as mercifully working through the gift of human freedom as we try to discern and respond to God's initiative within our contextualized and concrete daily lives. From this point of view, the will of God represents the pursuit of the ultimate truth or of one's "mission in life" in relationship to the individual's Creator and God. As Merton relates:

[A] great deal of the trouble comes from the fact that I look for a formula and expect to find a good one. If you want to find satisfactory formulas you had better deal with things that can be fitted into a formula. The vocation to seek God is not one of them. Nor is existence. Nor is the spirit of man...¹¹

Discerning God's will in one's life tends to resist once-and-for-all formulations. Barry notes the degree of difficulty in true discernment in Ignatius' own life as he notes, "At Manresa, Ignatius himself came to the conclusion that God wanted him to work apostolically in poverty. He also wrongly concluded that Jerusalem was to be the venue of his apostolate. Life after Manresa taught him the concrete way in which God's election of Ignatius would en flesh itself."¹² Seen

¹⁰ Thomas Merton, *A Search for Solitude: Pursuing the Monks True Life*, Vol. 3, ed. Lawrence S. Cunningham (San Francisco: HarperCollins Publishers, 1996): 235.

¹¹ *Ibid.*, 138, 188, & 192.

¹² Barry, *Allowing the Creator to Deal with the Creature*, 17. Barry further notes that the Franciscan provincial's decision to not allow Ignatius to remain caused Ignatius no small amount of turmoil. "The decision of the provincial in Jerusalem posed to Ignatius the question of trying to figure out how a decision clearly God's (his election to stay in Jerusalem) could be contrary to a decision clearly God's (the provincial's decision)...reflection on this question

from this angle, discerning God's will (the possibility that God could be personally concerned with the direction of the individual's life) is immediately alive and exciting, constantly sublime, and mysteriously significant.

In a very real sense we do not know exactly how to get a handle on the relationship between the mystery of our existence and the mystery of God's will. There seem to be equal chances that we will either prove to be a stumbling block for others, a scandal to God, and ourselves or to serve and glorify God through service of others. Hence, our decisions can entail setbacks or progress, harmony with ultimate truth or with the dissonance of illusion. Merton sums up this tension between authentic and inauthentic life in terms of a temptation that he noticed within his own particular vocation:

A great problem of the contemplative life. We pride ourselves in renouncing the *highest* natural goods, goods which in themselves are spiritual and easily supernaturalized and tend to lead us to God. For instance, married love in its most spiritual form—or art, music, scholarship, culture, and all the spiritual pleasures that go with them.

The renunciation of these things is not valid unless we are able to go beyond them and to fill the emptiness caused by their loss—to fill that emptiness with God Himself. Only a really spiritual man is capable of doing this—a highly spiritual man with very spiritual gifts.

But such gifts are often lacking in contemplatives. They often would be more truly contemplative if they accepted, or even *sought* these goods—I mean art, culture. For in “renouncing” them they often create void which they fill with something lower—preoccupation with business, or worse still, preoccupation with themselves, with their health, their hurt feelings, etc. Worst of all, those who get involved in immature and sentimental “friendships.”¹³

Merton insightfully relates the possible deceptions and the traps that one can easily fall into in simply setting out to pursue God and the ultimate truth in one's life. The authentic attempt to discern God's will involves the discernment of “spirits,” or the contest between good and bad thoughts for our allegiance, that often mislead us in discovering God's true will. This is

led to the eighth rule of the rules of discernment appropriate to the Second Week of the Exercises (#336) in which Ignatius cautions the exercitant to distinguish carefully the moment of consolation without previous cause from succeeding moments...Discernment takes place in the real world where all things are not possible and in the Catholic Church where legitimate authority may have the final word” (ibid., 75-76).

a dynamic and intense process that, as we will come to see, necessarily must be located within the persons living contact with the Creator and source of life if it is to be authentic and truly fruitful discernment.¹⁴ The source of these deceptions along the way are traditionally located in the realm of the demonic, the “principalities and powers” of which Paul speaks (cf. Eph 6:16). As John Climacus urges “We should not spar with demons. We should make outright war on them.”¹⁵ In turn, this presupposes an ultimate ground or rationale for the discernment process. The question as to the nature of this rationale for authentic discernment will become our main focus, rather than the specific, and important, techniques involved in the tradition of the discipline of discernment. That is to say, our primary concern is for investigating the conditions for the possibility and the ultimate rationale or essential ground for discernment rather than the more specific issue of discerning between good and bad spirits that may be at work on the individual. This being said, an overview of some of the fundamental sources and significant experiences characteristic of the life of St. Ignatius and of his spirituality found in the *Exercises* is appropriate.

It is important to contend with the broader context of Ignatian discernment, that is, the issue of *askesis* in general and Ignatius’ Exercises as belonging to this broader tradition. A mixture of his own conversion experiences with the church’s traditional sources of spirituality resulted in the development of Ignatius’ personal theological outlook and the spiritual practices he generated. To what degree he borrowed from traditional ideas concerning the spiritual life, and to what extent he relied strictly on his own intimate, mystical experience of God, seems a

¹³ Merton, *A Search for Solitude: Pursuing the Monks True Life*: 248.

¹⁴ Kennerth Leech, *True Prayer: An Invitation to Christian Spirituality* (San Francisco: Harper and Row, 1986):62. Leech writes: “There is a loss of wonder. So much in our society is artificial... The effect of the cult of the artificial in the spiritual life is seen in the fact that all too often there is a kind of lifelessness and immobility about ‘religious’

debatable point. That is to say, the importance of tracing the sources and experiences upon which Ignatius depended is largely a matter of one's focus when it comes to studying his teaching.

One emphasis tends to focus on the spiritual awakening, illumination or mystical experience of Ignatius as the source of all his consequent ideas about spiritual formation. Hence, there is a reticence about placing too much emphasis on similarities with particular, traditional sources. As de Guibert writes: "His borrowing of details relatively secondary in importance from the particular sources may indeed pique the curiosity of the learned; but these borrowings are something unessential for understanding the spirituality of a founder."¹⁶ And Hugo Rahner adds:

The question of historical sources has less importance with Ignatius than with any other saint—with the mystics' inimitable sureness of aim he could go to the sources and find confirmation of what, with certain obscure clarity, he already knew. . . . Nowhere, perhaps, so much as with the *Spiritual Exercises* does it seem so futile to go looking up the patristic sources for this or that doctrine. . . . Among the saints there is, surely, an affinity which reaches beyond the conditions of historical process"¹⁷

For Rahner it seems enough that Ignatius wanted to subject what he had written to precise theological revision at a later point. According to this view, the essential justification and explanation for Ignatius' work is located primarily in his mystical experience. (Also, part of Ignatius' concern with later revision is owing to troubles with the Spanish Inquisition; it became Ignatius' companion's job (Polanco) to add theological finesse to Ignatius' own 'certain obscure clarity'.)

The other emphasis, those tracing Ignatius of Loyola's teaching back to its roots in the historical traditions of spiritual life, can be represented by Hadot. Hadot sees affinities that even

people, a failure to be quite alive. Why? Because the concept of God, which was originally rooted in vital experience, has become mere lifeless jargon which corresponds with nothing in their experience."

¹⁵ John Climacus, *The Ladder of Divine Ascent*, trans. C. Luibheid (New York: Paulist Press, 1986):248.

¹⁶ Joseph De Guibert, trans. William J. Young, *The Jesuits: Their Spiritual Doctrine and Practice* (Chicago: Loyola University Press, 1964), 153.

¹⁷ Hugo Rahner, *Ignatius the Theologian*, trans. Michael Barry (New York: Herder and Herder, 1968), 46,51.

go beyond the patristic period and link Ignatius of Loyola to the exercises of the ancient philosophical tradition. Commenting on the inability of any religious tradition to meet the demands of contemporary spiritual needs, Hadot writes: “the methods and meditations set forth and practiced in Ignatius of Loyola’s *Exercitia spiritualia* were deeply rooted in the spiritual exercises of ancient philosophy . . . it is *philosophy itself* that the ancients thought of as a spiritual exercise.”¹⁸ Hadot never makes explicit the literal connections that he suggests exist between ancient philosophical exercises and Ignatius’; thus, his intention seems to be more that of using the familiar association of “spiritual exercises” exclusively with Ignatius as a point of departure for showing the link between the tradition of *philosophia* and Christian *askesis* in general. However, the implication of Hadot’s thought is that Ignatius is dependent on the early Christian theory and practices concerning the spiritual life, practices that in turn originally borrowed freely from the philosophical tradition and language.

[E]ver since the first centuries of the church’s existence, Christian spirituality has been the heir of ancient philosophy and its spiritual practices. There is thus nothing to prevent Ignatius from finding the methodology for his *Exercitia* within the Christian tradition itself. . . . [For] ancient spiritual exercises were preserved and transmitted by an entire current of ancient Christian thought: the current, namely, which defined Christianity itself as a philosophy.¹⁹

The point to note is that “spiritual exercises,” Christianized and made at least somewhat famous by Ignatius, actually have their deepest roots in ancient philosophical practice. Christianity absorbed the *philosophia* and, since Ignatius inherited Christianity, he also inherits these practices. For example, Ignatius’ spirituality lines up with the ancient philosophical (Stoic) practices like *prosoche* [cf.43] (attention and vigilance over oneself) and its goal of *apatheia* [cf.1;21;23] (tranquillity and equilibrium of mind; indifference to indifferent things). A

¹⁸ Pierre Hadot, *Philosophy as a Way of Life*, ed. Arnold I. Davidson, trans. Michael Chase (Oxford/Cambridge: Blackwell, 1995), 126; cf. 81-82.

spirituality emphasizing detached living in the present, summed up, for example, by Horace's *carpe diem*, has similarities with the spirit of Ignatius' *Exercises*.²⁰

Explicit connections between the early Christian era and Ignatius' thinking and spirituality as well as corollaries with the ancient philosophical exercises certainly exist. The fact that Ignatius read literature other than the bible during his conversion opens him up to the philosophical heritage latent in Christianity, regardless of his awareness of its presence. Indeed, this is to be expected because Christian spirituality must be incarnated in time according to the particular age of a given time and by the individuals living in a given historical circumstance.²¹ This spiritual task of each generation of Christians is never an easy one!

There were two chief literary sources from which Ignatius drew during his "Loyola" period where he recovered from a cannon wound received as a soldier in battle, and two from his stay at Montserrat/Manresa. The two from Loyola were *The Life of Christ* and the *Flos Sanctorum*; the two from Montserrat/Manresa were the *Imitation of Christ* and the *Book of Exercises for the Spiritual Life*, the last being by Garcia de Cisneros. Coupled with Ignatius' insights from prayer, these sources are the foundation for what Rahner referred to as the "certain obscure clarity" that nurtured Ignatius' tender principles of spirituality.

When Ignatius recovered enough to leave Loyola, he was already carrying around with him a copybook. This notebook contained the core principles of his spirituality, principles that continued to guide and console him strictly on a personal, private level. He would deepen these

¹⁹ Ibid., 127; cf., 107.

²⁰ See the Jesuit author Anthony DeMello, *Awareness: The Perils and Opportunities of Reality* (New York: Doubleday Image Book, 1992). DeMello speaks extensively about "awareness" and "detachment" in many of his writings.

²¹ Hadot, *Philosophy as a Way of Life*, 139. Jesus himself is rather notorious for not having left many directions about how to live out the life of a disciple. Hadot notes (and I agree) that scripture of itself is not a sufficient explanation for the actual spiritual exercises of Christianity: "By themselves, the texts from scripture could never

same principles during his stay at Manresa. The influence and interplay of these various currents incorporated by Ignatius are given different emphases. Ellard describes well the amalgam that wound up in Ignatius' copybook. Ellard writes:

. . . St. Ignatius was under the influence of a rather large number of different currents of spirituality. The two principal instruments of his conversion were the *Life of Christ* by Ludolph of Saxony and the *Lives of the Saints* by Jacopo de Voragine. The former was a Carthusian, and the latter a Dominican. Ignatius often thought: "St. Dominic did this, St. Francis that; should I not also do as they?" As matter of fact, for a time he thought of becoming a Carthusian. His favorite book throughout life was Thomas a Kempis; thus he put himself in debt to the "Devotio Moderna" that the Brothers of the Common Life and the monks of Windesheim were propagating. These three works were major forces in his formation. In addition to these he came under the personal influence of the Benedictines at Montserrat, of the Dominicans with whom he lived at Manresa, of the Franciscans, of the Hieronymites, of the Cistercians, and probably others also. . . . Ignatius fused two streams of spirituality which before him had come down in more or less parallel lines. . . . These traditions were those typified by Thomas a Kempis and St. Francis of Assisi. Ignatius took his *method* from the Christian Renaissance group and the *content* of his system from the Franciscan tradition, and then united them in his own original way.²²

It is most likely that Ignatius simply copied out what were useful and meaningful insights from his own conversion from these texts. Ignatius would later compile these source-notes, in the light of his defining mystical illumination on the Carorder, into a comprehensive text at Manresa. These notes would eventually become the *Exercises*. Ganss writes, quoting Polanco in

have supplied a method for practicing these exercises. Often, in fact, a given scriptural passage has only a distant connection with a particular spiritual exercise."

²² Augustine G. Ellard, "Ignatian Spirituality," *Review for Religious* 11 (1952): 125-126. See Hugo Rahner, *The Spirituality of St. Ignatius of Loyola*, trans. Francis John Smith (Westminster: The Newman Press, 1953): 78-79. Hugo Rahner downplays any connection between Ignatius and the *Devotio Moderna*. Commenting on an exaggeration of prophecies and general chaos in the Church just proceeding Ignatius' age, Rahner seems to want to stress Ignatius' timely genius for discernment: "The consequences flowing from this misguided flight into mysticism since the fourteenth century, the aftereffects of the Eckhart exaggerations, the movement of the "friends of God" (*Amici Dei*)—all were signs pointing to the mortal danger the Church had fallen into, a danger similar to that which menaced her very life during the two centuries when Gnosticism had flourished. Even the stress laid upon simplicity by the "modern devotion" could not wholly obviate this danger. In this respect, consider only the anti-Church mysticism of Wessel-Gansfort, with its over-refined "interiority," which made so deep an impression upon Martin Luther. Truth and falsehoods were jumbled together; but the power of discerning between the movements of good and bad spirits was absent, though the best of men of those times clamored for it. . . The need to distinguish between true and false spiritual coins had already been pointed out by S. Ignatius of Antioch; and in the history discernment of spirits the saying "Be ye clever money changers!" played a very characteristic role from Clement and Origen down through Jerome to Cassian, where it became part of the classical doctrine on the discernment of spirits—after which time it disappeared for a long while only to turn up once more in the chaotic conditions of the Reformation period."

part: “‘Ignatius began to make those exercises now contained in his book, and then to put them into writing for the instruction of others.’ He was writing, not for publication, but notes for his own use as a spiritual diary and aids in his apostolic conversations.”²³

The *Spiritual Exercises*, formed in Ignatius’ own conversion and discernment at Loyola and culminating in the illumination at Manresa, represent a manual for entering into the same process of purification and enlightenment for sincere and genuine service of God. In line with the essentials of the tradition of *philosophia*, as well as the Christian tradition of *askesis*, that has its roots in *philosophia*, the *Exercises* are meant to be a vital experience of spiritual therapy. As Barry notes:

In Manresa Ignatius had a number of mystical experiences which he describes in his *Autobiography*. These seem to have been the experiential substratum for the contemplation. Ignatius hopes that the exercitant will experience God’s creative touch, God’s desire and efforts to share with us as much of himself as he can. In effect, Ignatius hopes that the exercitant will experience the whole world and every moment in it as sacred, as ‘charged with the grandeur of God.’²⁴

Anyone who sincerely desires how best to please God would thus find in the *Exercises* the setting (the significant thirty-day retreat) as well as a “how to” guide. The guide, with such a goal in mind, requires action and engagement, though not without study and understanding. As Rahner notes further: “The earliest directories insist again and again that the Exercises are *to be made*; that, consequently, they are not a book to while away an idle hour, and should not fall into the hands of those who will give them but a cursory reading, culling from them such items only as appeal to their personal spiritual taste.”²⁵ The *Exercises* are not just about knowledge, but as in

²³ Ganss, *Ignatius of Loyola: The Spiritual Exercises and Selected Works*, 32.

²⁴ Barry, *Allowing the Creator to Deal with the Creature*:19.

²⁵ Hugo Rahner, *The Spirituality of St. Ignatius of Loyola*: 91.

the best traditions, about transformation of the person doing the exercise. Furthermore, this requires a vital experience of God.

At the same time, the *Exercises* are meant to be a flexible guide for the transformation of the person in relationships to God's will for that person: "To overcome oneself, and to order one's life, without reaching a decision through some disordered affection" [21]. The overarching goal of the *Exercises* is found in the "Principle and Foundation" [23].²⁶ The ultimate goal is outlined (eternal fulfillment as an earthly purpose); the means to reach that goal is given (creation and creatures rightly used); the attitude for rightly using created things is encouraged (using them if they help toward the ultimate goal and dispensing with them if they do not: indifference); and a reason for decision-making is provided (whatever option that is more to the greater glory and service of God, the "greater good," or *magis*.)²⁷ The ideal for engaging in this process is the retreat setting with a spiritual director, that is, the "thirty-days retreat."²⁸ (There are other options as are mentioned in Annotations 18 & 19 of the *Exercises*.) Hence, the handbook of Ignatian *askesis* falls respectively into a "four-week" structure, with guidelines for flexibility built into that structure. The ultimate goal of the *Exercises* is summed up as "Service

²⁶ See John Hardon, "Ignatian Spirituality Today" *Listening* 26, No. 3 (1991):200-210. This is a good overview of the essential elements of the *Exercises*.

²⁷ Walter J. Ong, "A.M.D.G.": Dedication or Directive?" *Review for Religious* 11 (1952):257-264. Ong suggests that the original formula for dedications was simply "Jesus," and not "A.M.D.G." ("I H S," representing the name "Jesus," was said to have been inscribed in golden letters on the heart of Ignatius of Antioch, Ignatius of Loyola's namesake. The Romans who martyred Ignatius of Antioch were to have ripped out his heart and found it so.) The maxim "To the Greater Glory of God" has roots in Christian tradition far older than Ignatius; but, as used today, is chiefly linked to him as a form of dedication; Ong maintains that Ignatius meant "Greater" to be directive, involving making a choice and not merely as a motto for dedications: "That the expression is thus polarized as a principle of decision rather than as a dedication of existing reality can be confirmed in this same part of the Exercises concerning the 'election.' For, in this very context, when Ignatius comes to speak of something other than the making of a choice, he drops the 'majorem' to say that man exists 'for the glory of God. . . . [To] the greater glory of God' is not a mere label, but the baring of one's soul" (pp. 261-262, 264).

²⁸ Leech, *True Prayer*: 53. Leech specifies that . . . spiritual guides are marked by *discernment*. Throughout the whole tradition the key word is *discernment* (*diakrisis*). Many Christians, according to the teaching of the Desert Fathers, become casualties through excess and through wrong paths. To travel the spiritual way without a guide is dangerous

in the Church, under the banner of the cross, for the glory of the Father.”²⁹ *Como un noble caballero de Christo!*

We find the disciplined or intentional life in Ignatius’ *Exercises*: self-awareness, indifference to indifferent things and so purity of vision (*apatheia*). Essentially, one’s life is meant to be initiated and transformed in Christ through spiritual practice or exercise:

The Jesuit ideal stands for “disciplined service,” which is, however, “the boundless love of the ‘more’ confined within the limits of the discretion of obedience” . . . Discipline is the virtue of the soldier who is in actual combat with Satan, a soldier who knows no other way of getting the better of his unscrupulous and disconcerting foe “with his snares and chains” . . . It is precisely this clear-visioned liberty of spirit that is at the root of Ignatian discipline and its absolute renunciation of all that savors of the world.³⁰

Ignatius’ exercises link up two fundamental streams: freedom of spirit and the tradition of being able to discern or use that freedom rightly, that is, for one’s ultimate meaning and fulfillment in God’s service in this life. The exercitant (or retreatant) is introduced to the way of freedom and equipped with the means for making the right choices along the way.³¹ This is the essential aspect of the *Exercises*: freedom to respond to the movement of the Holy Spirit at the level of the individual, within the tradition of the Church.

As intimated earlier, it is essential to appreciate the Ignatian ground for discerning God’s will, that is, Ignatius’ fundamentals of “consolation(s)” We will investigate the idea of Ignatian

and can lead to madness. Christians who are serious about their faith ought to take very seriously the question of seeking personal spiritual guidance.”

²⁹ Hugo Rahner, *The Spirituality of St. Ignatius of Loyola*, 111.

³⁰ *Ibid.*, 14 & 44.

³¹ Hadot, *Philosophy as a way of Life*, 92-93. Speaking of the Socratic method of dialogue, Hadot writes: “What counts is not the solution of a particular problem, but the road traveled to reach it; a road along which the interlocutor, the disciple, and the reader form their thought, and make it more apt to discover the truth by itself . . . [dialectical exercise] is the spirit’s itinerary towards the divine.” The road traveled in the *Exercises* is between ‘unctio’ and ‘tradition’ As Rahner notes: “We may quote St. Ignatius. ‘The Spiritual Exercises are the most important spiritual weapon in the armory of the spiritual life, and every retreat master should make himself an expert in the dexterous use of them.’ This dexterity can be achieved in two ways, by *unctio* and *tradition*, that is, the grace of personal experience and the study of retreat technique; or, to continue quoting from the Saint, one must have made the Exercises in such a way as to experience their full effect (*postquam expertus fuerit*), and one must be able to give

ultimate ground for discernment of God's will. We will contrast the Ignatian sense of this ultimate rationale or ground in light of the more ancient traditions. We will draw comparisons with the desert tradition on discernment, as represented by Antony and John Climacus.

Discernment techniques involve the process of identifying the various "spirits" that often lay claim to be the voice to be followed by the person, indeed, to be the very "voice of God." As is recorded in Antony's words: "for discrimination between the presence of the good and the evil is easy and possible, when God so grants it...Certainly, one must pray, as I said earlier, to receive the gift of discernment of spirits, so that we might not, as Scripture says, *believe every spirit.*"³² Antony intimately links the experience of good with God's presence, and the experience of bad with the diabolical. But, this pushes the question of discernment to a deeper level. How does one know what is good and what is bad? For Antony, the obvious bad spirits are those things which would tempt the solitary ascetic to despair of and abandoned the discipline, sordid thoughts represented, for example, in the vision of the woman (*Life*, 5) and a black boy (*Life*, 6). Even as he offers a possible resolution, Antony admits that the dynamics of discernment can entail the more profound, subtle problematic of deciding between the presence of good or evil. A person can experience trouble or fear even when good spirits are the ones present to the person. Presumably this can happen because the spiritual plane is so much outside of most people's daily life and expectation. Anthony responds that "The fear of those people does not stem from the soul's cowardice, but from the awareness of the presence of superior beings. Such, then, is the vision of the holy ones."³³

a full account of them (*reddere rationem*). Spiritual experience and study are the springs which feeds one's skill in giving the Exercises." Hugo Rahner, *The Spirituality of St. Ignatius of Loyola*, 90.

³² Athanasius, *Life of Antony*:chps 35&38.

³³ *Ibid.*, chp. 35.

As Antony said, the gift of discernment comes from God. In light of the more subtle problematics of discernment in general, we might wonder further at the basis, or ground of experience, in which the gift is given. For Antony, the gift of discernment cannot be separated from his total life's vocation (noted as lasting from when he was about 20 years-old until he died at 105 years). At the end of his life he is at the height of his spiritual abilities, such as clairvoyance: "this marvel occurred only to Antony, for while sitting in the mountain, he kept his heart alert, and the Lord showed him distant happenings" (*Life*, 77). We do get some suggestions at the deeper experience on which Antony depended and to which he referred all of his spiritual gifts, including that of discernment. (There is a greater issue here than simply "giving God the credit.")

This ground, or ultimate source of validation can be sketched and characterized in light of his ever-deepening journey within himself, typified in his literal journey to the "inner mountain." It seems that at the most inward part of his personality is where Antony defers in measuring the authenticity of his life in pursuing God's will. Thus the journey to the "inner mountain" lends itself to an allegorical interpretation as the journey within to the depths of the human person's heart, or soul, where God is most securely dwelling and accessible in mystical experience. We see this suggested by the "voice" that Antony heard in his deepening search for solitude: "If you truly desire to be alone, go now into the inner mountain" (*Life*, 49). Antony, now an old man, "was alone in the inner mountain devoting himself to prayers and discipline" (*Life*, 51). Antony came to dwell constantly at the font of a mystical experience of his indwelling with God. "The Lord has wiped clean the items dating from his birth, but from the time he became a monk, and devoted himself to God, you can take account" (*Vita*, 65). The end or goal of Antony's life is given most significance and weight. The most likely process, all considerations of the

development of the ideal monastic life aside,³⁴ is that Antony's initiation was an ever-deepening one, reaching its deepest levels at the end of his long, long life.

Antony's religious quest for God was a slow, zealously steady progress in the spiritual life, witnessed to by miracles, spiritual abilities and by others that sought to emulate him. This path of steady progression is suggested, as well, by his deepening devotion to remaining within, the "inner mountain," returning only to share, as a father to inquiring children, "the fruits of my experience" (*Life*, 16) with those not yet initiated into the holiest mysteries of life, those staying at the "outer mountain" (see *Life*, 14). "Therefore," Antony recalls for all, "we must rush back to the mountain, like a fish to the sea—so that we might not, by remaining among you, forget the things within" (*Life*, 85; cf., 20).

What the "things within" actually are is only hinted at. In his early efforts in seeking God alone, Antony was zealous with determination to not be separated from the love of Christ. "Here I am—Antony!" he would exclaim to the diabolical forces at work upon and him, "I do not run from your blows, for even if you give me more, nothing shall separate me from the love of Christ" (*Life*, 9). It would appear that his same profound, adamant conviction of being loved in Christ grew over a very long life into a calm and constant companionship with that vital, experienced source of love and spiritual wisdom. The thing, at bottom, to marvel at in his life is the great capacity to know God that he came to realize in the intimacy of his own depths: "marvel at the Lord, for he has shown favor to us in the measure of our capacity for knowing him" (*Life*, 62). We can conclude that this is the source against which Antony must have measured more subtle decisions, for example, between the two goods of remaining in the inner mountain, immersed in the inward dwelling divinity, or to go to the outer mountain to share his

³⁴ It would appear that there were many types of ascetics during Antony's sojourn, and that none of them had

profound experiences with others. (In his earlier years he had to be forcefully pried away from his zealous quest for God, see *Life*, 14). We only catch a glimpse at what might be the ground of this divine, illuminating and grounding experience and encounter within the human person, that is, as taking place in the obscure “intellectual part of the soul” (see *Life*, 5&20).

Ignatius outlined three basic sources of thoughts or spirits that are operating in the dynamic of human discernment and choice: “one kind is my own, which arises strictly from my own freedom and desire; and the other two come from outside myself, the one from the good spirit and the other from the evil” [31].³⁵ Ignatius considers the topic of discernment in the “Election” [169-188], in his “Rules for Discernment” for the first week [313-327], and in the “Rules for Discernment” for the second week [328-336]. In the second week Ignatius gets to the heart of the issue of the criterion or ground of discernment proper [176], as though seeking an irreducible first principle for knowing that an inspiration is in fact from God alone, that is, as not from self or the devil. Karl Rahner comments:

Is there for Ignatius a fundamental evidence and certainty which is presupposed by the various rules and techniques for the Discernment of Spirits and which performs the same function as the first principles of logic and ontology do for the rest of knowledge and which, distinct from these rules, makes them possible, so that they are the application and regulate putting into practice this fundamental certitude? The rules would thus represent as it were a supernatural logic and themselves refer back to their own “first principle” Clearly Ignatius has something of this sort in mind in the Rules of Discernment of Spirits in the Second Week. . . . For Ignatius it is only in the second week that there is an Election properly so called. In the first it is only possible to make resolutions which are simply the application of the general rules of Christian morality [such as Antony’s initial calling?] to one’s own life. It is only in the second week, therefore, that the Discernment of Spirits which is necessary for making an Election must appear.³⁶

solidified into a single tradition accepted as the ideal monastic habit. See *Life*, 4.

³⁵ See Cassian *Conference* 1.19 for the same observation about the sources of spirits.

³⁶ Karl Rahner, *The Dynamic Element in the Church*, trans. Francis John Smith (Westminster: The Newman Press, 1953): 130-131.

Let us turn briefly to considering the “second time” [176] of “election” with regards to discernment of spirits through “consolation(s)” before trying to draw some comparisons with the other representative of the desert tradition, John Climacus, on the same topic.

The problem with discerning a spiritual inspiration is that, as Rahner points out, it either is the effect of supernatural grace (though one could not be certain of it if so); or a preternatural phenomenon, a miracle (but this is outside the normal life of grace); or from another created reality (but a created reality can be produced by another created reality which begs the question of the actual source of a given inspiration).³⁷ How, then, can any individual hope really and truly to “know” God’s will? The fact is, one needs to arrive at some original, irreducible ground for the discernment of spirits. The question becomes, can this ground be identified and understood?

Ignatian discernment, in Rahner’s terms, appears as the ‘logic of discovering God’s will.’ Discernment is not fundamentally the calculation of discursive, general principles; rather, “It is a logic of concrete individual knowledge which can only be attained in the actual accomplishment of concrete cognition itself, in this instance knowledge of the particular will of God addressed to the individual as such.”³⁸ How can one know as a certain and genuine conviction that their life is in direct relation to the will of God? Such certitude, as a phenomenon of divine freedom and love immediately (of its own accord) touching the human person’s depth of existence as a created, free and loving spirit, can only be known through the “consolation without previous cause” (*consolación a la ánima sin causa precedente* [330]) or “consolation without cause” (*consolación sin causa* [336]). As Rahner states: “[W]hat is individually, vitally and above all religiously and morally important can in principle only be discovered by the logic which Ignatius makes explicit and brings to our attention in the Rules for Election and in the Rules for the

³⁷ Ibid., 123.

Discernment of Spirits.”³⁹ Consolations, effected by the prospective placement of oneself in the situation of having made a particular, objective choice [176] are measured by an original, that is, mystical, consolation from God [330, 336]. Stated in other terms, the religiously mature individual discovers the law of God in their life not as a compulsion, but as in intimate, internal force. Barry sees the *Spiritual Exercises* as a means of helping exercitants to union with God in action.” He adds that

for Ignatius, consolation was not first and foremost a pleasant and moving emotion nor encouragement to continue on a chosen path or help in prayer; consolations includes all of these, but first and foremost it is an experience that makes it possible to know and choose the will of God.⁴⁰

The Ignatian ground for discernment is some form of mystical experience of God. In fact, this experience is a part and parcel for making the *Exercises* in their fullest and intended sense. We want to make the case that an essential part of this mystical experience is a vital encounter with the unconditional love of God for the individual. As Barry writes:

Ignatius came to believe that the trinity wants each of us to live our lives in order to be part of the dream of God, the kingdom of heaven. We cannot, therefore, ultimately be happy and at peace in this life unless our lives are in tune with God’s dream for the universe and for each one of us. If we have this experience of God as the Creator who loves us into existence for community with God, then we will have a positive spiritual identity; we will know that we are beloved of God, the apple of God’s eye. I have called this experience the affective Principle and Foundation needed to make the *Spiritual Exercises*.⁴¹

In more technical terms we can say that certitude with regards to God’s personal will for someone is thus grounded in the mystical experience, as a non-objective intuition, if you will (“faith”), of God’s Spirit freely relating to the open and available human spirit. An ultimate presupposition for deciding is reached as the “consolation without cause;” consequent decisions

³⁸ Ibid., 169.

³⁹ Ibid., 169.

⁴⁰ Barry, *Allowing the Creator to Deal with the Creature*: 78.

⁴¹ Ibid.: 50.

can only be verified, not “proven,” against an ultimate experience of God. Such an encounter generates what Barry refers to as a “positive spiritual identity.” Decision, as one might expect, is still a matter of faith, but of disciplined, scrutinizing faith, born in love. Leech notes: “knowledge and discernment must be held together by love. Knowledge without love is very harmful...the emphasis is on the need for a Christian to combine knowledge with clear insight and awareness within a life that is [generated and] shaped by love.”⁴² Only in this sense can one validate or verify that the consolations that accompany the anticipation of an actual choice are not from self, or Satan, but from God alone. The deep, personal, and essential experience of God’s unconditional love serves as the ground for choosing and is that which the projected concrete object of choice is measured against, what Barry terms the “*affective* Principle and Foundation.”⁴³ The practical Christian life, one that involves right choice, brings up the need for true discernment and places us in the arena where, as Rahner asserts above, Ignatius still offers us much by way of an integral *askesis*.⁴⁴ This deepest sense of consolation(s), as an ultimate rational for genuine discernment, offers itself as an essential tool for living the Christian

⁴² Leech, *True Prayer*: 65.

⁴³ Barry, *Allowing the Creator to Deal with the Creature*: 9. “When people have an affective Principal and Foundation, they desire to be united with God and to know God’s dreams for themselves and for the universe. Before I take someone on for the full Exercises, I try to ascertain that he or she has had sufficient positive experiences of God so that the desire is present.” I think Jesus’ “Jordan Experience” (see MT 3-12-17) parallels the idea we are trying to get across here. In that one experience, Jesus’ whole life and ministry was grounded in a personal affirmation of God’s unconditional love for him, that is, of God’s favor and delight in him as God’s beloved son. All Jesus’ consequent actions flowed, and we can reasonably say, referred back to that grounding experience. Presumably we may have to find ways to help facilitate and make possible such experience’s in people’s lives that have yet to encounter God as such. Barry suggests this as well in saying “Now they [mystical experiences] could be used as a kind of touchstone for discerning new experiences of God. However, they might need the help of another person like a spiritual director to see the possibility of such use...The touchstone experience at the river Cardoner enabled [Ignatius] to discern wheat from chaff in other experiences.” He adds, “we need to savor and nourish the memory of such experiences and tell them to our spiritual director...Remembering and telling about profound experiences of closeness to the Lord can be the royal road to an ever-deepening intimacy” (100-101).

⁴⁴ Rahner, *The Dynamic Element in the Church*: 169. He writes that “An ascetical theology can only be conceived as an integral part of moral theology. If such pages are lacking to it and yet are only found in very faulty form in practical ascetical literature, it is not to be denied that the theology of the schools still can and ought to go to school to this master of life.”

discipline of finding the will of God . . . not just in the sense of finding God's will for a weighty decision, but towards finding God in all things and at all times thereafter.

The central theme of Ignatian discernment, that stems from the logic of the "consolation without cause," also has similarities to the idea of discernment found in John Climacus' *The Ladder of Divine Ascent*. . This characteristic aspect is the ability to find God in all things. To reiterate the Ignatian position:

This fundamental formula of Ignatian spirituality was doubtless rooted in his mystical experience. It is, in fact, the attempt of the mystic to translate his experience for others and make them share in his grace, as Nadal once said. This finding of God in everything, however, is only the persistent putting into practice of that supernatural concrete logic, of discovering the will of God through the experimental test of consolation. The particular that is met with or that must be chosen, done or undergone, is placed within this pure openness and receptivity of the consciously experienced transcendence towards God, and kept there. No wonder, then, that everything then becomes transparent in relation to God, that everything is found in God and God in everything, for everything is seen in the ever-open supernatural transcendence founded on the theological virtues and no longer obstructed by the particular object. We would have to note how important it was for Ignatius in his mysticism that he was able to find God at every moment, when he wished. In other words, it was possible for him to preserve that interior openness effected by God, in his dealings with this world. And for that reason he could carry out in everyday life, though, of course, in varying grades of intensity, the "experimental test" of consolation, confronting the particular matter with the utter openness towards God, by the method which he describes as the Method of making an Election.⁴⁵

John Climacus affords a very good parallel when he says, for example:

To put the matter generally, discernment is—and is recognized to be—a solid understanding of the will of God in all times, in all places, in all things; and it is found only among those who are pure in heart, in body, and in speech. . . . Discernment is an uncorrupted heart and conscience. It is pure perceptionIt is characteristic of the perfect that they always know whether a thought comes from within themselves, or from God, or from the demons. Remember that the demons do not automatically propose evil at the outset. Here we have a problem truly hard to penetrate.⁴⁶

⁴⁵ Ibid., 155-156.

⁴⁶ John Climacus, *The Ladder of Divine Ascent*, 229, 255. In the section "On Expert Discernment" of "Step 26" there are extensive and striking parallels with Ignatian discernment (pp. 244ff.).

Most people cannot presume to emulate the *Life of Antony* or Climacus.⁴⁷ Part of the virtue of Ignatius's method of discernment is to make available in a relatively short period (thirty days) both an ideal setting and method to hopefully have a touchstone, grounding experience in their deepest, truest part of their self with God's which generates a "positive spiritual identity" and shows itself in the possibility of knowing certainly God's will from then on. This represents a possibility of being guided to the encounter of God in a "Jordan Experience." Consequently, one is to go and live that precious experience as a daily call, always measuring each movement of spirit against the "consolation without cause." This can be said to be the same effort of a lifetime in the Desert Tradition or *askesis*.

There is a different emphasis concerning discernment within the desert tradition than that of Ignatius of Loyola's. Often the important emphasis for discernment in the desert was on reaching the mean so as to live the spiritual discipline moderately, and likewise to persevere in the calling.⁴⁸ Ignatius' contribution is to have *explicitly* placed discernment at the heart and beginning of the intentional life. The encounter with God (consolation without cause) is the certain origin of the initial thought or inspiration, and then one is to measure the concrete decisions against this "pure perception," that is, a mystical experience of God's love, through consolations (and desolations given the other possibility) [176]. The object of the Election is always a means back into God and out into God's greater glory and service. The ground of this Election is not an object at all, it is God's very self, which I think is what Rahner is getting at. Bedde Griffiths makes a similar point when he writes that mystical experience "is not a theory,

⁴⁷ Leech, *True Prayer*: 177. "What does the desert mean in today's world? It is unlikely, for most people in the west, to mean a literal desert. It must mean solitude, silence, withdrawal. It stands for the perpetual need in prayer to leave the strife and tumult and retire to a solitary place."

⁴⁸ John Cassian, *Conferences*, trans. Colm Luibheid (New York: Paulist Press, 1985): 2.19. Cassian says "So, then, we must seek in all humility to acquire the grace of discernment which can keep us safe from the two kind of excess.

which would be a product of the rational mind, but an experience. The mind, turning back on itself, knows itself intuitively...the knower, the known and the act of knowing are all one.”⁴⁹

This is hinted at in Antony’s “intellectual part of the soul,” the within or “inner mountain” which gives birth to the pure heart. Where Climacus makes a similar claim is in calling true discernment “pure perception.”

A difference between the Desert Tradition and Ignatius can be seen in the relative value of explicit recourse granted in Ignatian discernment to the mystical horizon as the first step and only ground for particular concrete choice. For example, it may be said that whereas Antony situates himself more profoundly in mystical experience toward the end of life, after years of *askesis*, Ignatius of Loyola places mystical experience at the very beginning of the authentic search for God, and as a necessary prerequisite, if you will.⁵⁰ This emphasis may in fact be due to the context of each spiritual tradition. Antony’s choice was clearer in some sense. He was choosing not between various positive forms of monastic tradition but between a life of secularism and one of asceticism. This sheds light on the fact that much of his discernment revolves around the issue of maintaining the discipline he was, in part, inventing. Ignatius had

For there is an old saying: ‘Excesses meet.’” This is similar to the Ignatian idea of ‘right use of means.’ See the “Principle and Foundation,” [23].

⁴⁹ Bede Griffiths, *The Marriage of East and West* (Springfield, IL: Templegate Publishers, 1982):91. For a comprehensive consideration of the intricate and subtle problems between mystical experience and its various methods of interpretation see “Appendix: Theoretical Foundations. The Modern Study of Mysticism” in Bernard McGinn, *The Foundations of Christian Mysticism: Origins to the Fifth Century* (New York: Crossroads, 1997): 265-343.

⁵⁰ Ignatius of Loyola, *Spiritual Exercises*. Ignatius considers the various arenas of election stating that “In the case of an unchangeable election, once it has been made there is nothing further to elect, since the first one cannot be undone. Examples are marriage, priesthood, and the like. But if this election was not made properly and in a rightly ordered way, free from disordered affections, the only thing that can be considered is to repent and to explore how to lead a good life within the decision made. An election of this kind does not seem to be a divine vocation, since it is something improperly ordered and indirect. This is a way in which many are in error; for they take up a predisposed or bad choice and then regard it as a divine vocation. For every vocation from God is something pure, stainless, and without mingling of the flesh or any other poorly ordered affection” [172]. Though we are more sympathetic in our day with bad original choices that come to light only after the fact of the choice, we can still appreciate the gravity of discerning rightly in the first place. He seems to be saying that if you made an essentially bad choice about a state of

many more presumably “good” options to discern between in living out his quest for God’s will, much like our own times. This helps explain why Ignatius might want to locate the value and necessity of irreducible mystical experience at the beginning of one’s discernment process. It is certainly significant that out of this plurality of religious life already established by the time of Ignatius, traditions he was free to choose from, he created an entirely novel order, that of the Society of Jesus!

In summary, Ignatius’ life experiences, his own discernment process and mystical illumination that spanned the time from Loyola and Manresa, offer a sense of where his essential method for discerning God’s will might be coming from. It was at Manresa where the notes that became the backbone of the *Exercises* were written. Most commentators acknowledge three primary literary sources that Ignatius is likely in debt to: Ludolph of Saxony’s *Life of Christ*; the *Flos Sanctorum* (a book about saints translated into Spanish from the *Legenda Aurea*) stemming from Jacobus de Voragine; and Thomas a Kempis’ *Imitation of Christ*, which is said to have been Ignatius’ all-time favorite book. (One could likely add a fourth influence: the *Ejercitatorio de la vida espirituale*, by the fifteenth century Benedictine Abbot of Montserrat, Garcia de Cisneros.) The general thrust of the spirituality and theology of the *Exercises* is the disciplined, chivalrous service of God, through the Church, towards the ‘more’ or *magis*. Some elements from the common heritage of the *philosophia* can be seen (*prosche*; *apatheia*) in Ignatius’ spiritual exercises; as Hadot asserts, Ignatius belongs to the common heritage of Christian *askesis*. Karl Rahner offered some insight for the rationale or logic concerning the Ignatian ground of discernment. Certitude in knowing God’s will must rest solely on a direct, mystical, encounter with God whose primary effect is consolation without cause, that is, upon some depth-

life, you will have to live with it; one ought to have discerned God’s will in the first place. The assertion seems to be

experience of God's unconditional love for the individual, one that generates a "positive spiritual identity." Concrete choice is then constantly tried against this essential experience for subjective verification through consolations concerning the objective, concrete, particular choice to be made [176]. Rahner referred to this as the "logic of discernment." A brief account of a more ancient characterization of discernment, with which Ignatius has similarities, was given above, that is, Antony's "within" and John Climacus' idea of "pure perception." An explicit difference between Ignatian discernment and the desert tradition was noted, i.e., Ignatius' method of discernment as grounded in the mystical horizon, so to speak. (This was not to claim that any of the desert ancients either were or were not familiar with what we call "mystical" experience. I only meant to emphasize that for Ignatius, as Karl Rahner argues, it is the only real possibility for certainty in discerning a spiritual inclination as truly coming from God. This is not made explicit in Antony or Climacus. Hence, one might ask, for example, did Antony in fact make the God-centered choice when he initially dispensed with his *arourae* (see *Life*, 1-3) and headed off for the disciplined life in the first palace?

The mystical ground (some profound personal experience of God's unconditional love) for certitude regarding God's will at the level of individual choice appears to be a reasonable position to take in considering the question of authentic discernment in both the Desert Tradition (where this ground is implied) and the Ignatian one (where it is made explicit). Karl Rahner's comments supported this particular investigation and interpretation⁵¹ Some of the chivalrous, courtly and otherwise military-like aspects of Ignatius Exercises might prove a problem given

that many never stop to consider God's will before entering their choice.

⁵¹ Karl Rahner, *The Dynamic Element in the Church*, 158. He says: "The object of the Election is always a means to God (n.169), not God himself. Consequently that object is finite and different from the term of the fundamental and divinely-effected consolation which represents the first of all principles of Election. This consolation never therefore has as its direct and genuine object the means, which is the concern of the Election. Secondly the starting-point and

today's sensibilities, but because of the context of freedom and the fundamentals of God's direct inspiration, Ignatian discernment seems worth critical and intelligent consideration as a model for discernment in a time when we are faced with many and various choices. Ignatius' is also a model that belongs to the development of the overall tradition of *askesis*, or Exercises. As Karl Rahner stated earlier, the fundamentals of Ignatian discernment have an important future because, "the Spiritual Exercises intend to allow the person to experience a radical immediacy to God, which, for Ignatius, ultimately supports and embraces everything Christian and ecclesial. Ignatius is convinced that such a "mystical" immediacy to God is really possible."⁵² One can make a real discovery in prayer and in relationship with God only by discerning or discovering the concrete decision that proceeds from that contact. Ignatius' innovations and insights concerning spiritual discernment are worthy of respect; but they must also be re-lived and constantly re-experienced to be effective.⁵³ This is precisely the grounding and vitality lacking in much of contemporary Christian experience of God. Contemporary needs for vital spiritual experience and action, challenges that are often not being met, can find recourse in Ignatius' Exercises. For Christians, the desire for such experience can discover a possible realization in a retreat setting and with a worked out rationale and method in Ignatius of Loyola's *Spiritual Exercises*.

Bede Griffiths wondered if the vital and life-giving myths of religion could survive in modern times. He thought that the way to transcend the hopelessness prevalent in our world

ultimate criterion of the consolations themselves and of the Election built on them can only be this really fundamental and certainly divinely-effected consolation."

⁵² Karl Rahner, the "Forward" in Harvey D. Eagan, *The Spiritual Exercises and the Mystical Horizon*: xiii.

⁵³ Michael J. Buckley, "The Structures For the Discernment of Spirits," 37. He states "Without hesitation and arrogance and also without naïve syncretism, the vocation of the contemporary Church is to discover the presence of the liberating Spirit of God within the most radical diverse religious forms and expressions. And for this urgent task, the Society of Jesus should be able to present greater depth in understanding the Rules for Discernment of Spirits."

today is to begin with mystical experience that underlies the Great Religions of history. He writes that if religion is to be revitalized in the present reality that

this cannot be the work of 'reason,' of learning and scholarship [the active intellect]; it has to grow out of mystical experience [passive intellect], in which the primordial meaning of the ancient symbols is recovered and their relevance in the world today is discerned. It is this process of 'de-mythologization' and reinterpretation in the light of profound mystical experience which religion has to undergo.⁵⁴

Or in the words of another modern Christian mystic: "Gone are the days when "mysticism" was for me a matter of eager speculative interest. Now, because this is my life, it is torment to think about. Like being in the pangs of childbirth and reading an essay on mother love written by a spinster."⁵⁵

⁵⁴ Griffiths, *Marriage of East and West*: 175. He understands "myth" as "the language of imaginative insight into ultimate reality" (Ibid., 181).

⁵⁵ Merton, *A Search for Solitude*:36.

Bibliography

- Barry, William A. *Allowing the Creator to Deal with the Creature: An Approach to the Spiritual Exercises of St. Ignatius of Loyola*. Mahwah: Paulist Press, 1988.
- Brou, Alexandre, S.J. *Ignatian Methods of Prayer*. Trans. W.J. Young. Milwaukee: The Bruce Publishing Company, 1949.
- Buckley, Michael J. "The Structure for the Rules for Discernment of Spirits." *The Way*, Supplement 20 (Autumn, 1973): 19-37.
- Calaveras, José P. *Ejercicios Directorio y Documentos de San Ignacio: Glosa y Vocabulario De Los Ejercicios Espirituales*. Barcelona: Editorial Balmes, 1958.
- Cassian, John. *Conferences*. Trans. Colm Luibheid. New York: Paulist Press, 1985.
- Climacus, John. *The Ladder of Divine Ascent: Step 26*. Trans. Colm Luibheid. New York: Paulist Press, 1986.
- Cusson, Giles. *The Spiritual Exercises Made in Everyday Life: A Method and a Biblical Interpretation*. St. Louis, 1989.
- Doncoeur, Paul, S.J. *The Heart of Ignatius*. Trans. Henry St. C. Lavin, S.J. Baltimore: Helicon Press, 1959.
- Egan, Harvey D. *The Spiritual Exercises and the Ignatian Mystical Horizon*. St. Louis, 1976.
- Ellard, Augustine G., S.J. "Ignatian Spirituality." *Review for Religious* 11 (1952): 125-142.
- English, John, S.J. *Choosing Life*. New York: Paulist Press, 1978.
- Ganss, George E., S.J. "Active Life or Contemplative Life?" *Review for Religious* 22 (1963): 53-66.
- _____. Ed. *Ignatius of Loyola: The Spiritual Exercises and Selected Works*. New York: Paulist Press, 1991.
- _____. Trans. *The Spiritual Exercise of Saint Ignatius*. Chicago: Loyola University, 1992.
- Gonzalez Faus, Jose I. *La experiencia espiritual de los Ejercicios de san Ignacio*. Spain: Editorial Sal Terrae, 1990.
- Griffiths, Bede. *The Marriage of East and West*. Springfield, IL: Templegate Publishers, 1982.
- Guibert, Joseph, S.J. *The Theology of the Spiritual Life*. Trans. Paul Barrett. New York: Sheed and Ward, 1953.
- Hardon, John A., S.J. *All My Liberty: Theology of the Spiritual Exercises*. Westminster: The Newman Press, 1959.
- _____. "Ignatian Spirituality Today." *Listening* 26, No. 3 (Fall, 1991): 200-210.
- Harvanek, Robert F., S.J., Director. *Contemporary Thought and the Spiritual Exercises of St. Ignatius of Loyola*. Chicago: Loyola University, 1963.
- Ignatius of Loyola. *Obras Completas*, trans. Ignacio Iparraguirre y P. Cándido de Dalamases. Madrid: Biblioteca de Autores Cristianos, 1952.
- Iparraguirre Ignacio. *Vocabulario De Ejercicios Espirituales: Ensayo de Hermenéutica Ignaciana*. Roma: Centrum Ignatianum Spiritualitatis, 1978.
- Jurado, Manuel Ruiz. *Ignacio de Loyola, Ejercicios Espirituales: Introducción, texto, notas y Vocabulario por Cándido de Dalmasas, S.J.* Santander; Sal Terrae, 1987.
- Leech, Kenneth. *True Prayer: An Invitation to Christian Spirituality*. San Francisco: Harper and Row: 1986.
- Lonsdale, David, S.J. *Eyes to See, Ears to Hear*. Chicago: Loyola University Press, 1990.
- McGinn, Bernard. *The Foundations of Christian Mysticism: Origins to the Fifth Century*. New York: Crossroads, 1997.
- Ong, Walter J., S.J. "A.M.D.G.: Dedication or Directive?" *Review for Religious* 11 (1952): 257-264.
- Rahner, Hugo, S.J. *The Spirituality of St. Ignatius of Loyola*. Trans. Francis John Smith, S.J. Westminster: The Newman Press, 1953.

- _____. *Ignatius the Theologian*. Trans. Michael Barry. New York: Herder and Herder, 1968.
- Rahner, Karl, S.J. *The Dynamic Element in the Church*. New York: Herder and Herder, 1964.
- _____. *Spiritual Exercises*. Trans. Kenneth Baker, S.J. New York: Herder and Herder, 1965.
- Tetlow, Joseph A. *Choosing Christ in the World: Directing the Spiritual Exercises according to Annotations Eighteen and Nineteen. A Handbook*. St. Louis, 1989.
- Toner, Jules. *A Commentary on St. Ignatius Loyola's Rules for the Discernment of Spirits*. St. Louis, 1982.
- _____. *Discerning God's Will: Ignatius Loyola's Teaching on Christian Decision Making*. St. Louis, 1990.
- Vandenbroucke, Francois, and Joseph Pegon. *Discernment of Spirits*. Trans. Innocentia Richards, from *Dictionnaire de Spiritualite* 3, cols 1222-1292. Collegeville: Liturgical Press, 1970.