

## **Presence in Contemporary Ignatian Spiritual Direction**

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**[Abstract]** While presence is a term widely used in the literature of psychology and is an essential phenomenon in Christian spirituality, presence is elusive and challenging to articulate. Presence in spiritual direction is a contracted and relational process though little has been articulated as to what supports a director to be present in a way that will contribute to the goals in spiritual direction. Is presence within the context of spiritual direction a quality, charisma or a skill? What kind of presence best aligns with the goals in Ignatian spiritual direction?

Christian spiritual direction develops from its early emergence with the desert fathers in the fourth century to contemporary professional practice. While the foundations remain essential and enduring in Christian spiritual direction tradition, no doubt its original format will change in response to the nature and background of people involved. This article engages an interdisciplinary discussion on the process of presence in contemporary spiritual direction, and reviews literature from Ignatian spirituality, psychology, philosophy and theology. Exploring different articulations of presence will help to build a rich phenomenological understanding of presence. Since the writer has a background in Gestalt relational psychotherapy and spiritual direction, a relational perspective in discussing presence guides the focus of this paper. This article suggests that presence is a disposition that the director holds and

involves 1) embodied action; 2) attunement; 3) dialogue; 4) contemplation, and 5) healing love. This article aims to stimulate reflection on contemporary Ignatian practice in spiritual direction.

**Keywords:** presence, Ignatian, spiritual direction, relational, discernment

## Introduction

As those living in the twentieth-first century, we experience a complex, materialistic and fast-changing era. Whether there is an active search for purpose and spiritual connection in life or a desperate sense of meaninglessness and hopelessness, both speak of an unchangeable quest for something beyond our ego concerns. The ministry of spiritual direction has enthusiastically and rigorously developed in recent decades in response to this yearning.

Spiritual direction is now inclusive of all faith traditions, but Christian (Ignatian) spiritual direction distinctively addresses the active presence of the Triune God. Jesuit Theologian Karl Rahner identifies the heart of Christian spirituality as the experience of God as “Presence, intimate, and relatable Presence.”<sup>1</sup> The divine mystery that Christians name God is always present, and our response is to actively engage our attention with Presence in our lived experience. Trinitarian theology offers an image of God as “relational love and Spirit, three persons in

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<sup>1</sup> Karl Rahner, "The Spirituality of the Future," in *The Practice of Faith: A Handbook of Contemporary Spirituality*, ed. Karl Lehmann and Albert Raffelt (London: SCM Press, 1985), 22.

loving relationship,”<sup>2</sup> and the Son of God incarnate Jesus shares our humanity and longs for a personal relationship with each of us. Ignatian spirituality holds that God is not a theory or dogma to study, but a real, living, affectionate Other with whom we can communicate and relate intimately. Robert Webber highlights Christian spirituality as “our mystical union with God accomplished by Jesus Christ through the Spirit. God unites with humanity in his saving incarnation, death and resurrection.”<sup>3</sup> Paul Tillich believes that even when we are experiencing the absent God, we know God, as this empty space evokes a longing for the presence of God to fulfil us.<sup>4</sup>

Being present originates from our human nature as relational beings since we “are created in the image of God as ontologically relational and gifted with spirit, then there is an actual relationship between all humans and God.”<sup>5</sup> Although the relational capacity of people varies, healthy humans generally possess subjective thoughts and feelings and at the same time can observe that others have separate sets of thoughts and feelings. Thus, the dynamic of exchange and connection exists. Intimacy happens when I am “making my inner world known and getting to know the inner world of the other.”<sup>6</sup> The capacity to fully see,

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<sup>2</sup> Maureen H. Miner, “Back to the Basics in Attachment to God: Revisiting Theory in Light of Theology,” *Journal of Psychology and Theology* 35, no. 2 (2007): 116.

<sup>3</sup> Robert E. Webber, *The Divine Embrace: Recovering the Passionate Spiritual Life* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Books, 2006), 16.

<sup>4</sup> Steven Ogden, *The Presence of God in the World: A Contribution to Postmodern Christology based on the Theologies of Paul Tillich and Karl Rahner* (Bern: Peter Lang, 2007), 87.

<sup>5</sup> Miner, “Back to the Basics in Attachment to God: Revisiting Theory in Light of Theology,” 119.

<sup>6</sup> Gordon Wheeler, “Towards Gestalt Developmental Model,” *British Gestalt Journal* 7, no. 2 (1997): 120.

hear and feel the other who is beyond my boundary creates presence. David Augsburg suggests that “when one is truly there for another, depth of communication occurs that is beyond words or style, or technique, or theory, or theology. It is presence gifted by Presence.”<sup>7</sup>

## **Christian Spiritual Direction as Relational**

Christian spiritual direction is an intrapersonal, interpersonal and transpersonal activity which is “directly concerned with a person’s actual experiences of his relationship with God.”<sup>8</sup> Roger Hurding proposes that the spiritual director is a kind of desert-dweller “who has experienced the refining process of solitude” and can listen from “a quiet inner centre.”<sup>9</sup> A spiritual director firstly cultivates a personal and intimate relationship with the Divine, supporting others with the wisdom from their own inner journey. Janet Ruffing describes the relationship of spiritual director and directee as one which explores everything from the stream of life together, akin to panning for the gold which is “the experience of grace and the Spirit.”<sup>10</sup> William Barry and William Connolly believe spiritual experience is the “foodstuff for cooking” in spiritual direction,<sup>11</sup> and the director aims to enable the directee:

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<sup>7</sup> David W. Augsburg, *Pastoral Counselling Across Cultures* (Philadelphia, PA: Westminster Press, 1986), 37.

<sup>8</sup> William A. Barry and William J. Connolly, *The Practice of Spiritual Direction*, Rev. and updated ed. (New York: HarperOne, 2009), 7.

<sup>9</sup> Roger Hurding, *Five Pathways to Wholeness: Explorations in Pastoral Care and Counselling* (London: SPCK, 2013), 95.

<sup>10</sup> Janet Ruffing, *Spiritual Direction: Beyond the Beginnings* (New York: Paulist Press, 2000), 57.

<sup>11</sup> Barry and Connolly, *The Practice of Spiritual Direction*, 56.

*to pay attention to God’s personal communication to him or her, to respond to this personally communicating God, to grow in intimacy with this God, and to live out the consequences of the relationship. The focus of this type of spiritual direction is on experience, not ideas, and specifically on religious experience, i.e., that dimension of any experience that evokes the presence of the mysterious Other whom we call God.<sup>12</sup>*

Although sharing spiritual experiences is a crucial element in spiritual direction, the goal of the spiritual path is not limited to talking about prayer. For Thomas Merton, the

*...whole purpose of spiritual direction is to penetrate beneath the surface of a person’s life, to get behind the façade of conventional gestures and attitudes which one presents to the world, and to bring out one’s inner spiritual freedom, one’s inmost truth, which is what [Christians] call the likeness of Christ in one’s soul. This is an entirely supernatural (spiritual) thing, for the work of rescuing the inner person from automatism belongs first of all to the Holy Spirit.<sup>13</sup>*

Merton’s emphasis on inner freedom for Christ resonates with Gordon Smith’s assertion that Christian spiritual direction is different from life coaching or counselling, which is helping another towards a self-constructed life. Christian spiritual direction aims to support those

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<sup>12</sup> Barry and Connolly, *The Practice of Spiritual Direction*, 8.

<sup>13</sup> Thomas Merton, *Spiritual Direction and Meditation* (Collegeville, Minn.: Liturgical Press, 2013), 8.

who have a desire to live with a “radical dependence on the Spirit and through intentional response to the Spirit.”<sup>14</sup>

In the sixteenth century, St Ignatius of Loyola wrote *the Spiritual Exercises* for people to deepen their relationship with God and live out the impact of that relationship. Ignatius expects that the Exercises journey has the potential to “prepare and dispose the soul to rid itself of all inordinate attachments, and, after their removal, of seeking and finding the will of God in the disposition of our life for the salvation of our soul.”(Exx 1)<sup>15</sup> The *Exercises* and subsequent directories are written mainly for those who give the Exercises in the context of Ignatian retreats. Philip Sheldrake reminds us to avoid “uncritically removing certain items from the text of the Exercises in order to construct”<sup>16</sup> a wider model of spiritual direction. Nonetheless, these guidelines not only lay the foundation of Ignatian spirituality but in my observation, have been referenced by spiritual directors beyond this tradition.

Ignatius believes that self-awareness and discernment are the keys to attaining inner freedom. The Exercises journey aims to support a directee in their “conquest of self and the regulation of one’s life in such a way that no decision is made under the influence of any inordinate attachment.” (Exx 21) Ignatian self-awareness does not promote self-absorption, but indeed encourages a person to notice and examine how

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<sup>14</sup> Gordon Smith, *Spiritual Direction: A Guide to Giving and Receiving Direction* (Downers Grove, IL: IVP Books, 2014), 22.

<sup>15</sup> The Annotations in the *Spiritual Exercises* will be abbreviated as ‘Exx’ thereafter in this article. Ignatius and Louis J. Puhl, *The Spiritual Exercises of St. Ignatius: Based on Studies in the Language of the Autograph* (Manila: St Pauls, 1987).

<sup>16</sup> Philip Sheldrake, “St Ignatius of Loyola and Spiritual Direction,” in *Traditions of Spiritual Guidance*, ed. Lavinia Byrne (London: Cassell Publishers, 1990), 99.

specific inner experience situates in one’s relational dynamics with God. As noted in the *Principle and Foundation* the director and directee co-discern which promptings, attitudes, dispositions or decisions draw each of them towards or away from our life orientation to “praise, reverence, and serve God our Lord, and by this means to save his soul” (Exx 23).

What leads one to freedom might lead another to entrapment. Ignatius expects those who enter the Exercises journey to be inflamed by God’s love and motivated towards loving service. Love is the basis for discernment and decision-making. Neil Pembroke acknowledges presence as the core of spiritual care.<sup>17</sup> To facilitate discernment and growth of inner freedom, a spiritual director listens to both self and others in an attuned and respectful way. Margaret Guenther uses the image of the midwife to describe how spiritual directors give support, encouragement and monitor progress by being “present to another in a time of vulnerability, working in areas that are deep and intimate.”<sup>18</sup> Guenther notes this is a ministry of presence, patience, waiting and being with uncertainty.<sup>19</sup> This intense work also includes the joy of celebrating the experience of being the giver of life’s blessings.

Spiritual directors are therefore called to be present with holistic awareness. The section that follows explores how presence involves physical, emotional, psychological, mental, relational and transpersonal dimensions.

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<sup>17</sup> Neil Pembroke, *The Art of Listening: Dialogue, Shame, and Pastoral Care* (London; New York; Grand Rapids, MI: T&T Clark/Handsel Press; William B. Eerdmans, 2002), 1.

<sup>18</sup> Margaret Guenther, *Holy Listening: the Art of Spiritual Direction* (Cambridge, Mass.: Cowley Publications, 1992), 89.

<sup>19</sup> Guenther, *Holy Listening: the Art of Spiritual Direction*, 91.

## 1. Presence as Embodied Action

Shari Geller believes that relational presence is not binary, either we are wholly present or not. Presence is “a continuous process with varying intensities that unfold in your encounter with clients.”<sup>20</sup> We first communicate presence through our body and it is common for people to feel a different energy after “being with” certain people. Neuroscience suggests that our nervous system has a mimic function towards the state of others through activation of mirror neurons in our brain. The neurobiological well-being of a person consequently influences the quality of presence. One can often observe oneself being impacted by another person whose state is relaxed, nervous, calm, agitated, dazed, tired or energised.

A person who intentionally offers presence serves through continuous self-regulation. David Benner proposes that “presence is the awakening that calls us into an engagement with some aspect of the present moment” and “the distance between whatever we notice and us is suddenly reduced.”<sup>21</sup> Peter Senge et al. define presence as “consciously participating in a larger field for change” by “deep listening” and “full conscious awareness” which conclude by “leading to a state of letting come,” and “letting go of old identities and the need to control.”<sup>22</sup> Otto Scharmer suggests presencing is using our “highest

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<sup>20</sup> Shari M. Geller and American Psychological Association, *A practical guide to cultivating therapeutic presence* (Washington, DC: American Psychological Association, 2017), 201.

<sup>21</sup> David G. Benner, *Presence and Encounter* (Grand Rapids, MI: Brazos Press, 2014), 2.

<sup>22</sup> Peter M. Senge, *Presence: Exploring Profound Change in People, Organizations, and Society* (New York: Crown Business/Currency Books, 2008), 13.

self as a vehicle for sensing, embodying and enacting emerging futures.”<sup>23</sup>

Gestalt therapists, Marie-Anne Chidiac and Sally Denham-Vaughan claim that “presence seems to enfold the dualities of being and acting, stillness and movement, availability and responsiveness.”<sup>24</sup> There is “a quality of being grounded, fully alert and yet apparently still.”<sup>25</sup> Presence involves a physiological state of concentration, calmness, uncluttered mental state and heightened awareness to “what is.” This “holding” stance is often addressed in spiritual direction.

Chidiac and Denham-Vaughan summarise the process of presence as “energetic availability and fluid responsiveness”<sup>26</sup>:

	<b>Energetic Availability</b>	<b>Fluid Responsiveness</b>
<b>As I experience presence in others</b>	Feeling deeply attracted by presence in others. Feeling noticed and seen by the other.	Feeling held/safe and with a person who is well resourced.
<b>As I experience my own presence</b>	Alert yet calm. Attentive to, and connecting with others.	Knowing what I know liberates me to focus on others, on the new.

Table 1: The experience of presence of self and others: energetic availability and fluid responsiveness.<sup>27</sup>

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<sup>23</sup> Otto Scharmer, “Learning from the future as it emerges” (Conference on Knowledge and Innovation, Helsinki School of Economics, Finland, 2000).

<sup>24</sup> Marie-Anne Chidiac and Sally Denham-Vaughan, “The Process of Presence,” *British Gestalt Journal* 16, no. 1 (2007): 11.

<sup>25</sup> Chidiac and Denham-Vaughan, “Presence for Everyone: A Dialogue,” 11.

<sup>26</sup> Chidiac and Denham-Vaughan, “Presence for Everyone: A Dialogue,” 9.

<sup>27</sup> Chidiac and Denham-Vaughan, “Presence for Everyone: A Dialogue,” 11.

## Energetic Availability

I share a similar heritage to Chidiac and Denham-Vaughan as a Gestalt therapist and understand that their articulation of what presence is in therapy could also apply in spiritual direction.<sup>28</sup> While it is challenging to capture the feeling of presence through words, those who have experienced presence describe it as being “met in a way that is deeply entralling.”<sup>29</sup> Richard Hycner poignantly describes this being met in such a way as “an embrace of gazes.”<sup>30</sup> Presence is experienced as knowing “the other has the ability and capacity to understand and hold all that I am in the moment, and that which I give freely unto the other.”<sup>31</sup> This “holding” and connecting capacity emerges not only through verbal exchange, but from our whole being. Kathleen Fischer agrees, noting that “the feelings [of a directee] usually arise of themselves when a person is strong enough to let them come.”<sup>32</sup> The psycho-spiritual integration work in the director’s life thus enhances the capacity to “be with,” similar to how Michael Brown describes “the presence process” as an unconditional embrace of “what is.”<sup>33</sup> Brown further states that integration is not about feeling better but getting better with feelings, especially those we

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<sup>28</sup> Special acknowledgement is given to the generous support of Relational Change (UK and Europe) through Dr Sally Denham-Vaughan in providing guidance to explore the concept of presence. [www.relationalchange.org](http://www.relationalchange.org)

<sup>29</sup> Chidiac and Denham-Vaughan, “Presence for Everyone: A Dialogue,” 10.

<sup>30</sup> Richard Hycner and Lynne Jacobs, *The Healing Relationship in Gestalt Therapy: A Dialogic—Self-Psychology Approach* (New York: Gestalt Journal Press, 1995), 9.

<sup>31</sup> Chidiac and Denham-Vaughan, “Presence for Everyone: A Dialogue,” 10.

<sup>32</sup> Kathleen Fischer, “Working with the Emotions in Spiritual Direction: Seven Guiding Principles,” *Presence* 12, no. 13 (2006): 32.

<sup>33</sup> Michael Brown, *The Presence Process: a Healing Journey into Present Moment Awareness* (Vancouver: Namaste Publishing, 2005), 120.

used to suppress in childhood such as anger, grief and fear.<sup>34</sup> Accepting one’s vulnerability is a pathway to integration, which means allowing whatever comes to awareness to have space to exist.

A person who intends to serve by being present is expected to have resources to share. In psychotherapy, this includes knowledge of human development and therapeutic skills. In spiritual direction, the director’s personal relationship with God and theological reflective ability is essential.<sup>35</sup> Bernadette Miles highlights that “personhood” is the primary resource for a spiritual director.<sup>36</sup> In her research interviews with spiritual directors, interviewees describe some directees reporting they have experienced a subliminal understanding from them. Directees may not know the life stories of the director, but they “know” if the person listening can understand their experience and what is allowed in the room.<sup>37</sup>

Kathleen McAlpin defines spirituality as lived experience coming from an “internalised vision of faith.”<sup>38</sup> Here faith not only refers to “a morally good [Christian] life, characterised by keeping commandments, prayer and some sacrificing service.”<sup>39</sup> Spiritual directors are called to

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<sup>34</sup> Brown, *The Presence Process: a Healing Journey into Present Moment Awareness*, 98.

<sup>35</sup> Brian O’Leary, “What is Specific to an Ignatian Model of Spiritual Direction?,” *The Way* 47, 1-2 (2008): 16. O’Leary highlights theological reflective ability not as having formal theological training but able to understand how certain spiritual experiences are understood to have theological frameworks.

<sup>36</sup> Bernadette Miles, “Spiritual Direction as an Enabling Resource for Leadership and Organizational Development for the 21st Century” (PhD University of Divinity, 2018), 223.

<sup>37</sup> Miles, “Spiritual Direction as an Enabling Resource for Leadership and Organizational Development for the 21st Century,” 224.

<sup>38</sup> Kathleen McAlpin, *Ministry that Transforms* (Collegeville, MN: Liturgical Press, 2009), 99.

<sup>39</sup> George J. Schemel and Judith Roemer, *Beyond Individuation to Discipleship* (Scranton, PA: Institute for Contemporary Spirituality, University of Scranton, 2000), 55.

engage in spiritual life, defined by George Schemel and Judith Roemer as having a “sensitivity to life” and “a more authentic experience and expression of emotions.”<sup>40</sup> The interpersonal relationship with God and others can be more challenging. Ignatian spiritual directors will not be surprised by the ebbs and flows of inner life but will be energetically available in attending to all movements, trusting they are valuable ingredients for understanding oneself and our relationship with God.

### **Fluid Responsiveness**

Being present also means to have fluid responsiveness, which involves an agenda “to be fully available in that moment and as responsive to the needs of the situations as I can be.”<sup>41</sup> Spiritual directors constantly make responsive decisions around choosing a theme to follow, asking a question, giving feedback, pausing for silence or offering necessary teaching. Fluid responsiveness is also located within professional boundaries. The code of ethics is written to promote the safety and integrity of the ministry. The director is required to ground his or her service in professional values from which “one can choose to just ‘be’ or feel moved to act and intervene.”<sup>42</sup> Ignatian directors are particularly reminded to be indifferent regarding directee’s decisions.

Chidiac and Denham-Vaughan have recently developed a new concept of “Ethical presence” to describe the type of presence that is required when someone is in a role that holds more power and expresses

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<sup>40</sup> Schemel and Roemer, *Beyond Individuation to Discipleship*, 55.

<sup>41</sup> Chidiac and Denham-Vaughan, “Presence for Everyone: A Dialogue,” 11.

<sup>42</sup> Chidiac and Denham-Vaughan, “Presence for Everyone: A Dialogue,” 10.

“an ethical stance in service of the other.”<sup>43</sup> To be ethically present, the practitioner orientates themselves to find an optimal balance of awareness to all three elements below:

- Self: can be seen as individual, group, community or organisation.
- Other: as the “Other” in the relationship at any given moment; and
- Situation: in which the issues are rooted.<sup>44</sup>



Figure 2 Ethical presence at the centre of the SOS (self, other, situation) model <sup>45</sup>

Based on the concept of ethical presence, I understand that spiritual direction uniquely focuses on exploring and becoming aware of how God is present, embedded and interacting with all three aspects. Such intersubjective interaction potentially evokes an emerging awareness which may connect to each sphere and the whole context.

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<sup>43</sup> Marie-Anne Chidiac, *Relational Organisational Gestalt* (New York: Routledge, 2018), 54.

<sup>44</sup> Marie-Anne Chidiac and Sally Denham-Vaughan, “Gestalt, The Good and the concept of Ethical Presence,” *British Gestalt Journal* 29, no. 1 (2020): 22.

<sup>45</sup> Chidiac and Denham-Vaughan, “Presence for Everyone: A Dialogue,” 22.

Spiritual direction is an intersubjective contemplative practice where the director, directee and God participate in immediacy and mutual impact. The community of spiritual directors collaboratively advocates an awareness and embodiment on how God is present and acting in our collective situation.

### **Spiritual Direction Encounter as Emerging Field**

Presence is a wholehearted willingness to enter an “unknown” territory with another and be present to whatever surfaces. Field theory, proposed by Kurt Lewin, initially refers to the “field” as phenomenal, the psychological environment that exists within the person, both conscious and unconscious that drive our behaviours. A person is not an isolated entity, but always a person in context.<sup>46</sup> Frank Staemmler studies different theories using the concept of “field” and concludes that relatedness is the commonality. Since everything is interconnected, the social, psychological and physiological all exist in the field and are part of it.<sup>47</sup> Culture, people, ecology, economy, social circumstance and time in a person’s situation are influential. Each person may have an internal psychological response to the external environment.

With field perspective, the liminal space between God, the director and directee in spiritual direction sessions is co-created to enable the reception of grace and transformation.

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<sup>46</sup> Kurt Lewin, *Resolving Social Conflicts & Field Theory in Social Science* (Washington, DC: American Psychological Association, 1997), 210.

<sup>47</sup> Frank-M Staemmler, “A Babylonian Confusion?: On the Uses and Meanings of the Term ‘Field’,” *British Gestalt Journal* 15, no. 2 (2006): 76.

*The liminal space...is characterised by a willingness to let go of anything familiar and an openness to what is emerging. It lies therefore at the moment of both being and becoming where the immanent and transcendent are joined.*<sup>48</sup>

Field theory highlights the “in-between” in a relationship—the co-emergence. The process, problems and solutions all serve unique functions in the relationship. The spiritual direction relationship is co-constructed and moves beyond two persons by acknowledging the Mystery as the Ground of all Being.<sup>49</sup> “People are not in a field but of a field”<sup>50</sup> and all the details of a relationship serve a certain function. For example, when directors observe growing anxiety, boredom, frustration or disconnection in the conversation, they might begin to ponder if misunderstanding, shame, avoidance, resistance or something else is present. Contemporary spiritual directors are also being asked to have a heightened awareness of what we are bringing into that liminal space. This includes theological preconceptions, cultural-racial-historical influence, gender norms, relational beliefs and patterns, power and privilege. Without such awareness, the director could unconsciously impose parts of themselves upon the ministry space.

Gestalt therapist Lynne Jacobs challenges the traditional understanding of transference and countertransference as if the therapist is the only one who knows the “truth.” She challenges this approach as

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<sup>48</sup> Sally Denham-Vaughan, “The Liminal Space and Twelve Action Practices for Gracious Living,” *British Gestalt Journal* 19, no. 2 (2010): 35.

<sup>49</sup> Benner, *Presence and Encounter*, 17.

<sup>50</sup> Gary Yontef, “The Relational Attitude in Gestalt Therapy and Practice,” in *Relational Approaches in Gestalt Therapy*, ed. Lynne Jacobs and Richard Hycner (New York: Gestalt Press, 2010), 41.

possibly inhibiting dialogue.<sup>51</sup> A more creative and power-balanced stance may ask “why and how, here and now” certain phenomena appear in the director-directee dyad. When a directee becomes over-dependent on a director, what is needed in this relational field? This way of enquiry also questions the fear among spiritual directors about “not getting in the way” between God and the directee. My hypothesis is that directors will share a presence between God and the directee once the direction relationship begins. The core concern is how and in what ways our presence is helpful to the development of the directee’s relationship with God. A passive, dismissive or disengaged presence can hinder the potential of the emerging field as is the case with a codependent, intrusive or controlling presence.

Field theory also offers us a broader vision to locate the human person. Traditionally, Western culture perceives development more as the result of personal effort.<sup>52</sup> Developmental and spiritual growth models developed by Erik Erikson, James Fowler and Lawrence Kohlberg successfully outline the tasks or signs for each developmental stage.<sup>53</sup> These paradigms have not yet offered a consideration of how other life forces, particularly relationships, affect a person’s self-organisation. Looking at development solely as the effort of oneself can

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<sup>51</sup> Lynne Jacobs, “Hopes, Fears, and Enduring Relational Themes,” *British Gestalt Journal* 26, no. 1 (2017): 8.

<sup>52</sup> Malcolm Parlett and Robert Lee, “Contemporary Gestalt Therapy: Field Theory,” in *Gestalt Therapy: History, Theory and Practice*, ed. Ansel Woldt and Sarah Toman (London: Sage Publication, 2005), 45.

<sup>53</sup> Erik Erikson has outlined a person’s life in eight stages according to age and each has tasks to fulfill in order to facilitate growth and integration. James Fowler uses a seven-stages model to highlight a person’s faith development. Lawrence Kohlberg’s model focuses on a person’s development in moral consciousness.

be shame-inducing as if the person who struggles is inadequate. An example would be how a “problematic child” internalises the field by unconsciously carrying issues from a dysfunctional family situation. I find it helpful to pay attention to how a directee presents relationally in the spiritual direction session, hoping that this might reveal their relational patterns with God and others in their lifeworld, and what kind of relational grace could be beneficial.

## 2. Presence as Attunement

As I reflect on fluid responsiveness, another related concept is attunement. Although Ignatius stresses discipline and structure, he keeps reminding directors to be flexible and attune to the specific needs of the directee (Exx 7, 12, 13, 14, 18, 19). Daniel Siegel suggests that “presence is our openness to the unfolding of possibilities. Attunement is how we focus our attention on others and take their essence into our own inner world.”<sup>54</sup>

*When we attune with others we allow our own internal state to shift, to come to resonate with the inner world of another. This resonance is at the heart of the important sense of “feeling felt” that emerges in close relationships. Children need attunement to feel secure and to develop well, and throughout our lives we need attunement to feel close and connected.*<sup>55</sup>

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<sup>54</sup> Daniel J. Siegel, *The Mindful Therapist: A Clinician's Guide to Mindsight and Neural Integration*, 1st ed., Norton series on interpersonal neurobiology, (New York: W.W. Norton & Co., 2010), 34.

<sup>55</sup> Daniel J. Siegel, *Mindsight: the New Science of Personal Transformation*, 1st ed. (New York: Bantam Books, 2010), 27.

Unless we feel the other person is attuned to what is happening in us, we cannot feel the other as being with us. The feeling of being impacted and moved by the experience of the other is a springboard to genuine connection. Attunement, however, does not require relinquishing our own experience to the other, which may lead to over-identification or enmeshment. To be attuned is to become aware of how one's energy and information flows in or out and to pay attention to any energy vibration during a relational encounter. In the physical world, when two objects vibrate with the same frequency there is resonance. This "physical phenomenon of resonance [is seen] as analogous to the intentional action of attuning or attending to self and other" in relationships.<sup>56</sup>

The ability to attune to others is largely influenced by our own relational recollection in life. Attachment theory was developed by John Bowlby and Mary Ainsworth to understand how the early emotional bond between an infant and the primary caregiver impacts a person's life satisfaction, self-functioning and relational capacity.<sup>57</sup> Across the globe, only half of the population experience a secure attachment style which means they generally have a better relational capacity, including attunement.<sup>58</sup> Insecure attachment, also known as attachment trauma, is usually caused by abusive, unpredictable or unattuned parenting. Parents

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<sup>56</sup> Chidiac and Denham-Vaughan, "Presence for Everyone: A Dialogue," 16.

<sup>57</sup> Marinus. H. van Ijzendoorn & Abraham Sagi-Schwartz Judi Mesman, "Cross-Cultural Patterns of Attachment: Universal and Contextual Dimensions," in *Handbook of Attachment: Theory, Research, and Clinical Applications*, ed. Jude Cassidy and Phillip R. Shaver (New York, NY ; London: Guilford Press, 1999), 880-905.

<sup>58</sup> Bowlby and Ainsworth categorise four attachment styles between primary caregiver and infants, which are named as secure, anxious-ambivalent (preoccupied), avoidant-dismissive and disorganised.

who have unresolved trauma and loss may impair their ability to be present and consequently passed on trauma through generations.<sup>59</sup> Although the spiritual direction relationship is different from parent to child, attachment theory may briefly inform spiritual direction practice in two ways. First, it is worthwhile questioning how significant it is for a spiritual director to embody some level of secure attachment experience to provide a healthy relational experience to others. In talking about this influence in professional relationships, Siegel writes that

*[i]f someone has an insecure adult attachment status, their own patients will likely be treated in ways that reflect that insecure history. It is essential for all people in the healing arts to care for themselves – which includes creating a coherent narrative of their own lives.<sup>60</sup>*

Future research could investigate how the attachment style of spiritual directors impacts our work. In practical terms, neuroscience literature suggests that a therapist’s presence can support a secure relational environment for clients as they down-regulate their defenses so that social engagement system can be optimised.<sup>61</sup> Furthermore, when an individual is feeling safe in the presence of a regulated another,

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<sup>59</sup> David J. Wallin, *Attachment in Psychotherapy* (New York: Guilford Press, 2007), 37.

<sup>60</sup> Siegel, *The Mindful Therapist: A Clinician's Guide to Mindsight and Neural Integration*, 72.

<sup>61</sup> Shari M. Geller and Stephen W. Porges, “Therapeutic Presence: Neurophysiological Mechanisms Mediating Feeling Safe in Therapeutic Relationships,” *Journal of Psychotherapy Integration* 24, no. 3 (2014): 179.

the bodily state and nervous system has access to better openness and self-exploration which in turn facilitates restoration and growth.<sup>62</sup>

Second, attachment theory can help to explain how relational patterns of directees parallel their relationship with God, self and others. Deepening their relationship with God therefore not only requires will power but involves affective experiences to foster an “earned secure attachment” in other relationships.<sup>63</sup> The reality of neuroplasticity means the brain has the ability to restructure through new experiences.<sup>64</sup> People may be able to re-establish a sense of security when they experience someone “making them feel cared for, important and providing them with a feeling of safety.”<sup>65</sup> While spiritual directors partly fulfil this need for security by holding a safe space for exploration, Melissa Kelley identifies attachment to God as the ultimate secure base that helps people negotiate separation and loss and thus increase their capacity for love and intimacy.<sup>66</sup> Gordon Kaufman agrees that

*the idea of God is the idea of an absolutely adequate attachment figure...the point is that God is thought of as a*

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<sup>62</sup> Geller and Porges, “Therapeutic Presence: Neurophysiological Mechanisms Mediating Feeling Safe in Therapeutic Relationships,” 181-82.

<sup>63</sup> Daniel J. Siegel, *The Developing Mind: Toward a Neurobiology of Interpersonal Experience* (New York: Guilford Press, 1999), 11.

<sup>64</sup> Daniel J. Siegel, *Pocket Guide to Interpersonal Neurobiology: An Integrative Handbook of the Mind*, 1st ed., The Norton series on interpersonal neurobiology, (New York: W.W. Norton, 2012), 8-1.

<sup>65</sup> Louis J. Cozolino, *The Neuroscience of Human Relationships: Attachment and the Developing Social Brain*, Second edition. ed., The Norton series on interpersonal neurobiology, (New York: W.W. Norton & Company, 2014), 410.

<sup>66</sup> Melissa M. Kelley, *Grief: Contemporary Theory and the Practice of Ministry* (Minneapolis, MN: Fortress Press, 2010), 59.

*protective and caring parent who is always reliable and always available to its children when they are in need.*<sup>67</sup>

For healing to happen, attachment with God has to be a felt experience rather than simply an intellectual knowledge. Wilkie Au and Noreen Cannon Au distinguish between professed knowledge of God and operating experience of God.<sup>68</sup> While a person might profess that God is omnipotent, omniscient and omnipresent, the real experience might be of a God who is distant and aloof, rather than someone caring and loving. Ignatian spiritual direction supports people in exploring how an unconscious negative image of God might sometimes be a psychological transference from a childhood experience and re-experience God through new contemplative experiences.

Apart from having a new relational experience to transform our attachment model, people who have adverse childhood experiences can also enhance their presence and security by integrating memories.<sup>69</sup> Story-telling is one way to enable people to "establish meaning and to integrate our remembered past with what we perceive to be happening in the present and what we anticipate for the future."<sup>70</sup> Jose Garcia de Castro Valdes proposes that

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<sup>67</sup> Gordon D. Kaufman, *The Theological Imagination: Constructing the Concept of God*, 1st ed. (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1981), 67.

<sup>68</sup> Wilkie Au and Noreen Cannon Au, *The Discerning Heart: Exploring the Christian Path* (New York: Paulist Press, 2006), 112.

<sup>69</sup> Psychological tool such as Adult Attachment interviews has been developed to help adults to review their childhood experience and making sense of them through the support of helping professionals.

<sup>70</sup> Herbert Anderson and Edward Foley, *Mighty stories, dangerous rituals weaving together the human and the divine*, 1st ed. (San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, 1998), 5.

*Spiritual Directors are called to help the retreatant to pronounce the most suitable word related to his/her inner experience in front of the mystery. Only through the light of language I can understand what I am and what God is asking me. Through words, God and I are able to build the relationship Creator-creature.*<sup>71</sup>

Ignatian spiritual direction enables the same healing process as therapy through holding space for directees. They may then find their narrative in life and furthermore, begin to put words onto how God is present and at work.

### 3. Presence as Dialogue

Spiritual direction is a dialogic process. Martin Buber, named as “philosopher of dialogue,” offers an elegant depiction of dialogic processes as spiritual because “all actual life is encounter.”<sup>72</sup> Deep encounter between humans can also offer a glimpse of the Divine. Buber acknowledges that human beings are always embedded in the context of relational dynamics<sup>73</sup> and our longing in relationship shapes our lives in compelling ways. This echoes Kurt Lewin’s understanding that all of us

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<sup>71</sup> Jose Garcia de Castro Valdes, “Silent God in a Wordy World. Silence in Ignatian Spirituality,” *Theologica Xaveriana* 181 (2016): 192, <https://doi.org/10.11144/javeriana.tx66-181.sgwswsis>.

<sup>72</sup> Martin Buber, *I and Thou*, trans. Walter Arnold Kaufmann (New York: Scribner, 1970), 62.

<sup>73</sup> Donna M. Orange, *Thinking for Clinicians: Philosophical Resources for Contemporary Psychoanalysis and the Humanistic Psychotherapies* (New York: Routledge, 2010), 19.

are of the field and influence each other. Buber’s philosophy of dialogue distinguishes two kinds of relationship, namely I-You and I-It.

I-You encounter involves the whole being of both,<sup>74</sup> “when You becomes present does presence come into being”<sup>75</sup> and relationship exists. “Presence is not what is evanescent and passes but what confronts us, waiting and enduring.”<sup>76</sup> Presence requires that our focus and consciousness is not on one particular point (the object), but the whole You. Buber also describes our relationship with God as relating to the Eternal You.<sup>77</sup> When Buber uses *Ich-Du*, he uses *Du* (You) with an intimacy similar to lovers and friends.<sup>78</sup> Prayer in the paradigm of I-You is direct and unmediated.<sup>79</sup> The composition of colloquy in the Ignatian Spirituality could potentially be a highlight of this kind of encounters. Prayers are not prescribed, pre-written, formulaic or recited, but have an immediacy that is personal and here and now.

When I-It is not confronted by You, it is merely “surrounded by a multitude of contents”<sup>80</sup> from the past. When a person lives in the past, this moment has no presence. I-It encounter objectifies another person.<sup>81</sup> When we objectify another, that person is reduced to a quality, a skill, a symptom, a theme or a story that can be used. Buber comforts us that as human, we will not permanently stay in an I-You relationship though I-

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<sup>74</sup> Buber, *I and Thou*, 54.

<sup>75</sup> Buber, *I and Thou*, 63.

<sup>76</sup> Buber, *I and Thou*, 63-64.

<sup>77</sup> Buber, *I and Thou*, 123.

<sup>78</sup> Buber, *I and Thou*, 14.

<sup>79</sup> Buber, *I and Thou*, 62.

<sup>80</sup> Buber, *I and Thou*, 63.

<sup>81</sup> Donna M. Orange, *Thinking for Clinicians: Philosophical Resources for Contemporary Psychoanalysis and the Humanistic Psychotherapies* (New York: Routledge, 2010), 15.

You has the potential for healing and sacredness. In my work as a supervisor to spiritual directors, I have observed encounters that demonstrate an I-It quality. For example, some directors from certain traditions that I have worked with can be more concerned if a particular directee performs some devotional practices that are highly valued in their tradition. Some directors may be occupied with addressing issues such as sexual orientation, mental health conditions, addictions, marital problems or whether one should stay or leave a religious order. While I am not suggesting that these themes do not come up in the spiritual direction, but when a director becomes anxiously preoccupied with one issue, they may lose sight of the person before them.

In the actualisation of I-You relationships, the practice of inclusion and confirmation are two important principles. Inclusion means “the attempt to imagine what at this moment the other person is thinking, feeling, wishing, perceiving.”<sup>82</sup> Buber himself describes how this can only be experienced through a “bold swinging, demanding the most intensive stirring of one’s being, into the life of the other.”<sup>83</sup> Buber’s notion of inclusion emphasises more than empathy. Inclusion does not simply mean feeling towards another. Inclusion affirms my own perception or feelings, but also a willingness to include those who may feel differently.

Pembroke defines confirmation as “making the other person in her uniqueness and particularity”<sup>84</sup> and “confirmation is beyond acceptance

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<sup>82</sup> Pembroke, *The Art of Listening: Dialogue, Shame, and Pastoral Care*, 43.

<sup>83</sup> Martin Buber, “Elements of the Inter-human,” *Psychiatry* 20 (1957): 110.

<sup>84</sup> Pembroke, *The Art of Listening: Dialogue, Shame, and Pastoral Care*, 96.

and empathy.”<sup>85</sup> The practice of confirmation requires the director to “bracket” their own assumptions. The director holds the space for the other person to make meaning of their experiences at their own pace. The agency of the directee is respected. Humanistic psychotherapist Carl Rogers claims that since human beings possess a self-actualising tendency, “clients gained the greatest benefit in therapy when...allowed to find their own solutions—a strong reminder of the discernment process advocated by St Ignatius of Loyola.”<sup>86</sup>

Buber reminds helping professionals to try and “influence the other person as little as possible.”<sup>87</sup> This requires humility and self-containment on the part of the helper. Buber believes that imposing on the other is much easier than leaving the person to him or herself.<sup>88</sup> Gonçalves da Câmara, who edited the autobiography of Ignatius, wrote in his diary: “[Ignatius] said to me that there can be no greater mistake, in his view in things of the Spirit, than to want to mould others to one’s own image.”<sup>89</sup> Commitment to staying in dialogue includes allowing others to differentiate, and this sometimes leads to disagreement.<sup>90</sup> To truly allow the directee to be who they are, we may stay in the tension

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<sup>85</sup> Pembroke, *The Art of Listening: Dialogue, Shame, and Pastoral Care*, 4.

<sup>86</sup> Lynette Harborne, *Psychotherapy and Spiritual Direction Two Languages, One Voice?* (London: Karnac Books, 2012), 22.

<sup>87</sup> Martin Buber, *Martin Buber on Psychology and Psychotherapy: Essays, Letters, and Dialogue* (New York: Syracuse University Press, 1999), 240.

<sup>88</sup> Buber, *Martin Buber on Psychology and Psychotherapy: Essays, Letters, and Dialogue*, 240.

<sup>89</sup> O’Leary, “What is Specific to an Ignatian Model of Spiritual Direction?” 102.

<sup>90</sup> Orange, *Thinking for Clinicians: Philosophical Resources for Contemporary Psychoanalysis and the Humanistic Psychotherapies*, 20.

of being “different.” Yet, through exploring the difference in dialogue, a new consciousness may arise in the intersubjective space.

There has been some discussion about the power behind the concept of directedness as exercised in the field of spiritual direction. Is the word “direction” an appropriate description for our ministry given that directors do not really “give” or decide the direction for the directees? Some consider the word “direction” is overpowering and therefore modify its naming to spiritual conversation or companionship. Some argue that spiritual direction does need directedness to avoid an “everything goes” tendency. As a director trained in Ignatian tradition, the *Principle and Foundation* in the *Spiritual Exercises* grounds me and offers a compass. I therefore wonder if the allergic response to “directedness” actually addresses the power issue within the direction relationship. In a conversation between two friends, two persons share equal power in deciding the direction of a conversation. In spiritual direction, the director directs the awareness of the directee by asking questions, affirming insights, validating emotions, noticing the movement of spirits and suggesting prayer themes.

Guenter notes that the director may not be authoritarian and yet “has great authority [because] she has skill, knowledge and perspective”<sup>91</sup> to provide solidarity. There is no doubt a power imbalance in the spiritual direction relationship. Buber’s concept of inclusion and confirmation in dialogue could possibly serve as an

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<sup>91</sup> Guenter, *Holy Listening: the Art of Spiritual Direction*, 106.

antidote to using that power to support discernment which Guenther beautifully concludes as a stance of “loving detachment.”<sup>92</sup>

#### 4. Presence as Contemplation

Spiritual direction is contemplation in action. Existential philosopher Gabriel Marcel describes contemplation as a present-moment, an intimate act with oneself which empowers one to engage with others. Contemplation involves receptivity and nurturing inwardness to establish true meeting within a person. At this depth, a person has the capacity to be receptive, available and give oneself freely.<sup>93</sup> Marcel distinguishes between a spectator as something “in front of” me and a contemplative who allows the object both within and inside me.<sup>94</sup> This resonates with presence as “letting come.” When I contemplate, I let this “other” impact me. Benner suggests contemplation as “spiritual posture...with intentional openness and presence.”<sup>95</sup> Tilda Norberg emphasises how contemplation relates to recognising God’s presence:

*As we allow ourselves to sink wordlessly into God’s presence, we are awed by God’s power and love as we watch people being invited to greater wholeness. Instead of trying to make something happen we pay gentle attention, trusting God will somehow shape our awareness as well as that of the person coming for healing. In other words, as best we can we*

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<sup>92</sup> Guenther, *Holy Listening: the Art of Spiritual Direction*, 106.

<sup>93</sup> Gabriel Marcel, *The Mystery of Being*, two vols. (London: Harvill Press, 1950), 45, 120, 23, 27., quoted in Neil Pembroke, *The Art of Listening*, 13.

<sup>94</sup> Pembroke, *The Art of Listening: Dialogue, Shame, and Pastoral Care*, 17.

<sup>95</sup> Benner, *Presence and Encounter*, 39.

*surrender the other person to God's desire to heal, knowing that God is already at work. Out of that deep rest comes direction and discernment about how to proceed.*<sup>96</sup>

Maureen Conroy writes that a spiritual director listens “actively with interest, sensitivity and compassion”<sup>97</sup> so as to help a directee “to savour, relive and respond to their experience of God, to notice interior changes, and the effects of these changes in relationships and life circumstances.”<sup>98</sup> Silence is not only permitted in spiritual direction but encouraged when this serves as a more appropriate response than words to foster a contemplative consciousness.<sup>99</sup> Maintaining regular spiritual direction is a contemplative practice.<sup>100</sup> When people share, the presence of God can be noticed and felt. The image of the visitation (Luke 1:39-56) between Mary, mother of Jesus, and Elizabeth in their pregnancies captures how the meeting of two people can individually and together celebrate the presence of God in their lives. When the director and directee follow the movement of the Spirit in the encounter, both can leap for joy through affirming the unique and shared grace. The direction encounter also becomes a spiritual experience.

In the *Spiritual Exercises*, Ignatius encourages a directee to contemplate Christ's life through imagination and senses. The person who contemplates becomes one of the participants in the scene and

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<sup>96</sup> Tilda Norberg, *Consenting to Grace: an Introduction to Gestalt Pastoral Care* (Staten Island, NY: Penn House Press, 2006), 39.

<sup>97</sup> Maureen Conroy, *The Discerning Heart: Discovering a Personal God* (Chicago: Loyola University Press), 76.

<sup>98</sup> Conroy, *The Discerning Heart: Discovering a Personal God*, 75.

<sup>99</sup> Pembroke, *The Art of Listening: Dialogue, Shame, and Pastoral Care*, 1.

<sup>100</sup> Liz Budd Ellmann, “Seeking God Everywhere and Always: Ten Trends in Global Spiritual Direction,” *The Way* 53, no. 2 (2014): 73.

interacts with the characters and the flow in the gospel events. As a giver of the *Exercises*, we also share the participatory grace of the directee through engaging our senses and imagination in contemplative listening. Conroy describes the role of a spiritual director as forming a supportive relationship with directees and nourishing a contemplative atmosphere that enables directees to express freely their vulnerability, pain, joy and gratitude.<sup>101</sup>

Such contemplative stance always asks: “where is the Spirit present to the directee and calling for growth in faith, hope and love?”<sup>102</sup> Sometimes the answer may even lie in a person embracing their suffering. For example, in contemplating Jesus’ passion, the directee may feel intimate, encouraged, terrified, sad, dry, strengthened, angry, powerless and helpless in staying with the suffering Christ. It can be a passion for one to contemplate the Passion.<sup>103</sup> However, Michael Ivens suggests that the participatory grace is compassion as it requires spiritual empathy.<sup>104</sup>

Presence as contemplation in the Ignatian tradition distinguishes spiritual direction from psychological therapy because contemplation in the Christian tradition is fundamentally relational and points to notice the presence of a loving God who is actively at work in a person’s life. However, helping professionals from other fields can also integrate a contemplative attitude in their work. There has been growing research on the benefits of applying contemplative strategies to cultivate

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<sup>101</sup> Conroy, *The Discerning Heart: Discovering a Personal God*, 75.

<sup>102</sup> Smith, *Spiritual Direction: A Guide to Giving and Receiving Direction*, 23.

<sup>103</sup> Michael Ivens, *Understanding the Spiritual Exercises* (Leominster: Gracewing, 1998), 147.

<sup>104</sup> Ivens, *Understanding the Spiritual Exercises*, 147.

therapeutic presence—a new psychological research field called contemplative studies.

## 5. Presence as Healing Love

How we choose to spend our time indicates what we value. What can be more loving than when someone is willing to set aside other agendas and devote undivided attention to another person? Spiritual directors offer the world a living sign of “God as love” through interpersonal care. The Jesuit scientist, Teilhard de Chardin, believed that love is an energy in evolution. “God continues to create from within this all-embracing love.”<sup>105</sup> Spiritual direction holds a unique perspective in recognising God as our Source of life and love. Directors and directees are connected travellers in life and both have joys, struggles and pain. When people are questioning the absence of God, the director is present and seeks to embody God’s love. Perhaps 1 John 4:12 best describes its nature. “No one has ever seen God; but if we love one another, God lives in us and his love is made complete in us.”

In my early years as a spiritual director, I was often reminded that we do not “do” therapy as the focus of spiritual direction is deepening one’s relationship with God. I now believe that healing is an integral part of spiritual direction just as healing is a core part of Jesus’ ministry. Living in a socio-political complex, fast-paced, materialistic and technologically-bombarded era, we are confronted with the fragmentation of lives. While the structure of counselling usually helps

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<sup>105</sup> Patricia H. Berne and Louis Savary, *Teilhard de Chardin On Love* (New York: Paulist Press, 2017), 5.

a person to restore a functioning ego in times of crisis, spiritual direction is helping us to dissolve our unhealthy ego representation so our authentic self can live in alignment with the Spirit. The healing process in spiritual direction often involves reconstructing images of God and images of self.

### **The “Selfing” Process through Relationships**

“Selfing” is a term in relational psychology that refers to the understanding of “self” as a process in relation to an environment which is in a constant state of flux.<sup>106</sup> Our sense of self is formed through our encounter with others.<sup>107</sup> On the other hand, this developing sense of self affects the way we relate to others and forms a recursive relationship.

“Selfing” emerges through meeting and relating with others, including God. Our self-image and our God-image are like two sides of the coin. For instance, a person who has an image of God as a critical judge may constantly feel themselves to be inadequate or flawed. Another person’s image of God as a compassionate and encouraging Father may enable them to experience themselves as being loved and confident. As noted above, Wilkie Au and Noreen Cannon Au further distinguish our professed knowledge of God from our operating experience of God.<sup>108</sup> While a person might profess that God is powerful, loving and present, their felt experience might be a distant and aloof God, rather than a God showing care and protection.

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<sup>106</sup> Dave Mann, *Gestalt Therapy 100 Key Points & Techniques*, 1st ed. (New York, NY: Routledge, 2010), 88.

<sup>107</sup> Buber, *I and Thou*, 62.

<sup>108</sup> Au and Au, *The Discerning Heart: Exploring the Christian Path*, 112.

Christianity has a strong emphasis on values and moral standards which serve as guidelines in how one “should” behave. Misconception is sadly formed around negative emotions as bad or unholy, especially negative feelings towards God. To be accepted, Christians sometimes learn to hide their vulnerabilities by suppressing or denying powerful emotions such as anger, grief, fear, anxiety, bitterness or jealousy, and sexuality.<sup>109</sup> Shame arises when people judge their feelings as flawed or when confronted with their vulnerabilities as inferior. To avoid shame, some people choose to sacrifice authenticity. Wilkie and Noreen Cannon Au see this abandoned self as our shadow, a part of our personality that is unconsciously suppressed. We then form an ideal self-image by adjusting to what is acceptable in our early experiences in family and culture.<sup>110</sup>

Spiritual direction has the potential to enable a person to cultivate an intimacy that starts with self, then extends to God and others. Monica Brown writes:

*Self-intimacy is about one’s ability to see and know the depths of one’s own being. It is the ability to live with one’s self, not in the sense of self-absorption or isolation, but in the sense of knowing one’s truth, owning one’s brokenness, embracing*

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<sup>109</sup> Irene Bloomfield, “Religion and Psychotherapy: Friends or Foes,” in *Spiritual Dimensions of Pastoral Care: Practical Theology in a Multidisciplinary Context*, ed. David Willows and John Swinton (London: Jessica Kingsley, 2000), 122.

<sup>110</sup> Wilkie Au and Noreen Cannon Au, *Urgings of the Heart: a Spirituality of Integration* (New York: Paulist Press, 1995), 25.

*one’s fears and all that prevents one from coming home to one’s self in a spirit of wellbeing and acceptance.*<sup>111</sup>

Spiritual directors show acceptance to the other person whatever their circumstances are, just as God accepts the director. Spiritual directors do not impose moral judgments though each will have their own ethical framework. Acceptance is not a passive stance of “putting up with things,” but intentionally seeing and noting experience with curiosity and openness. Steven Hayes et al. note that “acceptance has a flexible and active quality such that psychological events are noted and seen—even at times enhanced—moment to moment so that these events are available to participate in behaviorally if it makes sense to do so.”<sup>112</sup> When we can bracket immediate judgements, that will help us to see that everything, even our disordered tendency, exists for a reason.

Pembroke talks about shame as the primary emotion associated with the widespread phenomenon of narcissism, a cause of emotional distress in our time.<sup>113</sup> As Buber proposes, “a soul is never sick alone, and there is always a between-ness.”<sup>114</sup> Egocentricity is a kind of defence developed in childhood where we more or less have experienced conditional love from parents.<sup>115</sup> Shame originates from a lack of

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<sup>111</sup> Monica Brown, *Embodying the God We Proclaim: Ministering as Jesus Did* (Stowmarket: K. Mayhew, 2000), 82.

<sup>112</sup> Steven C. Hayes, Kirk Strosahl, and Kelly G. Wilson, *Acceptance and Commitment Therapy: The Process and Practice of Mindful Change*, 2nd ed. (New York: Guilford Press, 2012), 86.

<sup>113</sup> Neil Pembroke, *Renewing Pastoral Practice: Trinitarian Perspectives on Pastoral Care and Counselling* (Aldershot; Burlington, VT: Ashgate Publishing, 2006), 83.

<sup>114</sup> Buber, *Martin Buber on Psychology and Psychotherapy: Essays, Letters, and Dialogue*, 21.

<sup>115</sup> David G. Benner, *Care of Souls: Revisioning Christian Nurture and Counsel* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Books, 1998), 75.

unconditional positive mirroring in childhood within the family system. Our society and the emergence of social media further intensify the need to constantly look capable and successful. This affects parenting, education and even culture in the church as achievement is emphasised over authenticity. While shame brings alienation, “love is the power that allows the human person to overcome this state of estrangement.”<sup>116</sup>

As discussed before, being relational is our human nature. Brené Brown claims that “connection is why we are here. We are hardwired to connect with others, it is what gives purpose and meaning to our lives, and without it there is suffering.”<sup>117</sup> Fritz Kunkel points out that our hope for growth and wholeness is based on the desire to return to the “we-experience—the experience of interpersonal connectedness,”<sup>118</sup> where we are constantly looking for love and belonging. As humanistic psychotherapy believes, the therapeutic relationship itself contributes to healing. Integration happens when a person has a positive experience of being held by another with compassion and kindness. Our capacity to trust God relates to our ability to “see the goodness of the Lord in the land of the living” (Psalm 27:13). In difficult times, Ignatius encourages the director to express gentleness and kindness:

*[when] the exercitant is in desolation and tempted, let him [the director] not deal severely and harshly with him, but gently and kindly. He should encourage and strengthen him for the future by exposing to him the wiles of the enemy of our human nature,*

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<sup>116</sup> Pembroke, *Renewing Pastoral Practice: Trinitarian Perspectives on Pastoral Care and Counselling*, 83.

<sup>117</sup> Brené C. Brown, *Daring Greatly*, 1st ed. (New York, NY: Gotham Books, 2012), 153.

<sup>118</sup> Benner, *Care of Souls: Revisioning Christian Nurture and Counsel*, 75.

*and by getting him to prepare and dispose himself for the coming consolation. (Exx 7)*

Barry and Connolly also affirm that the relationship between the director and the directee may potentially serve as a positive mirror for a person’s relationship with a benevolent God.

*It is true that God can relate to people without the mediation of anyone else..., God’s usual way is, however, through other people. So the quality of the church’s ministry must be a great concern; ...This is especially true of spiritual directors.<sup>119</sup>*

During the First Week of the *Spiritual Exercises*, Ignatius of Loyola invites the directee to ask for the grace of shame and confusion, and to recognise any disordered attachments. If shame is understood as the barrier of love, disordered attachment could be our loss in experiencing unconditional love and our adjustment to “earn” this love which is already promised. The grace of the First Week is to experience oneself as a loved sinner. Our capacity to internalise God’s unconditional love is an ongoing collaboration of will and grace. It requires initially the grace of God and also our will to receive and embrace that love by cultivating an attitude towards self-compassion, which is contrary to self-rejection and self-abandonment.

The encounter between Jesus and the woman at the well (John 4:4-26) illustrates the Paradoxical Theory of Change proposed by Arnold Beisser. Jesus and the woman have a conversation over many things. However, it is the unconditional acceptance of Jesus which removes the

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<sup>119</sup> Barry and Connolly, *The Practice of Spiritual Direction*, 143.

toxic shame the woman bears. She felt seen and known and as a consequence, can proclaim her encounter with the “Saviour of the world.” The underlying premise of this theory is that “change occurs when one becomes what he is, not when he tries to become what he is not.”<sup>120</sup> Change in a person does not come from effort, coercion or persuasion, but first from accepting who the person truly is. As a metaphor, a person needs to be grounded firmly in their present reality, and then they may move one step forward. The woman has encountered God’s love incarnate, and this is what ministers of presence are called to become.

## **Obstacles to be Present**

While the capacity to present can be developed, it is important to understand that even experienced spiritual directors can still face obstacles to be fully present. Some possible reasons might be related to physical tiredness, stress, distractions, narcissistic preoccupation, triggering of our personal issues, or having specific outcomes in mind. In my experience, the anxiety around “what and how to do” is a common distraction among new spiritual directors.

Supervision is a confidential and supportive space for people to reflect on ministry experiences and explore graces and struggles to gain wisdom and freedom in service. Maureen Conroy writes that the goal of supervision is to support directors in noticing one’s “interior movements while in the process of directing...to help spiritual directors to grow in self-awareness and interior freedom to stay with directees’ experiences

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<sup>120</sup> Arnold Beisser, “The Paradoxical Theory of Change,” in *Gestalt Therapy Now*, ed. Joen Fagan & Irma Lee Shepherd (New York: The Gestalt Journal Press, 1970), 77.

and to be attentive to God during direction sessions.”<sup>121</sup> Neil Pembroke notes that while genuine presence facilitates healing and wholeness, a pretence of presence can become a source of embarrassment and shame which the other person can observe.<sup>122</sup> Shame occurs when we notice ourselves giving an inappropriate response in a given situation or when one feels a sensitive or vulnerable part is exposed. Supervision explores feelings that have been dismissed in conversation or content that make us “absent.”

Spiritual directors are also humans who are trying their best with the grace of God to serve. The idea of the “wounded healer” proposed by Henry Nouwen<sup>123</sup> can be used to describe spiritual directors who also have life struggles and brokenness just like anyone else. What makes us become an instrument is our containment of personal experience in the unconditional love of God, which is the foundation for true self-awareness and self-compassion. We are then able to be present, accept and understand others with growing compassion and a discerning heart.

## **Concluding Remarks**

It is not an easy task to discuss a phenomenon that is rich and hard to fully capture. This article aims to stimulate discussion and reflection rather than offer a definition. I believe in the value of spiritual direction in supporting people to live a God-oriented life. At the same time, working both as a supervisor and formator, my heart also aches to hear of people being wounded by the process of spiritual direction. While I

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<sup>121</sup> Maureen Conroy, *Looking into the Well: Supervision of Spiritual Directors* (Chicago: Loyola University Press, 1995), 9.

<sup>122</sup> Pembroke, *The Art of Listening: Dialogue, Shame, and Pastoral Care*, 163.

<sup>123</sup> Henri J. M. Nouwen, *The Wounded Healer: Ministry in Contemporary Society* (London: Darton, Longman & Todd, 2014).

still adhere to Ignatius' reminder to hold a good interpretation of others (Exx 22), some of this damage could be minimised if we as a community of practitioners are willing to engage in critical reflection on the dynamics of our practice.

As I write, I also observe the growing numbers of people seeking spiritual direction and the expansion of spiritual direction formation programs around the world. My hope is that spiritual direction does not become a trend, but truly ignites genuine passion in people to seek Presence and loving service in the world. Hurding notes that the twenty-first century is named as a conceptual age characterised by the need of creators and empathisers.<sup>124</sup> Can spiritual direction offer hope for authentic living and connection? This commitment to authenticity is grounded in our Christian faith that God loves and accepts all of our humanity, including our vulnerability. It is out of this authentic presence that genuine trust and connection can be strengthened among people and with the Divine. Faith communities can be maintained with vitality.

This paper has discussed the notion of presence in Ignatian spiritual direction through literatures from various fields. All converge to reveal that presence allows fundamental human needs to be met: to be seen, heard, respected, secure, loved, connected, makers of meaning and self-transcending. Spiritual direction can indeed learn much from other modalities to refine our knowledge of human development. This paper is one attempt to bring a dialogue between other fields and the practice of spiritual direction. Presence is one of the phenomena.

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<sup>124</sup> Hurding, *Five Pathways to Wholeness: Explorations in Pastoral Care and Counselling*, 126.

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〔摘要〕臨在是心理學文獻中廣泛使用的詞彙，也是基督教靈修中必不可少的內涵，它卻難以完全捉摸並透過文字來表達。靈修指導中的臨在是一個有協定的關係過程，但到底如何臨在才能使輔導對受導者作出最大支持，以符合靈修方向的目標做出貢獻則甚少有具體表述。究竟靈修指導中的臨在是種素質、神恩還是技巧呢？怎樣的臨在最能符合依納爵傳統靈修指導的目標？

基督信仰下的靈修指導始現於第四世紀的沙漠教父時期，到當代逐漸發展成為專業服務。儘管某些基礎在基督教靈修指導傳統中仍然經久不衰，毫無疑問其原始格式會根據所涉及的成員特質和背景而改變。本文對當代靈修指導的臨在過程進行跨學科的討論，包括回顧了來自依納爵靈修傳統、心理學，哲學和神學的文獻。探索表達臨在的不同方式將有助於建立對臨在的豐富現象學理解。因著完形療法和靈修指導的背景，拙文在討論過程中突顯了關係視角作為重點。本文認為臨在是靈修指導者的修持，其中涉及以下元素：1) 具身化的行動；2) 同情共感；3) 對話；4) 默觀；5) 療癒的愛。本文旨在激發讀者對當代依納爵靈修指導的實踐作出反思。

**關鍵詞：**臨在，依納爵，靈修指導，關係上的，分辨