

## **An Ignatian Perspective of Tension in Spiritual Direction**

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**Abstract:** Being indifferent towards all created things for the greater glory of God is the core of Ignatian Spirituality. This attitude cannot help but put a person inherently under tension in making good decisions. In spiritual direction the director is, under this similar tension, offering help to the directee so that the latter can also grow to become indifferent in one's life for the greater glory of God. This article is to delineate and explore five kinds of tension which are commonly present in the process of doing spiritual direction. The heightening of one's being conscious of these tensions during the conversation would be conducive to accompany the counterpart in the journey towards God.

**Keywords:** tension, Ignatian Spirituality, First Principle and Foundation, indifferent, operations

### **Introduction**

The request for and practice of spiritual direction has become a widespread phenomenon within the Church the last two decades. More encouraging is that a good number of qualified lay people take this service as their calling and receive corresponding formation to become spiritual directors.

This ministry is no longer limited to religious or clergy. Having worked in an Ignatian retreat house for almost twenty years, I witness that many Christians are yearning for a personal and deeper relationship with the Lord, and they appreciate the help of spiritual direction during Ignatian retreats to respond to this inner desire.

In this context, the formation of competent spiritual directors is necessary. However, different from other disciplines or professions, spiritual direction presupposes faith and a personal relationship with God which cannot be scientifically or academically measured and produced. Although books and lectures are helpful and necessary in training, being a spiritual director is fundamentally a vocation. One discovers this in personal prayers and retreats, and then it is affirmed by the larger Church community. Similar to a religious vocation, personal conviction in the Lord and communal affirmation are correlated, constantly interacting with each other as a way of proceeding, which we call discernment. That process is not without tension. On some occasions, personal appropriation is more significant, especially in moments of life crisis; at other times, communal feedback becomes crucial in deciding whether one’s calling is authentic or beneficial to the common good. Such tension was evident in the journey of St. Ignatius after his conversion in 1521, in discerning between his personal desires and the responses of the church. “God treated him at this time just as a schoolmaster treats a child he is teaching.”<sup>1</sup>

This symbol of tension also depicts the dynamics of spiritual direction. As a Jesuit formed in the Ignatian tradition and inspired by Bernard

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<sup>1</sup> In this work, the numerated paragraph in the text of the Autobiography will be designated as A, followed by the paragraph number in square brackets, for example [A19]; the numerated paragraph in the text of the Spiritual Exercises will be designated as SE, followed by the paragraph number in square brackets, for example [SE 23]. The Autobiography quoted in this work is from Barton T. Geger ed. *A Pilgrim’s Testament: The Memoirs of Saint Ignatius of Loyola*. (Boston: Institute of Jesuit Sources, 2020).

Loneragan's transcendental method of self-appropriation, I can see both Ignatius and Lonergan put their money on the importance of and prioritizing operations. While Ignatius structures his Spiritual Exercises to operate within the four Weeks, Lonergan explores the operation of human consciousness and differentiates it into experience, understanding, judgment and decision. Human transcendence and transformation depend on how one has sincerely and authentically operated in this process. In both kinds of operation, tension is present. Ignatius sees the perennial struggle between the good and evil spirits, while Lonergan realizes that human authenticity is precarious, fluctuating between progress and decline.

Borrowing from their insights, this paper delineates some dimensions of tension in spiritual direction. As Lonergan advises the heightening of consciousness in knowing and doing, a spiritual director's heightened awareness of tension in one's interaction with the directee would facilitate a better discernment process in the ministry.

Before illustrating the five fundamental—but by no means comprehensive—tensions, I would like to invite the Ignatian readers to ponder on the first Principle and Foundation in the Spiritual Exercises from the perspective of tension.

### **First Principle and Foundation from the Perspective of Tension**

St. Ignatius created this masterpiece of consideration to begin the Spiritual Exercises. Howard Gray understands it as the content of conversation between the retreatant and spiritual director in entering the Exercises, spending a few days to ponder and converse what it means to the life of the retreatant.<sup>2</sup>

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<sup>2</sup> Howard Gray, *Dynamic of the Spiritual Exercises Lecture 2: Principle and Foundation* (Georgetown University, November 7, 2012),

The text itself contains three parts, namely, the purpose of human life as being God-centered, an indifferent attitude towards all created existence, and the retreatant’s appropriating the *Magis* in fulfilling that purpose.<sup>3</sup> The process of conversation in spiritual direction brings flesh and blood to the text, echoing the transcendental process that Lonergan describes as moving from experience to understanding, from understanding to judgment, and from judgment to decision and so to complete one’s self-appropriation.

The religious worldview as being God-centered gives birth to a tension in how one sees the world and things, that is, a process of becoming indifferent towards all created goods as a universal worldview. If one does not desire health over sickness, wealth over poverty, success over failure, and a long life over a short one [SE 23], this attitude implies the readiness of putting the two opposite options into consideration, that is, holding the stronger inclination in a phenomenological *epochē*, while letting the lesser one emerge and be attended to. Spiritual life means making an effort to have a disciplined awareness of these opposites since human consciousness tends to disregard the less desirable inclinations, such as negative emotions, sickness, poverty, etc., in one’s spontaneity.

Therefore, there are three levels of healing or freedom,<sup>4</sup> as graces from the Lord. First, the emergence and acceptance of unfavorable emotions and unattended inclinations. Second, to hold the favorable and unfavorable ones

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<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Vk0F7CVtKFI&list=PL5k0yYNwcTkaG-MQI7Smcm5Qy5HbgN3Ph&index=2> (accessed June 7, 2021).

<sup>3</sup> *Magis*, Latin, literally meaning "more" or "greater." In Ignatian tradition, *magis* is related to *ad majorem Dei gloriam*, a Latin phrase meaning "for the greater glory of God."

<sup>4</sup> Healing and freedom are understood in the context of Spiritual Exercises as “every way of preparing and disposing 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” [SE 1].

together so that one can understand and discern for the greater glory of God. Finally, the determination to choose one over the other for the *Magis*. All three processes are in tension.

Following Gray's suggestion, the conversation at the beginning of the Spiritual Exercises on the first Principle and Foundation is partly to elicit the awareness of the presence of such ongoing tensions in one's life and past decisions, apart from eliciting the joy and gratitude in one's relationship with God. New images of similar tensions from memory come out as the conversation goes on, giving way to more and deeper insights into self-understanding and the dialectical worldview or spirits, which permeates in the dynamics and content of the four Weeks in the Spiritual Exercises.

### **An Understanding of Spiritual Direction**

Spiritual direction has many facets. There are various modes of delivering.<sup>5</sup> A spiritual director may emphasize one approach over another; the content and dynamic of the conversation between the two parties is neither rigid nor limited to one level of meaning. In fact, the catchwords of Ignatian tradition are accommodation and flexibility, which are the fruits of being indifferent towards one's own preferences in giving spiritual direction. The starting point of the conversation is open to all kinds of possibilities, according to the interest and need of the directee.<sup>6</sup> For Ignatius, the purpose of a spiritual conversation is to help souls. But the condition of possibility in achieving this

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<sup>5</sup> David L. Fleming, "Modes of Spiritual Direction" in *The Christian Ministry of Spiritual Direction*, ed. David Fleming (St. Louis, MO: Review for Religious), 106-112. There, spiritual direction can be functioned as institutionalized, as interpersonal relationship, as charismatic, as sacramental, and as incarnational.

<sup>6</sup> Howard Gray, *Dynamic of the Spiritual Exercises Lecture 1: Presupposition and Introductory Annotations* (Georgetown University, November 7, 2012), <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=5gMTEYHB130&list=PL5k0yYNwcTkaG-MQI7Smcm5Qy5HbgN3Ph&index=1> (accessed June 7, 2021).

purpose is, in the contemporary understanding, to build up a good rapport by attentive listening and empathy.

On the one hand, the goal of spiritual direction as relating oneself with the Lord may not be emphasized in the first place. On the other hand, any specific service has its own meaning and purpose. According to William Barry, spiritual direction is “a help given by one Christian to another which enables that person to pay attention to God’s personal communication to him or her, to respond to this personally communicating God, ...” This purpose is to be kept in mind, disregarding the accommodation that one is facilitating in the process. The holding of this purpose bears a kind of tension in the inner movements of a spiritual director.

In a wider sense, even in doing spiritual direction proper, this helping service itself can create a tension of various degrees due to their difference in horizons. According to Lonergan, horizon defines one’s boundary of knowing, including the known known and known unknown. When two persons interact, their horizons can overlap so that they are in congruence during the conversation and proceeding. No tension is implied. The two parties become different when their horizons are either complementary, developmental, or dialectic.<sup>7</sup> For example, the spiritual and professional practice of a married person is basically different from that of a religious. Their difference is complementary, and they can learn from each other and widen mutual horizons. The tension is usually not apparent.

However, in the process of spiritual direction, it can happen that the director discovers the inconsistency between what the directee has pronounced versus what was operational. For example, a directee may pronounce God as merciful and forgiving but the director hears an operational image of a

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<sup>7</sup> Bernard Lonergan, *Method in Theology* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1996), 236.

judgmental and punishing God in the former's prayer and life experiences. Then the help is to develop one's awareness of this discrepancy and to invite him/her to bring this to prayer. The interaction can imply a certain degree of tension. Finally, it sometimes happens that the two parties are at loggerheads on certain beliefs related to moral teachings or values. This becomes dialectical and the tension is keenly felt. More delineation and understanding on these in spiritual direction will be explored subsequently.

### **Tension #1: Conversation versus Silence**

This contrast presupposes the intention of moving into a personal depth in the direction process. At the beginning of spiritual direction, by free conversation the directee expresses one's outer and inner experiences in certain historical events or personal prayers. The spiritual director's attentive listening and empathy help the person connect, understand, and own oneself, and relate deeper to oneself, others, and God. Afterwards, the conversation usually moves into another level under the guidance from the spiritual director, who, according to one's own understanding of the purpose of spiritual direction, raises questions to help the directee into further discovery and understanding of oneself and God so that proper judgment and decision can be made accordingly.

When and why does silence come into the picture? According to Lonergan's transcendental analysis of human consciousness, experience itself is a complex phenomenon, including both conscious and unconscious dimensions. When a person says that the room is too hot, the very person may not yet be aware of the itchiness of his/her sole, although both are the simultaneous experiences of the body. Conversation seems to mediate between human conscious and unconscious intentionality. An ongoing conversation allows many related but unattended dimensions of one's experience to unfold, especially the inner experiences of feelings, ideas,

expectations, etc. so that one receives a more comprehensive attentiveness to the personal experience. Otherwise, the narrowing of oneself to partial experience leads to prejudiced opinion and judgment. For example, only focusing one’s hatred and anger towards someone may ignore the simultaneous appreciation and love towards the same person. Although not immediately, to elicit the awareness of unattended feelings is necessary. Here, the capacity to create space and time and to allow the directee to explore other inner dimensions in silence becomes significant in spiritual direction.

Beyond noticing experience, receiving insights into one’s own reality and deciding on values to serve God is the fundamental meaning of spiritual direction, especially in the Ignatian tradition where election for the greater glory of God is emphasized. But the emergence of possible insights greatly relies on relevant and inspiring images from one’s psychic censorship which governs the selection of images into our consciousness.<sup>8</sup> According to Lonergan, “Just as wanting an insight penetrates below the surface to bring forth schematic images that give rise to the insight, so not wanting an insight has the opposite effect of repressing from consciousness a scheme that would suggest the insight.”<sup>9</sup> Lonergan implies here that due to the human dramatic experience of trauma or other reasons, the psychic censorship represses relevant and useful images to understand the reality and allows the person to live in fantasy and illusion. He calls this aberration of understanding a *scotosis*,<sup>10</sup> a blind spot. Furthermore, “primarily, the censorship is constructive; it selects and arranges materials that emerge in consciousness in a perspective

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<sup>8</sup> Lonergan uses the dramatic instance of Archimedes rushing naked from the baths of Syracuse with the cryptic cry ‘*Eureka!*’ (I find it!) to begin his milestone book *Insight*. Archimedes was overjoyed because he received the insight to calculate the density of the golden crown when he saw the image of water being displaced in his own bath.

<sup>9</sup> Bernard Lonergan, *Insight: A Study of Human Understanding* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1992), 215.

<sup>10</sup> *Ibid.*

that gives rise to an insight.”<sup>11</sup> This belief justifies the importance of silence during interaction between the two parties. Silence is an important prerequisite for penetration through such psychic censorship. Our psyche needs sufficient space and security to organize and censor the related materials to give way to insights. Through raising relevant and significant questions for deeper exploration of the inner self, the spiritual director is helping the directee’s psychic censor to organize various images within to prepare for receiving further insights.

The child Jesus asked our Lady, “Why were you searching for me? Did you not know I had to be in my Father’s house?... but his mother treasures all these things in her heart.” (Luke 2:49, 51) At first they were in conversation after finding Jesus, but a significant question from the Lord immediately put his mother in silence. Jesus’ question and body language were to stimulate certain images, like “Father,” “His House,” “Staying,” in Mary that up to that moment were not obvious to her. Our lady needed the inner space and time to digest the meaning of this question so that she could understand her son and herself. She was in a way waiting for insights to this question. More conversations or explanations here would not help. This kind of silence seems to be the most precious and prayerful moment in spiritual direction. However, this moment comes from the previous flow of engaging conversation in the first place.

My own watershed experience in spiritual life confirms this understanding. When I was a Jesuit scholastic, i.e., before being ordained as a priest, I was sent to a secondary school to teach. Once, I complained to my spiritual director, a Jesuit companion, about the unedifying behaviors of the school principal. I lamented, “I don’t mind what he has done, but acting like that is not a good model in front of the teachers; I don’t mind what he has said

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<sup>11</sup> Ibid., 216.

but speaking in such manner before the students would certainly upset them. . . .” My spiritual director gazed at me and remarked, “Stephen, you mind!” I was stunned and could not utter a word. I did not expect that the spiritual director picked up a casual word in my articulation, which was unconscious or unintentional. The spiritual director’s mirroring of the word “mind” helped me to be aware, and notice the affective dimension that I had ignored or bypassed. In Ignatian tradition, the affective dimension is often the raw material for discernment and self-knowledge in conversation with God. Despite the emphasis on authenticity in spiritual life and human formation in contemporary times, its appropriation cannot simply rely on personal effort and determination. Rather, it is a dynamic or journey of co-discovery and exploration between two parties or in a community.

These two examples illustrate the significance and contribution of an insightful remark or evocative question raised to the counterpart in conversation. Such confrontation mediates between speaking and silence, leading to helpful insights for deeper self-knowledge and intimacy with God. However, this initiative causes tension first in the heart of the spiritual director, asking oneself to discern whether it is appropriate or timely to respond in such a way to this very person here and now. Then the response itself may cause tension between the two parties since the directee is usually not ready to digest or understand the remark or question addressed to oneself. The director needs the capacity at this moment to hold the tension of silence itself.

Ideally, conversation and silence become a rhythm during the spiritual direction. After a certain moment of silence, the directee can usually speak out and share deeper feelings, new images, previous unattended memory, or insights. This discovery leads to another level of conversation toward further exploration, which is extremely fruitful and a rewarding moment in spiritual direction. Sometimes the spiritual director may think it appropriate to break the

silence, especially if it lasts too long, and to ask the counterpart what was happening in such a moment of silence, and the conversation goes on.

### **Tension #2: Affectivity versus Rationality and their Stages**

The contrast between conversation and silence brings the mutual dynamic between the spiritual director and directee to a deeper level of self-discovery and understanding in the Lord. The contents to be engaged are one's affectivity and rationality in certain events or happenings. The director has a greater responsibility to be aware of which content is more helpful to deepen the process, following the First Principle and Foundation.

Rationality is usually related to our capacity to recall, understand, and interpret the events in one's natural attitude,<sup>12</sup> while affectivity is like a kind of step back from such rationality and to explore the feelings towards those events and corresponding understanding. However, both dwell within the greater horizon of one's own development in religious faith, namely, in one's institutional, critical, and mystical stage that Gerard Hughes explains in a lucid way from the contribution of Von Hugel.<sup>13</sup>

According to Von Hugel, each stage has its own attached rationality and affectivity. The Institutional stage represents the logic and need of our senses and memories in developing trust, stability, conviction, authority, security, and sense of belonging through sacraments, words, and teachings of the Church. Being critical in our development signifies the need to find meaning to integrate the world with one's own self-appropriation to make sense of life. One is no longer satisfied with the ready-made answers from others, including

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<sup>12</sup> Natural attitude, according to phenomenology, is a way of seeing the world and oneself without putting it in parenthesis. It is similar to Heidegger's use of "ready at hand" which connotes a lack of authenticity in the first place.

<sup>13</sup> Gerard Hughes, *God of Surprises* (London: Darton, Longman & Todd Ltd, 1985), 11-24.

doctrines and moral stipulations of religious belief. Convictions are formed and owned through the process where one questions, criticizes, and systematizes with intellectual strength and passionate vigor.

Finally, the human is called to be mystical as well, a sense of being united with the world, the others, and God. It is an interior path where one is interested and absorbed in one’s inner movements, such as feelings, feelings about feelings, thoughts, hidden beliefs, expectations, desires, and yearnings. These movements become the knowing objects to be explored. Although this is also a process of finding meaning in one’s life, this stage dwells on the unifying nature of the mystical yearning. The individual’s claim of truth and meaning is no longer significant, rather the harmony and union with others or the Other is predominant. While the rationality of the critical stage avoids and lessens sufferings, a person in a mystical vision is willing to choose suffering and loss for the sake of love. That is the tension between Peter and Jesus in His prediction of the coming suffering and death in the Gospels (Mt 16:21-28). The rationality of the former tended to be black and white, bending towards binary thinking, while the latter was fond of paradoxical, pluralistic, and inclusive language.

How are these kinds of distinctions related to spiritual direction? As succinctly mentioned above, the relationship between the director and directee can be in a development process due to the difference of their horizons. The spiritual director is to help the counterpart explore oneself for greater and deeper discovery. Gerard Hughes illustrates an example in *God of Surprises*.<sup>14</sup> Fred, a retreatant contemplating the Gospel scene of the Wedding in Cana, saw Jesus holding a staff, wearing a thorny crown, showing disapproval of the merriment of the celebration. At least two things are at stake there.

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<sup>14</sup> Ibid., 36.

First, Fred was a fervent and model Christian whose image of God was the God of love and mercy, but his prayer showed the Lord as a demanding judge. In fact, Fred has not found joy in his good works of serving the Lord. This discrepancy indicated the tension between Fred's affectivity and rationality that Hughes, as a spiritual director, acknowledged and took as a theme to help Fred to explore further. Second, Hughes' telling this story reveals that the director is helping the directee to move from a limited institutional stage to a freer critical and mystical one. A Christian is called to find balance and maturity in these three stages, without prejudice towards one or the other two of the stages. Again, this is the perspective of the first Principle and Foundation.<sup>15</sup>

Another example is Ignatius' letter to Sr. Rejadell.<sup>16</sup> He quoted her words saying, "I am a poor religious, and I think I have a desire of serving Christ our Lord," following his explanation in the previous lines on false humility. The evil spirit uses this tactic to prevent the soul from saying any of the blessings and strength the Lord has bestowed on him or her.<sup>17</sup> By this rationality Ignatius expounded that she had been deceived by the devil and did not dare to say clearly, "I have a desire of serving Christ the Lord." Here Ignatius' attention was on her affective movement rather than on the rationality such as eliciting her ideas on what and how to serve the Lord. Ignatius felt the hesitation and timidity behind those words which rendered the possible what or how to serve the Lord irrelevant. Here, Ignatius has demonstrated the

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<sup>15</sup> The spiritual director has also his/her moment of tending towards the institutional, critical or mystical stage during the conversation. It is important to be aware where one is and which stage of language and values that one is engaging.

<sup>16</sup> Ignatius of Loyola, "To Sister Teresa Rejadell," *Letters of St. Ignatius of Loyola* (Chicago: Loyola University Press, 1959), 18-23

<sup>17</sup> *Ibid.*, 20

spiritual director’s discernment between affectivity and rationality during the conversation.

The above two Illustrations do not imply that affectivity should always be dominant or emphasized during spiritual direction. Although the significance of affectivity is easily ignored and difficult to detect, Ignatian pedagogy on discernment of spirits is more of an affective movement, signified by consolation and desolation, than a rational calculation in the first place. On the contrary, when a retreatant is overwhelmed by feelings or strong inclination towards a certain preference, its rationality is to be explored. Jesus had a similar concern when someone was so keen to follow him, he tells the person, “... the foxes have dens and the birds have nests, but the son of man has no place to rest his head.” (Luke 9:58) It presents a cool and rational calculation for such a passionate candidate to consider whether one is ready. Each moment has its own priority in how best to help a person.

### **Tension #3: Mundane Life versus Spiritual Experience**

It was not uncommon to hear the comment that the Spiritual Exercises are like a rigid model which everyone is required to fit into, such as the fixation to go through the four Weeks of the whole Spiritual Exercises even in the length of an eight-day retreat. At the opposite extreme, some Ignatian guides just tell the retreatants to do repetition after hearing their sharing over the prayed passages. The lack of clear explanation and indication impressed the latter that they did not fulfil the expectation of getting the corresponding fruits of the Exercises.

Undoubtedly, these are grey areas to judge whether such proceedings serve simply to fit into the preconceived model. The structure of the four Weeks is the perennial Christian dynamic in spiritual life, while the purpose of repetition is to elicit greater fruits through the same passage of prayer, or to let the retreatants have more time to dispose themselves to such prayers. However,

there are various ways the original intent can be distorted into unhelpful practices. The following articulation on the tension between mundane life and religious experience has no intention to tackle the complaints but to shed light on it so that hopefully the guides will become more contemplative to avoid such Procrustes' temptation.

The keyword is contemplation.<sup>18</sup> Since its meaning is rich in Christian spiritual tradition, the term becomes elusive to some people. The following discussion limits the understanding of contemplation to focus on the tension between what is seen versus unseen, revealed versus concealed, known versus emerging to be known, and finally, what is already versus what is not yet. When I contemplate a flower, by senses I firstly see its various parts and appreciate its color, angle, brightness under the sun, movement in the breeze, and smell its fragrance. Slowly when I immerse in this gaze and appreciation, I feel the flower seemingly telling me, "You are as beautiful and blessed as I am." I am amazed by this sudden voice which is a kind of revelation to me beyond my expectation before my contemplation. Upon hearing this I tend to ask related questions, such as whether it is true, whether it is the voice of the Lord, etc. This illustrates the movements of contemplation when a simple human appreciation of flowers can move into a religious horizon and possible engagement with the Lord.

On the other hand, a person may converse a lot about one's interaction with the Bible passage in a spiritual direction, full of religious language or concepts, but the spiritual director does not discern interior movement at all in the directee's articulation. In fact, the conversation becomes dry and shallow as it goes on. Being aware of his or her own affectivity, the director is able to

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<sup>18</sup> The two complaints, namely, being rigid in giving all the Four-Week themes in the Spiritual Exercises or demanding repetition, in the above paragraph, are actual illustrations of lacking the capacity of contemplation.

contemplate the movements. They indicate that the religious thoughts or ideas of the directee may be concealing certain blind spot, struggle, or resistance that the counterpart has not been aware of. The director who is able to contemplate those possible traces, begins to raise certain questions to engage with the counterpart.

In the above illustrations, the contrast between the director and directee is filled with tension because passively the director must be indifferent towards certain elements in one’s consciousness, be open to the inquiries by the counterpart, and patiently wait for the answer or revelation. But at the same time, one is also actively making an effort to ask related questions to understand, to judge and to decide what is more helpful to the directee.

The Ignatian motto of finding God in all things implies everything of the mundane life can be a fulcrum towards religious experience. One of the challenges for the spiritual director is how to engage the directee in a thematic religious experience, as the purpose of spiritual direction. Religious experience is sometimes confused with religious language. It is not uncommon for people to have such a misconception that if the conversation is about God, Scriptures, pious thoughts and feelings, charity service, etc., they are the facets of religious experience, whereas sharing of one’s workaday life stories is not a religious experience. Certainly, this kind of judgment has a grain of truth in it, but fortunately it is not the whole picture.

The first two rules of discernment of spirits give some illumination. [SE 314-315] These rules show that the dynamics of the evil spirit and the good spirit are different, according to the moral states of the human soul. The guide is to contemplate the presence of spirits, a kind of religious experience, behind the orientation of one’s mundane life even without the awareness of the very person on it. Analogically, the guide is called to have a connatural sense of God’s presence or absence when one listens with contemplative love to the stories, feelings, thoughts, desires, etc., of the directee. This fruit of

contemplation, in many such occasions, becomes the entry point to help the directee connect one's personal experience with a clearer sense of God or the spirits.

For example, a directee shared the complaints and accusations due to her acute suffering from the injustice in her life; the guide was touched by her closeness with the crucified Jesus and sensed the love of Christ towards her. Through his contemplative love, the guide went beyond the directee's suffering to see the other side of the story and the grace in that person, even though such accusing language of mundane life also bothers the listener. This insight and confidence prompted the guide to invite the directee to attend to and appreciate God's possible presence and support in those sufferings in due time.<sup>19</sup> Often in spiritual direction, the guide can be the crucial mediator to facilitate a spiritual illumination from a merely secular perspective.

This contemplative attitude is also a remedy to the above-mentioned rigidity in giving the Spiritual Exercises. If being indifferent to worldly things, including the structure of the Spiritual Exercises, represents the fruit of being God-centered according to the first Principle and Foundation, then contemplative love is the other side of the same coin.

#### **Tension #4: Total Acceptance versus Thinking with the Church**

This tension is not always a specific concern in spiritual direction. It presumes certain revelations of the directee whose living norms or beliefs are somewhat in opposition to those of the spiritual director in terms of biblical

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<sup>19</sup> A tension or caution needs to be addressed here. Contemplation can be distorted to become a top-down instruction towards the directee, due to the director's preoccupation to change the person, insisting that God's love is always present in the sufferings when the counterpart is not yet ready to digest this.

teachings or church doctrines.<sup>20</sup> Normally it creates the two pulling forces within the guide, namely God is all merciful and forgiving in accepting sinners on the one hand, and the followers are to obey the commandments of the Lord on the other. The former leads to an accommodating and sympathetic attitude while the latter implies a need for instruction and expectation of change. Christian conscience is to be formed in a healthy sensibility of guilt and remorse as well as a trustful surrender to God’s love and forgiveness. The horizon of conversion and hope is commonly present in the sacrament of confession, pastoral counseling, and spiritual direction. However, the concern of spiritual direction is not so much with the instruction or explanation of church teachings as helping the person achieve a greater self-knowledge and to facilitate one’s closer relationship with God even amid one’s moral defects in behavior or intellect in Christian belief.

Honoring the complementarity of different horizons, the director is to acknowledge one’s own ignorance and possible bias, and the need to discover certain history and life stories of the directee so that the cause of wrongdoings can be better understood and empathized. This understanding provides a bigger picture for further contemplation and elaboration of respective affectivity and rationality as conversation, silence, and prayers go on during the spiritual direction.<sup>21</sup>

This kind of exchange and conversation facilitate the process of development, helping the directee elicit mutual affection between oneself and

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<sup>20</sup> No doubt in the discussion below, the aberration is basically assumed to be on the side of the directees. But it does not deny the possibility of aberration on the part of the directors. But supervision of the directors and its related concerns are beyond the capacity of this paper.

<sup>21</sup> Moral or intellectual defects have several layers, including one’s motivation, reason, circumstances, responsibility, etc. whose exploration is beyond the capacity and purpose of this paper. The complementary aspect simply draws out the necessity for the director to put this tension into thematic awareness.

the Lord in one's life stories, and to enhance one's self-understanding in the defective religious beliefs or moral behaviors. The former facilitates the experience of God's love for religious conversion;<sup>22</sup> the latter is about the discernment of spirits in Ignatian tradition, or about receiving insights into one's judgments and actions in Lonergan's paradigm. Even in tackling one's unfreedom in beliefs or behaviors, spiritual direction does not focus on immediate behavioral change but a deeper experience, understanding and judgment of the presence of the good and evil spirits in one's values, beliefs, or actions. This pedagogy has at least two implications.

First, it differentiates the reflective self in discernment from the workaday self in action with a healthier distance and more realistic objectification. The confusion of these two selves happens either in defensive reaction or self-blame. On the one hand, the reflective self protects or justifies the workaday self beyond proper proportion due to fear or shame; on the other hand, the reflective self blames the workaday self out of guilt and remorse. Neither stance facilitates a deeper self-understanding and a closer relationship with God. Through differentiation, the reflective self can shift its attention to feel and name the presence and influence of various spirits and one's inordinate attachments. Proper guidance from the director may help the directee to stay in a calmer and more reflective disposition.<sup>23</sup>

Meanwhile, discernment of spirits allows the guide to focus less on the demand for change but more on eliciting experience and understanding of the

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<sup>22</sup> According to Lonergan who is fond of the quote "the love of God has poured into our heart through the Holy Spirit" (Rom 5:5), religious conversion is the person falling in love unreservedly with the transcendent, which becomes the foundation of one's moral and intellectual conversion. *Method in Theology*, 243.

<sup>23</sup> Again, it is beyond the capacity of this paper to illustrate the ways of doing discernment of spirits in spiritual direction. This reflection presumes the director has had the knowledge of the rules of discernment and skills to apply them in facilitating such understanding for the directee.

tactics of the spirits. Under less burden, the guide is freer in accompaniment which is itself a helpful modeling for the counterpart. Such discernment provides a religious perspective in mundane life that is typically human and belongs to spiritual direction proper.

However, this director-directee operation can become dialectical when the mutual difference becomes irreconcilable. Lonergan names them position and counter-position.<sup>24</sup> This can lead to an end of the mutual relationship, when either party would propose to terminate it or refer to someone else. It may not be a bad outcome, but this needs discernment too. If that is not the case in consideration, it is still meaningful to continue and explore the mutual engaging. Here is a tension at stake! On the one hand, the interaction seems to be going nowhere as both parties are at loggerheads; on the other hand, there are rich dynamics in the movements of various spirits between the two parties. The spiritual director is to be gently aware of the temptation towards desolation, and to recognize the natural inclination towards desolation in the counterpart.

According to St. Ignatius, desolation is a formation process that needs to be handled patiently and delicately as the soul is suffering from inner turmoil.<sup>25</sup> Again, contemplation and compassion render the guide capable of holding the counter-position of the directee at ease and with hope. Even when the conversation goes nowhere for the time being, the guide is to trust the power of prayers and silence that God works on the soul. In this process, the director is the ambassador of Christ and the Church, whose horizon is to hold the rapport with the directee and the salvific end of the latter together according to the spirit of the first Principle and Foundation.

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<sup>24</sup> Cf. Bernard Lonergan, *Method in Theology*, p. 21

<sup>25</sup> Cf. *Spiritual Exercises* of St. Ignatius, #7 on treating those in desolation, and #322 on reasons of encountering desolation.

**Tension #5: Human Effort versus God's Grace**

This concern has nothing to do with the doctrinal controversy of Pelagianism, God's salvific and sanctifying grace has always come first before any human merits. Rather, this is a practical inquiry of striking a balance between making effort to help souls as spiritual director versus leaving it to God to achieve the intended fruits for the directee. How is the guide to understand whether one is doing too little or too much in one's awareness, reflection, and evaluation?

Ignatius adopts the principle of "less is more." He emphasizes that what satisfies the soul is the heart and not the length of exhortation or explanation [SE 2]. He reminds the giver to let the exercitant have direct contact with God rather than relying on the giver. [SE 15] In a good number of letters as Superior General, Ignatius instructs his fellow Jesuits to keep quiet and listen first and keep the speech succinct while speaking. All this drives home the point that the guide is always to have the vision of God in front of oneself even when one is trying to offer help to the counterpart.

How does this vision of God differentiate from doing too little or being incompetent as a guide? Leaving the result and change to God can become a convenient excuse of avoidance, procrastination to confront one's inadequacy. These questions have become more acute since our modern world values and even demands professional standards in service. The more professional and competent one is, the more sophisticated skills and guidance are expected, and thus the helping effects are more significant. Christians who are trained and formed within this horizon naturally feel the need to live out the same standard in doing spiritual direction.

Ignatius is neither stunned nor upset by this modern development. That corresponds exactly to the tension in the first Principle and Foundation which reminds us to remain indifferent towards changes. To be professional and to rely on God is not contradictory; the difficulty lies in one's preoccupied

attachment without enough awareness, just as humans have attached easily to health, honor, richness, and long life in the first place. Their opposites can become strange, despised, and non-sensible. When Peter pulled Jesus aside and advised him of the unnecessary of sufferings (Mt 16:22-23), his attachment towards the political Messiah caused him to say too much to the Lord. On the other hand, the parable of the rich man’s aloofness towards the basic need of the poor Lazarus (Luke 16:19-22) right outside his house elicited the danger of doing too little. Spiritual directors need to be aware of one’s own tendency and temptation of certain values that can lead one to go astray in guiding the directee.<sup>26</sup> However, some differentiations might be helpful here.

Ignatius, in his quoted advice above, assumed that retreatants have developed a certain degree of relationship with God in spiritual life, whose willingness to pray or engage in colloquy with the Lord is not a major block. The question of whether the directee has a healthy self-image and image of God was not in the religious and cultural horizon of the Medieval period. Contemporary understanding of spiritual psychology shows that a distorted self-image and image of God hinder one’s deeper conversation and relationship with the Lord. A capable director may deem it helpful to lead the counterpart to explore deeper the human condition and one’s history in such distorted dimensions before bringing those discoveries to prayers. This is simply one example of making a human effort which is like the work of counseling in contemporary practice.

Considering individual differences in gift and calling, it is impossible to draw a boundary line of human efforts for all spiritual directors, but some parameters are worthwhile to consider. The prominent ones are consolation

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<sup>26</sup> Nowadays, this kind of values can apply to being the left wing or right wing of the Church; being conservatives, traditionalists or liberals; homophobes or LBGT activists, etc.

and desolation for both director and directee during the interaction and afterwards. When Jesus reacted to the point of violently pulling down the tables of those merchants and even using a whip to drive away the cattle in the temple area, His passion for the temple consumed Him entirely. (John 2:13-17) It is a way to express His connection and love with the Father. His human effort was not simply to clean up the temple for better worship or to change the scandalous conditions, but to live out His love for the Father. This interior passion can be empirically felt and articulated beforehand, during the action or later in Examen. Analogically, the director is to have the felt sense and connection with the Lord in one's effort of helping. The formative familiarity with consolation and desolation in one's spiritual life is crucial to detect the interior signal whether one is doing too much, too little or hitting the bull's eye. Consolation is always related to true love and other-centered, not centered on one's achievement or self-satisfaction. On the other hand, the felt sense of desolation reminds us of self-centeredness, relying on oneself too much or falling prey to timidity and avoidance.

Moreover, the human effect of facilitating changes in the directee is not the main purpose of direction. All the help intends to prepare the counterpart to encounter the Lord and receive consolation from Him. This interior journey is to form the directee to gain familiarity with oneself and the Lord, and with the working of the good and evil spirits. This is the hallmark of genuine spiritual direction, in contrast to relying on the director or getting his/her approval.

### **Conclusion**

I would like to conclude this paper with a personal experience. It has taken me more than a year to finish this article. In addition to daily responsibilities in the retreat house and with the Jesuit community, an unexpected sickness and operation have diminished my focus and energy to write. In fact, I am still in the recovery process as I finish writing this article. Reflecting on this incident, I feel providential that this year sees the Jesuits and

our collaborators around the world celebrating the 500<sup>th</sup> anniversary of Ignatius’ conversion. I am in a mysterious way sharing his cannonball experience, greatly shocked and heavily upset by this physical illness beyond my imagination. But amid all this, I have learnt to keep in touch deeper with my vulnerability and become more patient and trustful in the Lord.

Javier Melloni, a Spanish Jesuit, in his lectures on the life of St. Ignatius, likes to capture the hallmark of God’s leading this saint as “fertile tension.” Tension represents the pulling forces between two powers that renders a person under its domain to feel uncomfortable, disturbed, and even painful. From the event of the cannonball onward, Ignatius could not settle on certain paths, ideas or decisions that would render God’s will clear to him. Moment by moment, the established conviction was suddenly challenged or shattered so that he needed to ask the Lord’s guidance again. This process is forming a person of faith, and a man or woman of God for the divine mission, as St. Ignatius has shown us.

This image of tension is helpful in forming a spiritual director and doing spiritual direction. From a cognitive perspective, tension represents a state of confusion or unknowing in confronting two possibilities that one cannot immediately rely on previous knowledge to proceed. Whether for the director or the directee, at certain points of the conversation one needs to pause and humbly be led, in God’s guidance, by shifting our use of faculties, by the felt sense of consolation and desolation, or by the habit of differentiating the good and evil spirits. It is a normative and formative process that one becomes closer and familiar with the Lord, which is the purpose of spiritual direction.

The Ignatian dictum affirms “finding God in all things,” yet the privileged one among all things is the fertile tension in our life and service.

**[摘要]** 依納爵靈修的要義是人為了天主更大的光榮，對世間的種種能達致平心。有了這份態度，想作出好的決定的人自然處身於張力之中。放在靈修輔導的處境來看，陪伴者是在這種張力中提供幫助，使受輔者同樣在生命中邁向平心來愈顯主榮。本文嘗試探討普遍臨在於靈修輔導中的五種張力。若在彼此交談中加強這些張力的意識，會對陪伴受輔者走向天主很有幫助。

**關鍵詞：**張力，依納爵靈修，第一原則與基礎，平心，操作