

**Caring for Spiritual Gifts:
Co-Discernment in the Ignatian Conversation of Spiritual Direction**

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. . . Earth's crammed with Heaven
And every common bush afire with God.
Only he who sees takes off his shoes
The rest sit round it and pluck blackberries.
Aurora Leigh, Bk 7
Elizabeth Barrett Browning

Some Useful Background and Assumptions

Spiritual direction is one of the many ways in which the important work of spiritual conversation and preaching the Word takes place. For both experienced spiritual directors, as well as for those in training and internships, there are a number of methods proposed in various books and courses, along with the mentoring from a mature director, for learning how to develop the insights and skills of spiritual direction in the Ignatian tradition. How the many discrete activities of spiritual direction are understood has a critical bearing on the conscious effectiveness of the individual director on behalf of the directee.

The work of spiritual direction is fundamentally a work of the Holy Spirit: how do the director and directee understand the promptings of the Spirit? How do they decide what to do with these promptings? How will the decisions about the promptings translate into action? Foster and Smith in *Devotional Classics* give us a description of the goal of good directing in this modernized version from Gregory of Nyssa's, *The Life of Moses*. Gregory says,

Since the goal of the virtuous way of life is the very thing we have been seeking, it is time for you, noble friend, to be known by God and to become his friend.

This is true perfection: not to avoid a wicked life: because like slaves we servilely fear punishment, not to do good because we hope for rewards, as if cashing in on the virtuous life by some business-like arrangement. On the contrary, disregarding all those things for which we hope and which have been reserved by promise, we regard falling from God's friendship as

the only thing dreadful and we consider becoming God's friend the only thing worthy of honor and desire. This as I have said is the perfection of life.

As your understanding is lifted up to what is magnificent and divine, whatever you may find, (and I know full well that you will find many things) will most certainly be for the common benefit in Christ Jesus. Amen.

All authentic catholic spiritualities carry a set of basic assumptions about the person who is serious about using direction:

- The person is living the Commandments.
- The person is committed to assuming basic responsibilities for good Catholic practice.
- The practice of spirituality is centered in the Eucharist.
- The life thrust is characterized by loving God, neighbor, enemies and self.
- The person is growing in his or her capacity for acknowledging one's own need for healing and forgiveness.
- There is a willingness to extend healing and forgiveness to self, friends, neighbors, relatives, and enemies.
- There is a willingness to practicing good stewardship for the world and its enterprises.
- The person is attracted to work toward just structures as a constitutive part of contemplation.

In addition, as our society becomes more educated and sophisticated, we now have a growing responsibility as directors and directees for managing our less conscious affective movements and images as well as our conscious behavior.

Ignatius hoped for a similar outcome for his retreatants in the 30-day retreat of the *Spiritual Exercises*. He envisioned that retreat to be the occasion and process by which the retreatants would contemplate the mysteries of Christ in the Gospels, thus Salvation History, deepen their own participation in these mysteries, and make decisions in life in keeping with what they had been taught from these exercises and mysteries. The movements for the retreatant in the *Spiritual Exercises* follow a path from being a person possibly unaware of God's personal love to a person enjoying intimacy with the Trinity in a fruitful apostolic life. The *Exercises* do this in an organic way, one grace leading most carefully into the next.

Beyond Individuation to Discipleship by Schemel and Roemer names that growth which for many people takes place in the *Exercises*. In the First Week of the *Exercises* a person might begin from a position of being unaware of God's personal love for him or her, and move through the exercises of that Week from the initial lack of awareness to an understanding that he or she is, indeed, a person deeply loved by God. The organic flow of insight and grace moves in that First Week:

- From being an person unaware of God's love
- To understanding oneself as a person deeply loved by God
- To understanding one's need for redemption and grace as needy creature
- To acknowledging one's sinfulness and forgiveness
- To being someone companioned by God to participate in building the Kingdom.

In the Second Week the flow of graces continues as one moves

- From a willing co-laborer with Christ in building the Kingdom
- To one who understands the poverty and limitation of this discipleship
- To someone who is learning to be a careful observer of Christ, the Master
- To a person willing to be a discerning disciple, no matter what the cost

By the Third Week the retreatant has moved

- From sorrowing at Christ's suffering all this for me
- To someone confirmed in one's discipleship, happy to be more like Christ even in the midst of suffering

The person concludes this movement in the Fourth Week

- From being a person willing to *die with* Christ
- To being someone willing to *live for* Christ
- To a serious desire to use that graced freedom gratefully, creatively and generously
 - by taking initiatives to co-operate with God in service to others
 - by learning to find God in all things and to grow in the peace and joy of intimacy with God.

This kind of spiritual life and work calls for a certain amount of maturity and awareness. It brings up the question, Is spiritual direction useful for everyone? The answer may be "yes" in a very broad sense, but the answer is surely "no" if one is considering long-term individual spiritual direction. For most people the place of "spiritual direction" is contained within the opportunities allotted by schooling, a parish setting, or adult education classes and homilies. It seems quite observable that most

people are nourished and adequately served and supported in their life with God through these venues. At the same time others are not. They need and desire more, and that “more” for many is helped by some kind of formal, on-going direction because it hopefully puts the person in touch with a solid tradition within catholic spirituality that speaks to this “more”. Some would object that this distinction is undemocratic and that everyone should be included for on-going direction. However, practically, it does not work that way. Many people have neither the desire nor the grace to move beyond their own circumstance. Spiritual direction is best used by those who are hungry and thirst for “more”.

As useful as the discipline of psychotherapy has become, it is not the primary model for spiritual direction or the spiritual conversation. Understanding the ways of the Spirit and being discerning as suggested in the *Spiritual Exercises*, in the long run, are far more useful. They keep the spiritual conversations God-centered and away from primarily focusing on troublesome issues, psychic distinctions, and personal growth. This comment is not meant to be exclusionary, but it does state a definite leading focus. It is not a matter of either/or.

Louis Lallemond, SJ, tertian director for St. Isaac Jogues and a few of the other North American Martyrs of the 16th century, understood spiritual direction as an aspect of the gift of counsel:

The persons best fitted to guide others, and to give counsel in what concerns the things of God, are those who, possessed of a pure conscience and a soul free from passion and detached from every interest, and sufficiently provided with science and natural talents, although they may not possess them in any eminent degree, are closely united to God by prayer, and yield a humble admission to the movements of the Holy Spirit. This was the opinion of St. Ignatius; and it was on this account that he appointed S.R., who though not one of those who were remarkable in the Society for human talents, was a man filled with the Spirit of God. (Spiritual Doctrine of Father Louis Lallemand, p.151.)

An additional role of the director is that of “process-keeper.” However, that role assumes one knows a process, one’s own process and one that belongs to a mainstream tradition. If a director is careful about that role and its process, then the directee is freer to share personal content and knows in general how the spiritual conversation fits into a long-term discernment process. When a director has a process in mind, it saves those receiving spiritual direction from having to deal with the randomness and occasional ambiguity of amateur or even professional eclecticism.

Knowing the tradition of spirituality as expressed in the Christian churches is important, particularly because it frees one from repeatedly having to make all the usual mistakes of persons trying to live a spiritual life without learning from the wisdom of one’s spiritual heritage. The mistakes of beginners are ordinary and frequent. Many beyond the beginning stage can be reminded of these same pitfalls as well.

John of the Cross, for instance, in *The Dark Night of the Soul* cautions beginners, in particular, to be aware of the pitfalls of launching out on one’s own. For John the “dark night” is the life of faith. He believes in accordance with good catholic tradition that the basic union with God is through faith. The phrase “dark night” is not to be confused with desolation or depression. John’s dark night is a life of faith that does not end or rest entirely on what one personally perceives or thinks, but holds firmly to what God has revealed and promised:

Dark night of sense: believing what God has revealed beyond what our senses tell us

Dark night of the spirit: believing what God has revealed beyond our own understanding, emotional states, images and ambitions.

Using the classic categories for capital sins, John applies these categories very narrowly to movements and attitudes in contemplative prayer and says that accepting the “dark night” or life of faith redirects these tendencies and promotes greater union and freedom in contemplation.

Pride: Satisfaction with my own spiritual works and with myself doing them

Greed: Finding ways to produce more satisfaction in religious practice – focusing on the affect rather than the substance

Luxury: Fear of, or engagement in sensuality and comfort that disrupts prayer and distracts from God

Wrath: Anger and bitterness, anxiety and frustration when consolation in spiritual things seems to disappear

Gluttony: Addiction to spiritual sweetness, actively seeking more satisfaction

Envy: Sadness that others are more holy, virtuous, praiseworthy or noticed as being spiritual

Sloth: Weariness with spiritual practices, losing interest in God for not measuring up to my standards or keeping my timetable

The point here is that it makes little sense to launch out on one's own only to reinvent the wheel. Although it is true that in general a director is not primarily in the spiritual conversation role to dispense wisdom and does, indeed, allow a person to come to his or her own insights, it is also true that a kind reminder from the tradition can save both persons much grief and wasted time. That is the gift that the past wisdom of tradition is for us. That is why it is very helpful for a director to know a definite tradition and to share it appropriately.

Over many sessions of spiritual conversation and in the consistency and fidelity of prayer and reflection, the directee comes to know his or her "Name of Grace." This metaphor refers to the unique relationship each person has with God and the way in which this person is inserted in the various communities of family, education, religious influence, nationality, etc. of his life. It is in this context that the Word of God will come to him or her. In his graciousness God speaks to us in a way that we can understand. That stance will be an important touchstone for any discernment.

The Role of the Spirit

How is a director to understand the practical way in which the Spirit illumines the life of a person? Hopefully, not as a good and pious notion without much practical substance. The hymns and liturgies of Pentecost are full of reminders of how the Spirit works with us. The Alternate Opening Prayer for the Pentecost Liturgy from *Living with Christ*, June 2006 says,

Father of light, from whom every good gift comes, Send your Spirit into our lives with the power of a mighty wind, and by the flame of your wisdom open the horizons of our minds. Loosen our tongues to sing your praise in works beyond the power of speech, for without your Spirit man could never raise his voice that Jesus is

Lord, who lives and reigns with You and the Holy Spirit, one God,
forever and ever. Amen.

In another place in that same liturgy we hear in the Sequence for Pentecost

Come, Holy Spirit, come! And from your celestial Home
Shed a ray of light divine.
Come, Father of the poor! Come source of all our store
Come within our bosoms shine.
You, of comforters the best; You the soul's most welcome guest;
Sweet refreshment here below.
In our labor, rest most sweet; Grateful coolness in the heat;
Solace in the midst of woe.
O most blessed Light divine, Shine within these hearts of yours,
And our inmost being fill!
Where you are not, we have naught, Nothing good in deed or thought,
Nothing free from taint of ill.
Heal our wounds, our strength renew; On our dryness pour your dew;
Wash the stains of guilt away.
Bend the stubborn heart and will; Melt the frozen, warm the chill;
Guide the steps that go astray.
On the faithful, who adore And confess you, evermore
In your sevenfold gift descend.
Give them virtue's sure reward; Give them your salvation, Lord;
Give them joys that never end. Amen

These lovely and powerful promises are given to us now, not delayed for a future eternity. They may be spoken of here in poetic words that one does not necessarily use in everyday language, but they express an on-going reality of how close the Presence of God is to us in every moment.

Peter Beer, SJ in "The Holy Spirit and Lonergan's Psychological Analogy" names this working of the Spirit in each of us so beautifully when he writes,

The Spirit lovingly draws us and entices us to find certain sets of data that are relevant to our becoming enthralled with Christ. So the Spirit is sent by the Father and Son Incarnate to draw and lead us, in the way He alone can, in our human activities (cf. Rom. 8:14), and in these we enter into conscious union with the Second Divine temporal mission, Jesus Incarnate. That is, within this conscious gifted union with the temporal mission of the Spirit, we are being gifted lovingly both to inquire and to move to establish our feelings, and also lovingly to come to understand and to judge

and to decide. So we are being led and drawn by the Spirit into at-one-ment with the Father's imaging forth of the Word Incarnate (cf. Rom 8:29). By freely deciding and judging at-one with Jesus we image forth the sonship of Jesus. So it is that by conscious at-one-ment first with the Second divine temporal mission we are gifted to be brought into union with incarnate filiation of the Son: as we cry consciously and knowingly, both individually and communally, "Abba" with Jesus, we are at-one as loving children with our Father (Rom. 8:14-17).

Can one not conclude that the community of believers has been lavished throughout the ages with the Presence and Gifts of the Spirit? Is this fact not something spiritual directors need to take very seriously? This question arises partly by one's being observant about how modern people understand themselves. The impressions given in many places is that people may have taken too seriously the rather dismal images of the Prayer to St. Michael, "cast into hell, Satan and all the other evil spirits who roam around the world seeking the ruin of souls" or the Hail Holy Queen, ". . . here we are poor banished children of Eve . . . mourning and weeping in this valley of tears." The images and promises of Pentecost insist on a life far brighter, challenging, and inviting.

A second important question then arises, how is a director to look for and recognize the promptings of the Spirit in his or her directees? What is meant by being someone who receives the Spirit of Yahweh as indicated in Isaiah 11? Today we name this grace of the Spirit of Yahweh as Gifts of the Holy Spirit: Wisdom, Understanding, Counsel, Fortitude, Knowledge, Reverential Awe or Fear of the Lord, Delight.

Directors need to be able to see this presence of the Spirit somehow happen in themselves and their directees. If we find no evidence of the presence of these Gifts, should we not ask why the signs of a growing enthrallment with God are not more observable in ourselves and our directees? Grace happens to real people in real time. It is a quality of presence that one can observe.

Unfortunately, there are occasions in our current times when this activity of the Spirit is reduced by some to mean clever or successful ideas, lucky breaks, finding a

strategic parking place, insights from a well-functioning intuition, or interesting, dramatic religious experiences. Sometimes the “Gifts” and “one’s talents” are merged into one. What a difference it might make in the life of the Christian community if having money, being a good helper, being an artist or musician, or teaching children, all listed as “talents,” were further augmented by learning and appreciating what gifts of wisdom, understanding, counsel, etc. are present and available for sharing. Appreciating and using this model suggests of new potential for community. If one considers the other gifts and joys of the Spirit, not in the official list drawn from Isaiah, but nevertheless in the Scripture, a person would be inundated with more tenderness and variety than one can imagine. For instance,

joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, trustfulness (Gal 5:22)

goodness uprightness, truth, light or clarity (Ep 6)

love, faith, purity, study, gentleness self-control (1 Tim: 4:13)

perseverance, labor, purity, knowledge, patience, kindness, freedom from affectation, joy, poverty (2Co6:4 -)

faith, goodness, understanding, self-control, perseverance, devotion, kindness, love, (2P 1:5-7)

warmth, sympathy, single-mindedness, unity of love, mind and heart (Ph :1-5)

compassion, generosity, humility, patience, forbearance, forgiveness, love, peace, gratitude (Col 3:12 – 15)

love, knowledge, understanding, discernment (Ph 1:9-10)

confidence (Rom 8:14 – 15)

There may well be others. Not to acknowledge this vital presence of the Spirit and the gifts that are given causes one to miss the immensity of the Mystery in which we participate.

Fr. Beer, SJ reminds us in another article “Religious Experience and God’s Call to Prayer” of four proclamations of the Council of Orange in 529 relevant to the acknowledgement of these Gifts and by extension to the practice of spiritual direction.

Quoting from *The Church Teaches* (Herder, St. Louis, 1955, pp. 226-7) Against the Semi-Pelagians

“the Council affirmed that as we experience any understanding, desire and delight leading to our making a decision for God, God effects these actions in us,

If anyone says that the grace of God can be conferred because of human prayer, but that it is not grace that prompts us to pray, he contradicts . . . the Apostle (Canon 3)

If anyone argues that God awaits our will before cleansing us from sin, but does not profess that even the desire to be cleansed is accomplished through the infusion and the interior working of the Holy Spirit, he opposes the Holy Spirit . . . (Canon 4)

. . . an adversary of the apostolic teaching who says that the increase of faith as well as the beginning of faith and the very desire of faith . . . inheres in . . . not by gift of grace . . . (Canon 5)

If anyone says that mercy is divinely conferred upon us when, without God’s grace, we believe, will, desire, strive, labour, pray, keep watch study, beg, seek knock for entrance, but does not profess that is through the interior infusion and inspiration of the Holy Spirit that we believe, will, or are able to do all these things in the way we ought . . . he contradicts the apostle. (Canon 6)

Are we, as directors, not supposed to pay attention to these movements of the Spirit which we discover in ourselves and hear from our directees? Certainly Ignatius did pay consistent attention to the Spirit as attested to in his *Autobiography*. Furthermore, he encouraged persons to make a daily examination and thus become more attentive to the inspirations of the Holy Spirit. From there he expected one to move into decision and action. This expectation distinguishes Ignatian spirituality from some of the other “complacent love” spiritualities and identifies Ignatian spirituality as a spirituality of “loving service”.

From a director’s point of view, the challenge is not so much acknowledging the probability of religious experience coming up in the directing interview, but rather being willing to sort out these experiences and look for the signs of these traditional gifts promised to all believers as a confirmation of their calling. Doing so helps distinguish

truth from fiction, a directee's ambition from his or her call, his or her inflexible certainty from the process of finding truth, and his or her complacency from rootedness in the Lord.

The Role of the Director

Although it is quite true that this activity of spiritual direction in the spiritual conversation is a work of the Holy Spirit, it is equally true that grace builds on the nature of the spiritual director nature. Preparedness, carefulness, a loving attitude toward the person being directed, and the ability to bring to bear a wide range of human knowledge to the discernment at hand on the part of the director is a very important. Spiritual direction is more than being a good listener. It is being a co-discerner with the directee. That activity requires the use of the director's head, heart, and faith on behalf of the directee.

Many times a person chooses a spiritual director based on the compatibility of personalities. There is an added advantage of having a director who has both an insightful way of proceeding as well as a compatible personality. There is then the richness of quality, congeniality, and productiveness in the conversation, not unlike the simple elegance of a Shakespeare soliloquy disguised in blank verse. Important things are said in a safe and unobtrusive container.

Although many excellent directors say they have little awareness of *how* they do what they do in the interview, or why their direction is connective and useful for their clientele, there may be something more for the directee to gain if this grace, art, and skill of the director were made more conscious, insightful, and useable. Directing skills could be used with more precision. Although one might consider any one of several models helpful as a framework for conducting an integrated hour of spiritual direction, it is usually more constructive for both the director and the directee to know and agree, at least implicitly, on some minimal process for their conversation.

Before a director agrees to be a co-discerner in a long-term spiritual conversation there are many decisions to be made about his or her relationship to the directee in the

interviews. Fr. James Borbely, SJ and the ISECP staff recently suggested the following areas of discernment that are particular to the director. Note they are areas of discernment on the part of the director and not just unreflective or expedient decisions.

For the director personally,

1. Will I enter into this particular directing situation?
2. When will it be appropriate and possible to enter this particular directing relationship?
3. What will be the length and frequency of these appointments?
4. What will I need to put in place to protect my own interior freedom?
5. When is it appropriate to share the expertise from my other roles in an interview (e.g., scripture scholar, career counselor, artist, parent, etc.); what are the limitations and boundaries of these extra comments?
6. How will I recognize that a “directee” is possibly looking for something different from direction, such as instruction about scripture, a friend to tell trouble to, a guide to tell me what to do?
7. Am I willing to change my role from “director” to teacher, parent, listener, soother? Why would I relinquish the role of director?
8. What decisions do I make to gain more knowledge and skill as I recognize my need in directing?
9. When and how do I make use of “reality checks” (case consultation, second opinion about an issue in direction, reading, the Examen, study, etc)?

The director also has decisions to make on behalf of the person being directed:

1. What grace should one pray for?
2. When is it appropriate to shift a grace for the directee (asking for a different grace, and which one)?
3. When should I ask the directee to use a different method of praying?
4. When is a directee ready to address the next issue?
5. When is it appropriate to give feedback on a content of the directee making a decision?
6. When is a grace ready to move into an action?
7. How does one confirm that a grace has been received? (especially when the

directee does not recognize that it has been given)

8. On what basis do I decide whether to share the director's clarity rather than to set an atmosphere for the retreatant to find the clarity him/herself?
9. When is waiting for clarity unproductive before moving on?
10. When might it be appropriate for the director to decide to focus on something in another aspect of the directee's life rather than on what happens in the prayer (such as their work, leisure, health, diet), noting that prayer is only part of a larger flow of life.
11. On what would the new focus be centered?

For some directors it might be helpful to focus on the role and importance of being discerning in the spiritual conversation process by using some reflection questions, such as,

Honoring Your Stance as a Director

Preparation:

1. How do you prepare yourself physically and mentally before a directing session?
2. What image do you have of yourself as a director? How does that image influence your directing?
3. Who are the people who inspired you as a director? What do you want to remember and use from what they modeled?
4. Who taught you to do spiritual direction? Is the method still valid today?
5. What do you do to protect and use your own interior freedom as a director?
6. Why did you decide to take on this particular person for direction?

Within the Interview

1. What is the *ID Quod Volo* for you as a director?
2. What is the mystery you are asking the person to enter?
3. How does the directee's prayer become "the points" that the director is contemplating during the interview?
4. How is the interview itself a contemplative experience?
5. How, as director, are you a contemplative in action?

Reflection and Resolution

1. How do you as director help a directee “incarnate” or make real in history his or her consolation?
2. How is directing an opportunity for growth in the director’s own faith, hope, love?
3. How are the gifts of the Spirit operative for you in the directing situation?

Dr. Thomas J. S. Edwards in unpublished notes concerning the work of discernment in a director locates similar important points in the *Exercises*. He points to

As a Director, what do I desire?

- [47]: “Represent the place” How does the director enter the Mystery of this interview? How do I enter the mystery?
- [48]: What do I, as director, desire as a grace?
- [77]: During reflection after an exercise: “Am I getting the grace I desire?”
- [89]: If I am not getting the grace, what should I do differently?

Citations from the *Contemplatio ad Amorem*:

- [231]: Love consists in a mutual sharing of goods [gifts]. How does the atmosphere I create support the person who comes?
- [233]: Asking for an intimate knowledge of all the blessings received. How are I and the retreatant being blessed?
- [236]: God works for me. [The fruits of prayer – in the director or directee – should also contribute to the building of the Kingdom. For more references, see the Kingdom meditation.] In what way does God work for us in the spiritual conversation?

As a director, what keeps me from being at my best?

- [2]: Saying too much in presenting the points
- [6]: Not probing enough about how the directee is praying
- [9]: Engaging the directee in a level of conversation that is either too basic or too subtle
- [15]: Not letting the Creator deal directly with the creature. [Getting in the way.]

Ignatius himself focuses on the director in his initial Annotations. Briefly he encourages the director to

- Keep focused on the Scripture passage and keep his/her own explanations brief [2]
- Encourage the directee to pay close attention to the meaning of his or her interior movements, [6],
- Be gentle and kind in the directee in a supportive role [7],
- Explain the rules for the 1st and 2nd Weeks only as they are needed and only when that explanation would be useful to the retreatant[8],
- Distinguish between the movements of the 1st and 2nd week difficulties so as not to move the person beyond his or her present need and development prematurely [9],
- Introduce the Rules for the 2nd Week when it is appropriate [10],
- Do not anticipate future exercises but stay centered on the present struggle [11],
- Encourage one's retreatant to moderation during times of fervent consolation. Avoid excesses.[14],
- Remain as a balance at equilibrium and do not get in the way of the relationship between God and the retreatant [15]
- Carefully consider what adaptations could or should be made so that the *Exercises* meet the needs of the directee. [18].

3. Using Some Models of Lonergan to Enhance the Spiritual Conversation:

The basic theological/philosophical of Bernard Lonergan, SJ offers several models that can be useful to a director. These three stand out in particular:

1. The Development toward Rational Consciousness (Lonergan, *A Second Collection*)
2. Patterns of experience and their influence on language (*Insights*, Chapter 6)
3. The development of knowledge (*Insights*, Ch. 19)

These processes are useful for a director in isolating a method for a single interview and also in understanding the patterns in a series of interviews that lead one through a discernment. There is no evidence that Lonergan intended to speak to spiritual directors *per se* by this methodology; however, some of us have found that considering these areas as a guideline enhances the directing situation.

These schemas and processes are compatible with the discerning process outlined in the Second Week [170 - 189] with its Rules for Discernment [328 - 336]. They work well by laying a solid background for the interview and for personal processing. The *Exercises* can build on this solid foundation and provide a further method when it comes to the formal discernment. The focus of the *Exercises* will be primarily on the God questions, and they challenge one to look more sharply at the attitudes expressed in

- The Kingdom Offering [98]: What am I willing to give to the Lord?
- The Two Standards [136 – 148]: How do I distinguish those things that lead to Christ from those things that lead to darkness?
- The Three Classes of Person [149 – 156]: How might these three moments influence the process of my decision?
- The Three Degrees of Humility[165-168]: Would I want to follow Christ even to the point of renunciation of sin and a willingness to embrace poverty, humiliation and scorn so that I might be closer to Him if this please Him?
- The Rules for Scruples [345 – 351], especially [351]: With what freedom am I willing to exercise my desire to do something that I consider appropriate and good?
- Rules for Thinking with the Church [352-370]: How do I balance and maintain a sense of honesty and integrity with a fondness for the Church?

1. Developing toward rational consciousness

Bernard Lonergan, SJ in the *The Second Collection* speaks of the growth in personal subjectivity that takes place in the human person. Some of it seems to be a natural, almost automatic, part of growing into adulthood; but other aspects seem to require willingness and effort on the part of a person to want to operate more consciously. Having people for spiritual direction with this desire to operate more

consciously and reflectively can be very useful. It may not be a requirement, but it surely helps the long-term process if both director and directee are willing to enter into a conscious process.

Lonergan suggests the following distinctions in this growth toward authentic subjectivity:

1. We are **Potential Subjects** when we are unconscious in dreamless sleep or coma.
2. We move to a minimal degree of consciousness when we are the helpless subject of our dreams.
3. We become **Experiential Subjects** when we are awake, subjects of lucid perceptions, imaginative projections, emotional and conative impulses, bodily action.
4. Further as **Intelligent Subjects** we retain, preserve, goes beyond, complete the experiential and go beyond it when we inquire about our experience, growth in understanding, express our inventions and discoveries.
5. Then as **Rational Subjects** one continues to retain what has gone on before, yet transcends and completes the former steps by
 - Questioning our understanding
 - Checking our formulations and expressions
 - Asking whether we have things right
 - Marshalling the evidence pro and con
 - Judging this to be so and that not to be so
6. **Rational Self-consciousness** moves these operations even further when
 - We deliberate, evaluate, decide, and act.
 - The existential subject exists: his character, personal essence is at stake

Lonergan further comments,

What promotes the subject from experiential to intellectual consciousness is the *desire to understand*, the intention of intelligibility. What next promotes him from intellectual to rational consciousness, is a fuller unfolding of the same intention: for the desire to understand, once understanding is reached, becomes the *desire to understand correctly*: in other words, the intention of intelligibility, once an intelligible is reached, becomes the intention of the right intelligible, of the true and, through truth, the real, becomes *the intention of the good*, the question of value,

of what is worthwhile, when the already acting subject confronts his world and adverts to his own acting in it.

The exact point of productive direction in this schema is hard to isolate, but presumably, both director and directee need to be operating at least as intelligent subjects. This matter of decision and the ethical, religious choices it challenges one to make, require a trained subjectivity, one that knows acceptable ethical principles as well as one that knows the practice of good people with regard to these matters. It appears that Ignatius places much of his discernment process at the 5th and 6th stages [169 – 189] Note in the Second Week a person comes before God as a total person in as much as he or she is able.

Knowing how a person grows in his or her subjectivity has great implications for a director. For instance, it is not sufficient for a director to unpack dreams or listen to prayer experiences, or check on how a person feels about something, tasks that seem to be popular in the training of directors today and perhaps fit more with the first three or four levels. However, an Ignatian director needs to ask questions that help a person from these preliminary levels on to meaning, decision, and action. This calls for a more mature awareness on the part of both the director and the directee and moves one on to levels five and six in the Lonergan schema.

2. Patterns of Language coming from a person's pattern of experience

Human language is very rich, but it is fraught with potential misunderstandings. Even in very simple circumstances the same object can be named in so many different yet correct ways. Lonergan notes three major levels of discourse: the universal/theoretical/ scientific, the metaphorical/dramatic, and the level of common sense. An example might help to make this clear. For instance,

- *Universal/theoretically*: I own a small feline mammal whose territory is defined by a personal domicile in block 746 on Grant St.
- *Poetically*: My home is spirited with an angel in fur who watches my every move and allows me to stay in her presence at her pleasure.

Common Sense-wise: I have a small cat who lives in my home.

One could go on to make further distinctions and observing more views. Why it is so important to understand that there are different levels of discourse and to know some ways to handle them, is that in most Catholic circle, one is constantly having to switch levels of discourse. Most people do not realize the movement except to feel bewildered. Thus, many of our documents come down to us in universal, academic, theological statements, and are sometimes interpreted concretely according to one's common sense to apply in every possible situation to the point of obscurity. Liturgy and sacraments, together with their art and music speak to us dramatically and poetically. For those who do not understand that language of symbol, metaphor, ritual, and story the sacramental rituals and liturgical celebrations are often criticized for being obscure and irrelevant. Personal common sense conclusions about certain facts that make sense in a particular situation can mushroom into "eternal truths" that are bewildering and illogical when placed in another setting.

Realistically, it is difficult not to become entangled in misinterpretation. Put that together with the different ways, for instance in the Jungian system, that intuitives, sensors, thinkers, feelers, introverts, and extroverts are heard and not heard by each other, one gets a glimpse as to why it is important in the spiritual conversation to listen carefully, avoid projections, check assumptions, and so on. Is it any wonder that at times people become confused and frustrated when things "don't make sense."

In as much as a director is able to distinguish among theory, common sense, and the dramatic aspect of conversation he or she can be useful. Each of these sets of vocabulary have their advantage in a certain context, but they cannot be interchanged easily without multiple problems. Good directors know how to move among the levels and keep the intent of the direction and meaning in focus.

2. Steps leading from experience to decision-making

For Lonergan a certain sequence of four movements moves a person from an initial experience to a discerned decision. Applied to spirit direction this means that a person, both director or directee, moves from the consideration of relevant data to finding insight, meaning, and verification, and then onto a decision-making process that puts that decision into some form of action. In good Ignatian fashion that decision results in some action and service that contribute to the betterment of the world and that lead ultimately to radical obedience and adoration of God. In the truest sense the director and directee become as Rahner would say, careful “hearers of the Word” when they engage faithfully to this process.

There are four steps in this process of knowledge from experience to decision. In brief they are

1. “Being attentive”: gathering the data that is pertinent to the situation
2. “Being intelligent”: understanding the data and finding meaning in the considerations
3. “Being reasonable”: answering the relevant questions about that meaning and verifying the truth of what one is understanding
4. “Being responsible”: asking what the ethical consequence is for coming to this conclusion, carrying out whatever loving service is called for, and being willing to be led toward a greater knowledge and love of God.

These steps can be used by any director or directee at any time, but using them as a pedagogical tool for training and for the supervision of interns at the beginning of their professional training assists in keeping those in supervision on track during an interview. It gives them a way of moving through the interview and provides some broad pattern for a beginning, middle, and end within the interview while the director assists someone in a discerning process.

Not all four steps need to be present in any one directing situation, but there is a rhythm and logic in following this process through the four steps that will show itself over several sessions and assure a careful discernment. These four steps are not unusual or unique. They are the inevitable phases that any person journeys through to verify a truth and to move toward a decision that expresses his or her love of God. Since some directors may not be particularly reflective about their directing process, they might have automatically and intuitively moved through several of these phases within a directing period; but because unreflective human dialog sometimes skips steps or attempts to use phases out of sequence, the resulting good work and expressions of loving service are at times haphazard and lack careful consideration. It seems to be truer to the Ignatian tradition to find a careful “way of proceeding.” These four steps offer one way of being reflective and careful for both the director and directee in the interview and further offer to them a way to proceed.

Step 1. Gather the data relevant to the situation

The first step in Lonergan’s process looks at relevant data. Not all data is relevant to the matter at hand. It is easy for a director to become lost in detail during an interview and overwhelmed by the plethora of information that a directee can give about his or her exterior life and the interior experience of prayer over Scripture over several weeks. In our times the temptation often lies in “the more psychology one knows, the more avenues of data become available for exploration.”

Unfortunately, for some other persons, debriefing the prayer experience and focusing only on the prayer experience for data becomes an end in itself. Using another lens, the attention of some directors is focused on what has happened on the first few levels of consciousness. Once the dreams, feelings, and prayer experiences are explored, the meaning is never taken beyond those initial levels to decision and action. In a few circles this debriefing focuses on the feelings generated in the prayer and bypasses three other very important human realities: thinking, desire, and context. All are needed for a good discernment.

Certainly, a carefully debriefed prayer period can give a director a wide range of data that needs to be sorted in some manner and brought to insight. However, that debriefing is only the first of many steps that need to be completed before an actual good is incarnated in the world. Ignatian direction moves a person from experience, insight and meaning to decision, action that enhances the Kingdom. It is balanced with a reality check by considering further what one thinks of this data, how it might support or militate against what one deeply desires and how these desires fit in one's context and Name of Grace. Directors need to focus on what is being said, how it is said and what symbolic value the images may have while at the same time putting that information into the larger context of the person's everyday life, graces, and call within the wider reality of the life in the Church and this world.

In addressing the area of relevant data given in any interview one might look at four general areas that are sometimes overlooked.

1. The directee brings to the interview a wide range of experience. There is the matter of his or her internal thoughts, feelings, images, desire, ambiguities, and more. In addition the person comes to the interview from a particular life-style, a horizon of discourse, his or her insertion into a particular context.
2. The director comes with a similar package of experience. However, in his or her case, what will be important in the interview is the receptivity of the director to hear what is being said or not said by the directee, and to be in a stance of freedom that allows the director to choose what questions or observations to make. These will be based on his or her own knowledge and experience. Out of that horizon will come the questions and the timing of those questions that will move this process of the interview along to benefit the directee and to take the discerning process one step further.
3. There is also a field of dynamics that occurs because of the inter-relatedness of the two persons within the interview. Together they develop a unique field of discourse. Certain personalities work well together; others do not. There are ways of predicting possible good pairings by using Jungian types or the like, but it is not

the place of spiritual direction to spend a lot of the interview time trying to untangle that field. That is the realm for psychotherapy.

However, for the purpose of spiritual direction both persons are in a better position of freedom to maintain a long-term relationship and not unduly muddy the dialog if each is aware and “smart” about the perplexity of this field created by their personalities. Otherwise, either director or directee can fall victim to projections, unconscious alliances, social mores, or shyness that often stand in the way of good directing.

This reality also points to the need for thinking and choosing carefully both directors and directees. There may be times when a certain type of director is better for us. There are advantages and disadvantages of having someone similar to the directee “who really understands my situation.” At others times someone who is very different and who challenges my positions by his or her very presence may provide a better way to grow if both are mature and can endure and profit from the inevitable tension that is sometimes present.

4. In addition to these personal dynamics, the spiritual director brings to the interview a distilled experience in the tradition of the lives of the saints, Scripture and the context of the Christian community. This is the context in which spiritual direction takes place. The director does not speak merely for himself or herself; but the conversation, especially on the part of the director, keeps in mind the tradition of spiritual direction and the general principles and practice of spirituality that has been present in the Church over the ages. For that reason the interview is more than a counseling session, or a friendly conversation, or a dialog of admonition or encouragement. The director has at his or her disposal hundreds of years of tradition for what holiness is, what good directing is, how it fits within the context of the Church, and how it leads one to a closer union with God and greater apostolic effectiveness in the world. In the directing situation we talk to each other in the context of a tradition that has something to say to each of us

about what is normative and what is normal. Here we are anchored in a tradition of interpretation of Spirit through the lives of the saints, the practice of good people, Scripture, and the context of the Christian, catholic community. In the Ignatian community the use of the Rules for Discernment in the First and Second Weeks [314 – 338] along with some of the other Annotations [1-22] are very helpful in keeping the “meaning” focused on the God question.

In addition to these four areas of data that are often overlooked, there is also a list of things that are more commonly observed. If one merely considers the interview *from the point of view of the directee*, the range of experience includes, but is by no means restricted to,

For the directee

- What is actually being said within the interview ? What am I hearing the director say, whether it was actually said or not?
- What non-verbals of behavior in both the directee and director are present? Do I assume their meaning or take the time to verify what they mean?
- How does the personal background and education of both directee and director bear on this situation? How do they influence this conversation?
- What influence does my context, my sub-culture, and family heritage have to bring to the interview?
- What is my affective tone as I speak? Why?
- What were the details and story-line of the fantasy that occurred in the prayer experience? What did the narrative mean to me?
- What are the actual facts of the historical situation I am trying to relate?
- What were the spontaneous movements of affectivity that arose as I prayed and reflected during the conversation? What did they mean?
- Were there any dreams and projections that were revealed during the course of the considerations? How do they relate the matter at hand?

- With what persons or situations did I identify when I inserted myself into the Scripture passage? How does my name of grace and the context of my faith bring together the prayer experience and daily life?
- Was there any significance to any obsessions, compulsions, slips of tongue, or somatizing that may be observed in everyday life?
- What are the actual facts of the historical situation I am trying to relate?

This list along with other considerations is only one part of the dialog. The director has all of his/her experience as well. The director on his/her part must be attuned to what is going on in his/her own world of concern and responsibility. Although the director ordinarily cannot attend to all this detail of experience at any one time, it is important to look for information more widely than from one's own frame of reference.

Step 2. Be intelligent: What is the meaning of the relevant data?

Both the director and directee are to "make meaning" from all this data. On the part of the director, for him or her to move from looking at all the data to the second step of being intelligent and helping the directee to "make meaning" takes careful reflection and timing. Again the following list suggests many, but not all, of the areas a director needs to attend.

For the director

- The freedom to listen carefully to one's own mind, body, affect and truth and to use the information as needed
- The responsibility for the director to own one's own interior dispositions and not project them onto the directee

Attention to the director's own thoughts and feelings and asking why they arise and what they might mean in conjunction with this interview

- Knowing what to say at the right moment. Here timing is essential. A friend was fond of saying, "Ninety per cent of what I know, I never use. The other 10% I use only at the right time." Another person once described an

intervention as having two parts: letting the other person know that he or she was heard, and taking the process one step further. Note here that there is an assumption that one knows that there is a process and further that one knows what the next step is. It is not the same as solving a problem with a quick answer

The willingness to explore one's own pertinent questions about the interview and the directee without using the interview for the director's own agenda

A sense of poised liberty with regard to one's own grace, understanding, theological/philosophical/psychological images and impressions. Having the freedom to use those that help and being willing to lay aside those that do not contribute any help at this time to further the process of the directee.

A willingness to distinguish faith absolutes from cultural relatives so that the essentials of faith and one's relationship with God as not overly-cluttered with piety, personal whim, convenience, and "old wives' tales"

A way of processing information in tried and true categories, balancing thinking with feeling, intuition with sensation, perception with judgment, reflection with initiative.

Awareness of the 'field' that is created in the pairing of myself with this particular directee for this interview and assessing its influence on the atmosphere of the interview.

Maintaining a sensitivity to the differences in speech among different personality types continues to help one keep in mind what is really being said

As one sorts through the abundance of experience that is being presented, both director and directee need to ask what it means and where there may be indications of the movement of the Spirit amid all the fragments of insight and impressions. For the directee this may mean asking more pertinent questions such as

For the Directee

What feelings accompanied the images? Why?

Why were these particular images present? Why not some others?

Where was I positioned in the prayer and what was the significance of my position? Where were the other people in the experience in relationship to me? What did that mean or indicate?

What stirred me and attracted me?

What distracted me?

What questions arose and were answered?

What meaning can I assign to this data?

How does this meaning connect with other things I know?

What attractions and desires are in keeping with my Name of Grace?

What part of the data is not relevant for the decision and action I am about to take?

The director may ask a simple question such as, “Where was God? What was God’s attitude toward you?” The answer to this simple question many times pulls together all the data and brings the experience of the prayer, life context, and possible discernment to a growing meaning, moving from insight to meaning. Asking the right question at the right time is a significant art and takes much practice and intention.

Step 3. Be reasonable: Verifying the meaning

It is at this juncture that many directors and directees skip a step in the process. They jump from the insight and meaning in the second step of the process into decision in the fourth step without asking if their conclusions and judgments are true as directed in Step 3. It is a critical omission, one that needs a careful process to remedy this omission so that a discernment can be grounded in truth.

The third step in our checklist is the step of judgment or asking, what is the truth in the conclusions I have come to now that I have taken the time to answer the relevant questions. Modern living does not always support finding out what is true. Sometimes the goals are more influenced by being expedient, “democratic,” and egalitarian in our assessments or fall into the realm of “whatever.” That is not helpful here.

In the Ignatian tradition one's own personal principles of verification are augmented by the Rules for Discernment [313-336] in the *Spiritual Exercises*. The Annotations scattered throughout the *Exercises* are also helpful. Although the language in these citations is metaphorical and classic, nevertheless, the Rules, Additions, and Annotations help us to sort out what is of faith, and call, and honor. Being haphazard about a decision was foreign to Ignatius, who seems unusually careful with the discernment process. In the *Exercises* he suggests that there are several steps one must use to work with a grace. In addition to reflecting and examining a grace, we are instructed to use a careful, reflective process.

Ignatius offers several verbs of action for working with the movements or experience of grace. The list suggests not only attention to detail, but also an insistence on using a reality check for one's own conclusions.

1. *Reflecting* on the possible grace. [333], [334], [336]
 - a. As it arises from prayer
 - b. As it somewhat consistently appears in the *Examen*
 - c. As it reappears in consciousness over a period of time.
2. *Examining* the possible grace [333], [334], [336]
 - a. Making a decision to track its movements
 - b. Pondering the place of this grace in one's Name of Grace
3. *Formulating* the grace [336]
 - a. Speaking or writing about the alerting signs of this grace
 - b. Describing as best one can what is being asked
4. *Shaping* or incarnating this grace [336]
 - a. Imagining how this grace might look if it were acted out or put into practical form or process in everyday life
 - b. Being realistic about the facts and resources, the obstacles and juridical boundaries that may be present
5. *Sharing* the grace with an experienced director [326]
 - a. Expecting a careful listening on the part of the director

- b. Listening to the comments of the director
 - c. Pondering their significance and application to this grace.
6. *Putting the grace in the context of one's life.* Talking with each other about this grace in the context of what both of them know about the usual ways in which God calls to the directee [336]
- a. Asking the question, Granted this is a good thing to do, why should the directee be the one to do it?
 - b. Noting additional consolations and desolations as one converses
 - c. Seeking answers to how this new action will fit directee's vocation, present responsibilities, present circumstances and resources
 - d. Investigating other options that might be used to honor the grace in other ways.
 - e. Asking whether the means I use have the same quality of goodness as the end I am seeking? Here the means must enter into the end and a consistent quality of personal, grace-filled presence be maintained.
 - f. Evaluating whether my mind, heart, body, faith continued to grow in peace and joy as I worked toward the enactment of this decision.
 - g. Maintaining the on-going dialog with my director to confirm the rightness and goodness of this decision
 - h. Observing whether I have been energized to persevere in the task and at the same time have I grown in my relationship with God, knowing Him better and loving Him more?
7. *Working out the details.* [336]
- It is a challenge to translate thought, inspiration, and call into the details of time, money, space, and time. What is realistically possible given this occasion and circumstance?
8. *Seeking the approval* from legitimate authority. [336]
- That authority may be civil, ecclesial, personal or familial. It is helpful to settle ahead of time such questions as
- a. Who has authority in this case?
 - b. Is this authority consultative or deliberative?
 - c. Are there any overlaps of jurisdiction?
9. *Trying it out* in history [351]
- a. If the outcome brings peace and joy in the Spirit, a graced energy to persevere through difficulties, the decision is being confirmed.
 - b. If there is turmoil, harshness, and dissipation, one should look to see what that kind of desolation indicates.
 - c. Several months after the decision one must ask, is this really working? Is it accomplishing what it is supposed to do? How is it incarnating, or

making real in history the original grace? What are the fruits that are arising? How am I being drawn closer to God?

In addition the persons making the discernment have been exercised by reflecting upon the dispositions arising from considerations:

- a. *On the giving of Alms [337 – 344]*, where we are cautioned to watch our motivation, be reflective about our giving, aware of our blindness in making good judgments concerning ourselves, family and friends [337-344], willing to consider our actions from the viewpoint of our deathbed [340], and the last judgment [341], and in general to use moderation by being saving and cutting expenses in keeping with each one's own condition and rank [344]
- b. *Scruples [345 – 351]*, in which we are encouraged to moderation [350] balanced by initiative and freedom [351]
- c. *Thinking with the Church.[352-370]*. Where one is encouraged to a fondness for the institutional church and instructed to maintain a positive attitude and interpretation of public things, admonish wrong-doers in private and find some balance among grace, freedom and good works.

Unless one has worked through the steps of these processes, the grace one perceives may only have inspired a kind of wishful thinking. By going through the steps and working the grace out in a practical action, one can come to rest in the consolation of peace and joy in the Spirit. One has listened to the Word of God and kept it or at least listened to the Word of God and found out that there are steps missing that need to be addressed before a good decision can be completed. One has incarnated his/her consolation, and the union with God has been strengthened. One has moved from being a follower of ordinances to being a discernor.

As the retreatant moves further along in the process of Step 3, verifying the truth of one's meaning, the director is further asking,

How does this conclusion fit the person's faith context and my own faith as I listen?

How is this person's desire, faith, hope, and love being put into practice?

What Rules for Discernment from the First Week [313 – 327] concerning consolations and desolation might apply to what is being concluded?

How is this person being deepened in his/her union with God?

Each person has his or her own worldview that influences the conversation. For the directee, it is the conclusions he or she comes to because of reflecting on his or her prayer, name of grace, and daily life. It is further confirmed by his or her following the process of this decision in the examination of consciousness each day. For the director all this material that is accumulating during the interview become the “points” of his or her own contemplation during the conversation. It consists of the information put together by experience, understanding, and judgments of the directee coupled with the director's experience, learning, and sensitivity to the Spirit. The reality check from such an arrangement between the two persons contributes to the on-going integrity of the conversation about the decision. In other words, the different data, insight, and meaning that each has will together make a more verifiable meaning. What is considered to be true to the directee and director will help to answer the question, Is this what God is asking. Is grace beckoning here? The collaboration of two persons in the discernment puts the directee in a stronger position for shaping an action and committing oneself to discerned action for the Kingdom and a deeper relationship with God.

Step 4. Being Responsible: Make the ethical choice for discerned action

Knowing the truth is not necessarily doing it. Here in Step 4 a person is faced with a simple but penetrating question, “So what?” What are the inevitable consequences and the compelling action that confront me now that I have come to this conclusion which I declare to be true? The answer to that question leads a person to a decision that results in a discerned action that leads to a greater love of God and makes a contribution to the world about us.

If our process of sorting through the experiences, insights, meanings, and grappling with the relevant questions has been completed in as much as a person is able, and there

is no other relevant question that needs attending, then the director and directee must face the truth of their consideration and be willing to ask the ethical question, *so what*. If what we have concluded is named as a grace and call from God, then how will this grace be shaped and put into action?

The director looks for congruence here. He or she needs to check to see that

There is congruence about these pertinent questions in the directee's own head, heart, and faith concerning the matters at hand

There is congruence within the director's own head, heart, and faith about what the directee has said and what the director is supporting

The Ignatian "sentir" is present.

This declaration of truth fits within the tradition of what good people do about such things and this decision is in keeping with the directee's name of grace.

The focus of spiritual direction in matters of a particular discernment takes place in Lonergan's scheme at the moment of an ethical choice between step three, "being reasonable," and step four, "being responsible." A good discernment is the result of our having verified that the observations, attractions and understandings are true and that time has been taken to answer any relevant questions that pertain to them. It further includes a willingness to act by answering the question, "So what?" with a concrete and consistent action that leads one to co-operate in help building the Kingdom and growing in further union with God.

In the Ignatian tradition this implies that the decision is placed within the context of one's "name of grace" and one's fidelity to the inspirations of the Holy Spirit so that the object of choice is in keeping with who I am, as an individual, or who we are, as a group, as we stand before God. Ideally, both director and directee have paid attention to how the Rules for Discernment, especially those in the Second Week [328 – 336], apply to this decision; and both director and directee experience "*sentir*": my head, my heart, and my faith say this decision is right and it is in keeping with who I am as I stand before God. George J. Schemel, SJ was fond of quoting a Rahnerian-based definition of discernment, "Discernment is an experiential knowledge of self in congruence with the object of choice and one's fundamental religious orientation."

This fourth step of putting decision into action is important. It requires the grace of moral fortitude to translate the religious experience and the pursuit of truth into an apostolic decision that will insert itself into the world of daily life. With that insertion will come change. With that change will come loss. With that loss will come a renewed action that will bring about the Kingdom in a way that is better than the former *status quo*. The directee is about to commit himself/herself to initiating something new in history, be it a project or a deeper stance in faith, be it public or quite hidden.

In a certain way God, too, makes a commitment to this project because the person has chosen it. Together they are co-laborers. Will a person have the faith to believe that in His graciousness God will continue to be co-operating in the new work? The question is, whether a person will have the faith to let God accomplish this good work. It is at this point, when the grace to incarnate one's consolation is the logical next step, that careful directing can be a great help for a seriously apostolic person. Reflective consideration honors the grace that has been given and that is now being confirmed. It moves one on to incarnating that consolation in history for the others. It challenges one to work *with* God rather than *for* God.

For the directee this means that he/she

- Will have to answer the question, so what?
- Will be challenged to make an ethical response to the truth that is revealed
- Will be faced with the practicality of shaping that inspiration into something tangible, working through the details that will allow this grace to become real in history.
- Will require the directee to face the attitudes expressed in the Three Classes of Persons and note his/her own tendency to procrastinate or to have his cake and eat it, or to be liberated into seeking the magis. [153-155], [97 and 167]
- Will come to the realization that discerned action for the Kingdom is a constitutive part of contemplation

The directing conversation is a process, both dynamic and subjective. There are conversations and thoughtful considerations of the *cons* and *pros* of any choice. This is the heart of discernment. This new possibility, before it is a choice, anticipates and acknowledges how grace is working: from inspiration →to alertness →to choice→ to shaping the choice in a viable situation →to a confirmation of the choice→ and a living out of that choice in peace and joy over time. Discernment of spirits moves one toward action: action either *for* the choice or *against* the choice it; but, nevertheless, action that draws one more closely to God.

Here in the fourth step the director is busy supporting the movement from grace into action, making sure the person does not go beyond the grace that has been given [336] and continuing to create an atmosphere that keeps the directee as “a balance at equilibrium.” [15].

The end of the endeavor is not only the new work or stance but the deepening union with God. If the process has been grace-filled and the faithfulness to the process has been carefully kept, the result for the directee is a deep sense of consolation, an intimacy with God that results from a deepening of love and knowledge about the One who has invited us to participate with Him in building the Kingdom. The result is a good decision in time and space and a deepening of peace, joy, and graced energy for the discernor.

At this point in the process the director’s job is relatively easy. If all has gone well, the director will see congruence in himself/herself as well as in the directee. There will be an abundance of peace and joy for this director as well as his/her rejoicing that he/she was instrumental in seeing that the directee has responded to grace and deepened his or her friendship with God and contributed to the betterment of the world.

There is also the ongoing work of discerning the inevitable movements of consolation and desolation that arise as one lives out the choice. The cycle of these four steps: Be Attentive, Be Intelligent, Be Reasonable, and Be Responsible continues as a framework for understanding the experiences that come with the myriad of choices made

in the person's incarnational faith journey. It leads to a life that is conscious and responsible.

That is why a careful use of the "Examination of Consciousness" can be so fruitful during this time of on-going attentiveness to the Spirit. This focus for the *Examen* may be slightly different for some. Whereas, one might begin the *Examen* early in the spiritual life as a way of learning to be reflective, to be more aware of one's sinfulness and need for healing, a time to be grateful for the graciousness of God, one later begins to realize how the *Examen* alerts one to be more sensitive to the inspirations of the Holy Spirit. While not omitting any of this richness, here in the discernment process the *Examen* becomes the place for an on-going dialog with God about how one's instrumentality might play out. One has the flexibility and docility to be led and involved as called and as needed.

An example of this attitude in the *Examen* is to consider what it might mean to be a timpanist in a symphonic band. Many times the musical score does not call for the tympani to play. At other times there may be a minor accompanying part. Rarely, is there a solo. Yet the timpanist stands at attention, poised to strike the instrument, but only at the appropriate measure and only as the conductor directs. Here, too, a director moves to an attitude of flexibility and docility to be led and involved as called and as needed. By using the *Examen*, there is contact with God during the whole process of the discernment and its unfolding in history. This is not merely a personal project that I have to negotiate by myself, but rather I have placed myself in an attitude of listening and co-operating. Perhaps I have even understood Ignatius' prayer that he not be an obstacle to God's grace and learn to appreciate that prayer and attitude for myself. Here the director helps the person sort out what is ambition vs. what is grace; what is reluctance vs. what is possible. There are other possibilities of deception here as well. Human beings are particularly creative in inventing ways to get off track.

At times of discernment and as one continues his or her life with God, the daily *Examen* moves to another dimension. No longer is this exercise solely a time of being grateful, a time for acknowledging areas that need healing, or even a deepening of one's awareness of the presence of God in one's day. The *Examen* now becomes a focal point

for on-going daily discernment. The activity of the day is submitted in partnership to God who is the one who will accomplish the purpose of His grace. Thus work is now not only something that I do *for* God, but the work is something I do in collaboration *with* God. This collaboration is more than wishful thinking or a pious phrase, for I have made a faith commitment to watch and listen for nuances and attractions of the Spirit in the process of this chosen apostolic endeavor.

Conclusion

In summary then, a good spiritual direction conversation honors the natural process of moving from experience through insight, to the answering of relevant questions and the verification of truth, to an ethical choice that leads to the greater love of God and betterment of the world about us. It is this process that honors the gifts of grace that have been given to the individual directee and helps to move a person to a completed action. Using such a process enhances the directing situation and gives the director a checklist that can be useful in a spiritual conversation. Lonergan's four steps work integrally with the *Exercises* and the discernment process. Together with the "Rules for Discernment" and the *Examen* they offer a realistic way for a director to distinguish, guide, and support the inspirations of the Spirit that have been given to the directee. The interview can rightfully be called a spiritual conversation. That conversation becomes the practical way for a spiritual director to be a co-discerner with the directee and for both of them to care for the spiritual gifts that have been given to them for themselves and for the well-being of others.

How one prays, how one understands and participates in the Eucharist, and how one lives out one's life personally and communally in God's Presence are all connected and are all aspects of the same reality. In each we acknowledge our sinfulness and need for God's grace, we learn by taking on the mind and heart of Christ, we work out our call to charity and forgiveness as we move, ever responding to the drawing of the Father. Thus whether one is making the *Exercises*, participating in Eucharist, doing the *Examen*, praying alone, or living life creatively, the same dynamic of listening and responding, loving and forgiving, being loved and forgiven is happening.

God has called us to Himself and we are moving in His direction as we care for ourselves, each other, and our world. The third verse of Marty Haugen's hymn "All Are Welcome" summarizes these considerations on caring for the spiritual gifts:

Let us build a house, where love is found
In water, wine and wheat,
A banquet hall on holy ground
Where peace and justice meet.
Here the love of God through Jesus,
Is revealed in time and space
As we share in Christ the feast that frees us
All are welcome, all are welcome, all are welcome in this place.