

WHAT IS SPECIFIC TO AN IGNATIAN MODEL OF SPIRITUAL DIRECTION?

Brian O'Leary

THE MOTTO OF SPIRITUAL DIRECTORS INTERNATIONAL is 'Tending the holy around the world and across traditions'. The existence of such an organization, whose membership spans the main Christian denominations as well as other faiths, reminds us that no one tradition has a monopoly on spiritual direction. The need 'to tend the holy' is universal, and this need has been met in a variety of ways throughout human history. The result has been an accumulation of wisdom and practice of which we are only now becoming more fully aware. The SDI journal, *Presence*, regularly contains articles that expand our knowledge and stimulate our imagination in ways that are ever ancient, ever new.

Once we recognise that there is a variety of traditions of spiritual direction, the issue of the identity of one's own tradition inevitably arises. Some spiritual directors embrace a wholly eclectic approach, but they are a minority. Most see themselves as working within a particular historical tradition. This gives them a sense of being well grounded, but it does not exclude an openness to learning from other traditions and even to adapting their practices. Ignatian spiritual direction is generically Christian, evolving out of teachings and practices that go back to the Desert Mothers and Fathers. But what can we claim is specific to this tradition, that might make it recognisably different from, let us say, Carmelite or Salesian spiritual direction?

My purpose is not to undertake a comparative study of a range of traditions. This would be beyond the limits of a single paper. My search for what is specific to an Ignatian model of spiritual direction will focus instead on a collection of presuppositions, values, characteristics and emphases without which the term 'Ignatian' would not be appropriate. These will be fundamental to an Ignatian model and will be recognisably present in any exercise of Ignatian spiritual direction. This does not mean

that they will always be explicitly present, but that reflection on what the director is doing will discover them to be at work.¹

Many of my reflections will inevitably concern the relationship between spiritual direction and Ignatius' Spiritual Exercises. In light of this I need to make clear a working presupposition of my own: that giving the Exercises is not the same as engaging in ongoing spiritual direction. They are distinct, although by no means totally separate, ministries.² A person who is trained to give the Exercises is not automatically equipped to offer ongoing spiritual direction; and a person trained in ongoing spiritual direction is not necessarily prepared to give the Exercises.

However, I do not think that Ignatius and the early Jesuits would have recognised this distinction as clearly as we do today. My impression is that these men (I am thinking particularly of Pierre Favre) moved fluidly from spiritual conversation to offering the Exercises in some form—frequently what became known as 'light exercises' or applications of Annotation 18. In the sixteenth century, the ministry of spiritual direction did not exist with the resolution and definition that it has acquired in recent times. There is no evidence of special training, of contracts between directors and directees, of regular meetings, of fifty-minute sessions, of codes of ethics, still less of payment. These have all been creations of the late twentieth century. The professional nature of the ministry was unheard of five centuries ago and might well have been abhorrent to Ignatius and to the first generations of Jesuits. They would certainly have balked at payment.³ Therefore, our core question about what is specific to Ignatian spiritual direction cannot be answered simply by historical enquiry into the attitudes and practice of the sixteenth century. We need to take as our starting-point spiritual direction as it exists today, professionalised as it has become.

¹ Such reflection takes place, for example, during supervision.

² As Philip Sheldrake has written, 'I would suggest, however, that we must be very careful about uncritically removing certain items from the text of the *Spiritual Exercises* in order to construct a model for spiritual direction in the widest sense'. See 'St Ignatius of Loyola and Spiritual Guidance', in *Traditions of Spiritual Guidance*, edited by Lavinia Byrne (Collegeville, Mn: Liturgical Press, 1990), 99.

³ Ignatius was insistent on gratuity of ministries as a core expression of religious poverty in the Society of Jesus. This norm was to apply especially to spiritual ministries. See, *inter alia*, *Formula of the Institute*, 3 [1] and *Constitutions* VI.2.7. [565].



Contemporary spiritual direction: a retreat at the Center for Spirituality and Values in Business, Loyola Marymount University

A Contemporary Model of Spiritual Direction

According to William A. Barry's and William J. Connolly's classic account,⁴ three participants are involved in the dynamic of spiritual direction: director, directee and God. The relationship between the directee and God exists prior to the relationship between the directee and the director, and is independent of it. Hence the director does not initiate the relationship between the directee and God but facilitates it and fosters an already existing reality. The directee-God interaction is always more important than the directee-director interaction. The latter can only play an instrumental or mediating role.

The directee's relationship with God is not confined to any one part of his or her life but is all-pervasive, all-embracing. Therefore, nothing can be excluded *a priori* from the raw material of direction. Nevertheless, a person's prayer can be expected to focus that

⁴ William A. Barry and William J. Connolly, *The Practice of Spiritual Direction* (New York: Seabury Press, 1982).

relationship, to be the place where it is experienced (at least at times) in a more explicit, a more transparent or a more intense way. Hence no conversation can lay claim to be spiritual direction which does not include discussion of what is happening in the person's prayer.

This approach is built on the supposition that the person's prayer is real—a supposition which must always be tested, especially in the early stages of the spiritual direction relationship. Self-deception is a constant possibility. Prayer can be used as an escape from reality. Instead of being a focus for a person's experiences of God and of life, it can become a way for the person to try to escape in an unhealthy and unhelpful manner from the demands, stresses, pain and confusion of these experiences. Because he or she is not being real, God cannot be real for him or her.

When a person first approaches a spiritual director the latter will be interested in one key question: 'Does this person want a real relationship with God?' Any other goal or motivation will not permit the specific kind of relationship with the director that is spiritual direction. The person may be seeking help for psychological problems, or have been sent by someone in authority, or be lonely, or be looking for self-fulfilment, and so on. Such motivations may prompt the director to refer the person to some other kind of helper (for example a psychotherapist or a counsellor). On the other hand, the director may intuit that the person could be helped to move beyond these current motivations towards the more specifically spiritual motivation of desiring a relationship with God.

Does this person want a real relationship with God?

The relationship between director and directee has clear presuppositions, specific aims, and a corresponding methodology; it is not something casual, sporadic or vague. It requires clear boundaries and so needs to be governed by a code of ethics. All this must be clarified with the directee at the beginning of the relationship. When this is done and the directee knows what is involved, the director can then enter into a working alliance with the directee, or, in more precise terms, a working alliance *with the directee's desire to deepen his or her relationship with God.*⁵

⁵ This working alliance is different from friendship, although it requires friendliness. Unlike that of friendship, the purpose of the relationship does not lie within the relationship itself, but in that other relationship between the directee and God. In other words, the director and directee do not meet to foster *their* relationship. Friendship is entered into for its own sake and does not require any other justification. Spiritual direction, on the other hand, is an instrumental relationship, one whose purpose lies beyond itself.

An Ignatian Paradigm?

This contemporary model of spiritual direction would, I believe, be broadly accepted in Christian circles today. This is not to claim that it is definitive, but it stands as representative of a new thinking and new approaches that have become commonplace. It is a model that can be called generically Christian and can be adapted to the emphases of different traditions. This is one of its strengths. But would it be accurate to call it Ignatian?

I would want to suggest that this model, while coming from an Ignatian background and drawing on certain key Ignatian principles, is so generic as not to be specifically Ignatian. Yet this model, or something similar to it, is what many directors who call themselves Ignatian use in practice. So do directors who see themselves as Benedictine or Franciscan.

It is time to begin searching for what is needed to make this understanding of spiritual direction specifically Ignatian. My starting point will be the Church and my conviction that all spiritual direction, but especially Ignatian spiritual direction, is an ecclesial ministry.

An Ecclesial Ministry⁶

The primary, though not exclusive, locus for the working out of the Trinitarian plan for humankind is the Church. Every element of that Trinitarian plan is somehow embedded in the Church's life. Hence all human activity that is a response to the Spirit's initiative, that attempts to foster the Spirit's involvement in our lives, that offers itself as an apprenticeship to the Creative Spirit, becomes an ecclesial ministry.

Spiritual direction is only one such ministry. In practice it holds a relatively modest place (if only because it is available in its strict, and nowadays professional, sense to a very small proportion of believers). Prior ministries, both chronologically and in importance, include liturgy, preaching, catechesis and the sacrament of reconciliation. Each of these, however, includes elements of spiritual direction (for example teaching, formation and healing), and spiritual direction never replaces our need for the other ministries.

In the past it might not have been so necessary to stress the ecclesial nature of Christian spiritual direction. However, today there can

⁶ See my article, 'Spiritual Direction Today', *Religious Life Review*, 39/202 (2000), 162-167.



The Church as the Bride of Christ

from organized religion. It can be an expression of an exaggerated individualism in which people seek truth and meaning exclusively in the realm of inner experience.

Any full portrait of Ignatius shows that he was a man of the Church. Even without invoking the Rules for Thinking, Judging and Feeling with the Church (Exx 352–370),⁷ his attitude of reverence towards the Church and its ministers manifested itself throughout his life. In his earlier years one could regard this attitude as cultural as much as religious. However, his mystical experiences at Manresa, and subsequently his studies in theology, only confirmed his inherited sense of reverence for the Church, and the Rules give added sharpness to this aspect of Ignatius' convictions.

In the context of the Exercises, in which so much emphasis is placed on how God deals directly with the soul (Exx 15), the Rules remind us that this inner illumination is not the *only* way in which God acts.

Between Christ our Lord, the Bridegroom, and the Church, his Bride, there is the same Spirit which governs and directs us for the

be a tendency, at least in the West, to regard spiritual direction as almost independent of the life of the Church, especially in its institutional dimension. It can appear to operate in parallel with the sacramental and other ministries of the Church, and in some cases to replace them. This phenomenon is linked with that of people becoming interested in spirituality while turning away

⁷ See a contemporary discussion of these Rules by Avery Dulles, 'The Ignatian *sentire cum ecclesia* Today', *Review of Ignatian Spirituality*, 76 (1994), 19–35.

salvation of our souls. Because by the same Spirit and our Lord Who gave the ten Commandments, our holy Mother the Church is directed and governed. (Exx 365)

The 'same Spirit' leads and guides in different ways. Even during the Exercises the Church plays a role. The exercitant enjoys a relationship with Christ because of receiving the Spirit at baptism and being initiated into the community of the Church. Making the Exercises involves deeper insertion into the life of the Church, not moving outside it. The presence of the Rules for Thinking, Judging and Feeling with the Church in the book of the *Spiritual Exercises* is not accidental, nor are they to be ignored because of their difficulty or their controversial nature.⁸

Moreover the substance of these Rules is equally important outside the Exercises. They point to the context of our Christian life in general, and that of the ministry of spiritual direction in particular. They provide part of the director's frame of reference, and if the director does not appreciate their significance the directee is not likely to do so either. If the director is alienated from the Church the directee will pick this up and possibly be drawn into a similar sense of alienation. It is not so much a question of the director presenting the text of the Rules as of the director being, like Ignatius, a man or woman of the Church.

Spiritual Direction and Theology

The Rules for Thinking, Judging and Feeling with the Church present a theology of the Church based on the role of the Spirit in its life. All the practical issues raised in the Rules, even those that are not historically conditioned, are less important here than Ignatius' central theological vision of the Church as Spirit-filled and Spirit-guided.

The under-use of these Rules today, within and outside the Exercises, is due to many causes. The Church has fallen victim to the widespread distrust and suspicion of all organizations, and of all authorities outside the self. This has led to the tendentious distinction that many make between spirituality and religion. A worrying number

⁸ It is true that we need to get behind the Rules' sixteenth-century premises, and present their core message in contemporary terms. This is feasible so long as those who give the Exercises are convinced of its necessity.

of self-described Christians prefer to pursue their spiritual journey on their own, without allegiance to any formal body of believers.

Much spirituality today tends towards the non-intellectual, if not the anti-intellectual. People, including some directors, are still in reaction against an overly cerebral and moralistic approach to spirituality from the early twentieth century. Sometimes they are trapped by the even older division between theology and spirituality.⁹ I would argue, however, not

**Theology needs
to permeate
spirituality**

only that there is a necessary theological dimension to the Exercises, but also that this dimension must be an integral part of ongoing Ignatian spiritual direction. The Rules for Thinking, Judging and Feeling with the Church provide just one example of how theology needs to permeate spirituality. We can empathize with Teresa of Avila's preference that her directors be learned rather than pious. She writes of the need for a director to possess prudence (good judgment), experience and learning.¹⁰ She is not looking for high-powered academic theologians, but for people who are at least theologically literate, and who allow theology to enrich their own lives. John of the Cross places learning first in his triad of qualities needed in a director (the other two being discretion and experience).¹¹ Of course theological competence cannot compensate for a lack of other skills that we now take for granted, such as non-judgmental acceptance, active listening, empathy, adeptness in giving accurate feedback, ability to confront, and so on. However, without theological competence these skills risk being applied in a spiritual vacuum.¹²

⁹ Much has been written in recent times about the relationship between theology and spirituality. See, for example, Sandra M. Schneiders, 'Theology and Spirituality: Strangers, Rivals, or Partners?' *Horizons*, 13 (Fall 1986), 253–274; 'The Discipline of Christian Spirituality and Catholic Theology', in *Exploring Christian Spirituality: Essays in Honor of Sandra M. Schneiders*, edited by Bruce H. Lescher and Elizabeth Liebert (New York and Mahwah, NJ: Paulist Press, 2006). For a critique of Schneiders' position see Philip Endean, 'Spirituality and Theology', in *The New SCM Dictionary of Christian Spirituality*, edited by Philip Sheldrake (London: SCM Press, 2005), 74–79; and, at greater length, 'Christian Spirituality and the Theology of the Human Person', in *The Blackwell Companion to Christian Spirituality*, edited by Arthur Holder (Oxford: Blackwell, 2005), 223–238, at 228–231. My view is closer to that of Endean.

¹⁰ Teresa discusses the importance of learning in a spiritual master/director in *The Book of Her Life*, chapter 13, 16–21, in *The Collected Works of St Teresa of Avila*, volume 1, translated by Kieran Kavanaugh and Otilio Rodriguez, revised second edition (Washington, DC: Institute of Carmelite Studies, 1987), 130–132.

¹¹ See the long discussion of spiritual direction in John of the Cross, *The Living Flame of Love*, stanza 3, 27–67 in *The Collected Works of St John of the Cross*, translated by Kieran Kavanaugh and Otilio Rodriguez, revised edition (Washington, DC: Institute of Carmelite Studies, 1991), 683–701.

¹² A further general question concerns the kind of theology from which it is most appropriate for an Ignatian spiritual director to work. A brief answer would point to any theology that incorporates the

And theology is not just a prerequisite in the spiritual director. The growth of directees cannot be confined to the affective and conative dimensions of their being but must also embrace the understanding. The key Ignatian word *sentir* means ‘to have a felt understanding’. The directee needs to be encouraged to broaden this understanding, to read and reflect theologically as well as to pray and to act according to gospel values. The fostering of theological competence in the directee is part of the Ignatian director’s remit—without becoming a teacher. The director’s part is to stimulate, to interest, to indicate links between the directee’s experience of life and possible theological interpretations.¹³

The Relationship between Director and Directee

When we come to the relationship between director and directee, a person working in the Ignatian tradition might well identify with what I am calling the generic model. This is partly because of the common heritage that all Christian spiritual directors share, and partly because of the influence of psychology on this ministry today. Any Ignatian training programme would teach what we commonly call counselling skills, such as those referred to already; and stress would be put on issues such as boundaries, confidentiality, transference and counter-transference. Professional ethics would be at the heart of the ministry. Nevertheless, even in the case of elements that are almost universally shared, the Annotations and Presupposition at the beginning of the Exercises are a resource that incorporates important Ignatian emphases (Exx 1–20, 22).¹⁴

It is clear that Ignatius expects a basic respect and trust to exist between the two people. The director is to be a good listener, allowing exercitants or directees to tell their stories in their own way without the

insights represented by the key meditations in the *Spiritual Exercises*: the Foundation, the Call of the King, the Incarnation, the Two Standards, and the Contemplation to Attain Love. Such a theology would be optimistic in the sense of being world-affirming, but also acutely aware of the pervasive problem of evil, at the same time contemplative and service-orientated. For a wide-ranging discussion of the contribution of theology to any kind of spiritual direction see Dermot Mansfield, ‘The Place and Value of Theology’, in *The Way Supplement*, 91 (1989), 123–135.

¹³ We might recall the passage in the *Paraclesis* where Erasmus, a near-contemporary of Ignatius, excoriates the professional theologians. But rather than denigrating theology itself he goes on to say, ‘Only a few can be learned, but all can be Christian, all can be devout, and (I shall boldly add) all can be theologians’ (*Christian Humanism and the Reformation: Selected Writings of Erasmus*, translated and edited by John J. Olin [New York: Fordham UP, 1987], 97–108, here 104).

¹⁴ See n. 1.



© The Leaven

intrusion of the director's own experiences or ideas. Even when offering material for prayer the director is to exercise restraint, 'going over the Points with only a short or summary development' (Exx 2). The focus must be kept on the exercitant's relationship with the Lord. While this is required throughout the Exercises, it becomes even more important at the time of election or decision-making.

In the Spiritual Exercises, when seeking the Divine Will, it is more fitting and much better, that the Creator and Lord Himself should communicate Himself to His devout soul, inflaming it with His love and praise, and disposing it for the way in which it will be better able to serve Him in future. So, the one who is giving the Exercises should not turn or incline to one side or the other, but standing in the centre like a balance, leave the Creator to act immediately with the creature, and the creature with its Creator and Lord. (Exx 15)

When basic respect and trust exist between the two people the director is free to respond appropriately to the exercitant or directee. This appropriateness will depend on what is happening in that person's inner life. For example, Ignatius writes:

If the one who is giving the Exercises sees that the one who is receiving them is in desolation and tempted, let them not be hard or dissatisfied with them, but gentle and indulgent. (Exx 7)

At other times, however, the appropriate response may be confrontation:

When the one who is giving the Exercises sees that no spiritual movements, such as consolations or desolations, come to the soul of the one who is exercising, and that they are not being moved by different spirits, the one giving ought to inquire carefully of the one receiving about the Exercises, whether they are doing them at their appointed times, and how. So too of the Additions, whether they are observing them with diligence. (Exx 6)

A person may not always welcome such a challenge. If the relationship is not already well grounded the confrontation may cause it to fracture. But given the requisite respect and trust the exercitant will accept the director's intervention as necessary to assist his or her forward movement into the dynamic of the Exercises.¹⁵

Such confrontation may be easier during the Exercises than in ongoing spiritual direction. Both the one who gives the Exercises and the one who is making them are quite clear on the commitments that have been made regarding the amount of prayer, and even the times of prayer. The Additional Directives referred to in Annotation 6 add further clarity to what is required.¹⁶ So the exercitant will not be surprised if the one giving the Exercises seeks to discover whether these commitments are being fulfilled.¹⁷

¹⁵ This absence of spiritual motions is often due to unconscious resistance that needs to be brought to light.

¹⁶ 'Additions for making the Exercises better and for finding more readily what one desires', Exx 73. Ignatius supplies Additions or Additional Directives for each of the Four Weeks. 'The additions represent the distillation of much experience and the text of the Exercises itself leaves no doubt about the importance Ignatius attached to careful observance of them (cf. Exx 6, 90, 130, 160).' (Michael Ivens, *Understanding the Spiritual Exercises: Text and Commentary* [Leominster: Gracewing, 1998], 64. See also Brian Grogan, 'To Make the Exercises Better: The Additional Directions', *The Way Supplement* 27 (1976), 15–26.

¹⁷ Before beginning the Exercises, Ignatius used to give Annotations 1, 20, 5 and 4 to the exercitant, and, after the Foundation, Annotations 3, 11, 1 and 13. *Directory Dictated to Father Juan Alonso de*

In ongoing spiritual direction a similar, but adapted, set of commitments should be in place. This is what is meant by an initial contract or covenant. At their first meeting, or at least before the director formally accepts the other person for spiritual direction, a contract should be agreed that is acceptable to both parties. This will cover issues such as the frequency and length of meetings, and in some cases the question of appropriate remuneration. But it should also include, again by mutual agreement, a commitment on the directee's part to a specified amount of prayer and possibly a commitment to keeping a journal or notes as well. The importance of this contract, from an Ignatian perspective, is that the director is now free to challenge the directee, if necessary, on whether he or she has been keeping the contract.

Flexibility in the Director

Growing out of this model of the direction relationship is a flexibility of approach, which the Annotations also encourage. How the Exercises are to be given is not decided *a priori*, but depends on the unique personality and life history of the person involved. So we read:

The Spiritual Exercises have to be adapted to the dispositions of the persons who wish to receive them, that is, to their age, education or ability Again, that should be given to each one by which, according to their wish to dispose themselves, he may be better able to help themselves and to profit. (Exx 18)

Such flexibility is not confined to initial decisions about what a person is able to undertake, but is an essential part of the director's approach throughout. During every single meeting, the one who gives the Exercises cannot know beforehand what he or she will say or suggest. Everything depends on the exercitant's experience. The director needs to be thoroughly familiar with the text of the *Spiritual Exercises*, yet free to depart from that text should the needs of the exercitant require it. The agenda is being set, under God's guidance, by the exercitant and not by the one who gives the Exercises. This level of

Vitoria, [21] 10, [24] 13, in *On Giving the Spiritual Exercises: The Early Jesuit Manuscript Directories and the Official Directory of 1599*, translated and edited by Martin E. Palmer (St Louis: Institute of Jesuit Sources, 1996), 21–22.

flexibility is integral to the giving of the Exercises, and it is readily transferable to ongoing spiritual direction.¹⁸

Indeed flexibility is even more necessary in ongoing direction. The one who gives the Exercises pays careful attention to the narrative being presented and adapts to it, but nevertheless he or she is also monitoring the dynamic of the Four Weeks. The person giving the exercises has a framework within which to work, as well as exercises and other suggestions of Ignatius on which to draw. There is a constant interaction between the exercitant's experience and the text, however flexibly this may be applied. But in ongoing spiritual direction there is no such text, and no such clear dynamic to guide the director. An Ignatian director still draws on the Exercises, and on his or her own experience of making and giving them. However, this happens in a much more indirect way and is often more a matter of the overall wisdom of the Exercises than any specific parts or teachings.

Furthermore, the prayer of a person in ongoing direction frequently lacks focus, intentionality and intensity compared with prayer during the Exercises. Especially in the Twentieth Annotation Exercises, the daily meeting with an exercitant mostly concentrates on periods of prayer during the previous 24 hours, as well as on what was going on in between. This is relatively straightforward for an experienced director. However, in ongoing direction, with monthly meetings, there is far more to talk about in the person's life, and their prayer is often very diffuse. Formal prayer may no longer be central to the narrative and a director may want to explore more how the directee is finding God in the events of life. For this there is no specific framework.

¹⁸ The thinking of Ignatius is well illustrated in the *Directory* he dictated to Vitoria, [30] 19. 'In observing the rules or ten Additions which are given for making the Exercises well, care should be taken to have them observed very exactly, as is directed, seeing to it that there is neither excess nor too much laxity. The exercitants' characters also need to be taken into account. Melancholic persons should not be pressed too hard but given free rein with most of them; the same is true of persons who are delicate and not much used to such things. But careful thought must be given to what will be most helpful. I myself have employed leniency in these rules with some persons and it did them good; with other I used considerable strictness, but as gently as possible, and I observed that by the Lord's grace this did them good also.' This passage is substantially reproduced in the *Official Directory of 1599*, chapter 15, [133] 9 (Palmer, *On Giving the Spiritual Exercises*, 23, and 316–317).

Theological, Cultural and Other Differences

In today's world the possibility that a director and a directee come from very different ethnic and cultural backgrounds, or from different Christian denominations, or that they hold different theological views (especially on moral issues) can increase the difficulty of listening well to one another. Such differences create both emotional and intellectual challenges for both parties. Sitting opposite someone whose image of God, or view of the Church, or sexual orientation, or cultural premises, or political persuasion is radically different from one's own can raise strong and conflicting emotions. These emotions may impede a trusting sharing of experience by the directee and an appropriate response by the director. There are also the more familiar differences of gender, age and economic class. All these differences, and their corresponding difficulties, need to be brought to the surface, acknowledged and faced rather than denied or covered over.¹⁹

Ignatius has wise words to say about such situations—perhaps because he had been suspected of illuminism himself, or because he was aware of the theological differences underlying the Protestant Reformation, or simply because he understood human nature well. He wrote:

In order that both the one who is giving the Spiritual Exercises, and the one who is receiving them, may more help and benefit themselves, let it be presupposed that every good Christian is to be more ready to save their neighbour's proposition than to condemn it. If they cannot save it, let them inquire how the other means it; and if they mean it badly, let the one giving correct them with charity. If that is not enough, let the one giving seek all the suitable means to bring the other to mean it well, and save themselves. (Exx 22)

Ignatius is saying that without a genuine openness and a willingness to enter the other's frame of reference, no helpful conversation can take place. Indeed, our desire must be to 'save', or justify, what the other person is saying. In contemporary terms, he is asking that a hermeneutic of generosity be brought to the encounter. He stresses the mutuality of influence when such generosity is present. Commenting on the phrase, 'to help and benefit each other', Michael Ivens writes,

¹⁹ See the wide-ranging discussion of cross-cultural spiritual direction in *Common Journey, Different Paths*, edited by Susan Rakoczy (Maryknoll: Orbis Books, 1992).

Though often referred to in the Directories in master-disciple terms, the relationship is here described as one of co-operation. Director and exercitant have a common project: that the exercitant find God through the Spiritual Exercises. In working together towards this, the one who gives and the one who receives are required to 'help' each other. The help is two-way.²⁰

Of course, Ignatius could not foresee all the complexities of today's world and his Presupposition does not solve, or even address, every difficulty. In particular, he makes no explicit reference to the presence in such encounters of those deep and turbulent emotions that make it difficult to think or respond rationally, and which may need to be brought to supervision. He writes as though the differences in question simply existed on the level of ideas. Nevertheless, his succinct comments are helpful in pointing us towards the attitude of mind and heart that we need to bring to this increasingly common situation.



© Jesuit Retreat House, Cleveland, Oh

Different backgrounds: Men's Homeless Retreat Programme, Cleveland, Ohio

²⁰ Ivens, *Understanding the Spiritual Exercises*, 25.

Fostering Desires²¹

It is often said that to understand the purpose and get to the heart of an Ignatian exercise one need only look to the grace being asked for and the colloquy. In fact, the colloquy may be seen as an elaboration of the initial prayer for the grace. The naming of the grace, the articulation of desire, occurs towards the beginning of each period of prayer. 'The Second Prelude is to ask God our Lord for what I want and desire.'²² Every Ignatian exercise is built on that 'what I want and desire' and grows out of it. Desire is the basis of the dynamic that drives the Spiritual Exercises. It ignites exercitants' prayer, focuses their intentionality, sustains them in times of desolation, reveals where their prayer is moving, and becomes central to the narrative that they share with the director. Desire is especially pivotal in the process of election or decision-making.

Once we grasp the centrality and the dynamic of desire in the Exercises it becomes obvious how applicable it will be to ongoing spiritual direction. Desires, however, are ambivalent and much discernment will be needed. Especially in affluent societies, with their consumerist culture, deeply human desires can be smothered or suffocated. Spiritual desires are even more at risk. Both the deeply human and the spiritual are frequently replaced by superficial desires for goods that are transitory and of no lasting value. It is these superficial desires that then dominate our consciousness. It is extraordinary how difficult many people find the question: 'What do you *really* want?' No matter how intelligent and articulate we may be, we are finding it increasingly difficult to get in touch with our deepest and most authentic desires. A primary aim of Ignatian spiritual direction is to draw people into their own centre, their own heart, where these authentic desires lie.

As in the Exercises, desires fuel movement in ongoing direction. The Ignatian director does not simply want to know 'what is going on', but 'what is going forward'. He or she will be attempting to tune in to the movement of the Spirit in the directee, realising that desires can

²¹ On the role of desires in Ignatian spirituality, see E. Edward Kinerk, 'Eliciting Great Desires: Their Place in the Spirituality of the Society of Jesus', *Studies in the Spirituality of Jesuits*, 16/5 (November 1984), 1–29; Michael Ivens, 'Desire and Discernment', *The Way Supplement*, 95 (Summer 1999), 31–43; Philip Endean, 'To Reflect and Draw Profit', *The Way Supplement*, 82 (Spring 1995), 84–95. For a more general discussion of desires in spirituality, see Philip Sheldrake, *Befriending Our Desires* (London: Darton, Longman and Todd, second revised edition, 2002).

²² Exx 48 and *passim*.

indicate the Spirit's presence and the direction in which the Spirit is urging the directee to travel. Without this 'going forward' the directee's inner life will be stalled, becalmed. As in Annotation 6, if this is so the director may need to explore this absence and intervene accordingly.

Rules For Discernment²³

Probably the greatest resource that the Exercises offer to the ministry of ongoing spiritual direction is the understanding contained in the Rules for Discernment (Exx 313–336). A director who has internalised these rules will apply them spontaneously in every encounter with a directee. Although they may rarely be quoted verbatim, their influence will be implicit in each response, query, clarification, suggestion or challenge that is made to the directee's narrative. The Rules will have the same purpose as that given in the text of the *Spiritual Exercises*:

Rules for perceiving and knowing in some manner the different movements which are caused in the soul the good, to receive them, and the bad to reject them. And they are more proper for the first week. (Exx 313)

Such help is invaluable for those who desire to seek and find God in the complexities of their own psyches, their relationships, their responsibilities and their evolving self-identity.²⁴

Less frequently, but at key moments in life, a person will have to face serious decisions. Here again, by combining the Rules for Discernment with the wisdom and method that Ignatius offers in the election process of the Exercises (Exx 169–189), a director can give precious support to a directee at what is often a turbulent period. No other Christian tradition has such clear and incisive guidelines for decision-making as those found in the *Spiritual Exercises*. In a way, Ignatian spiritual directors come into their own with a directee who needs to make a decision. The director knows that Spirit-based

²³ Within the large amount of writing on this topic, see two recent books by Timothy M. Gallagher, *The Discernment of Spirits: An Ignatian Guide for Everyday Living* (New York: Crossroad, 2005) and *Spiritual Consolation: An Ignatian Guide for the Greater Discernment of Spirits* (New York: Crossroad, 2007).

²⁴ One might here point to the value of the Consciousness Examen as a daily exercise in discernment. See Timothy M. Gallagher, *The Examen Prayer: Ignatian Wisdom for Our Lives Today* (New York: Crossroad, 2006).



© Lazy boy

decision-making is close to the very heart of what is specific to the Ignatian charism.

Spirituality and Psychology

A fruitful dialogue has been taking place over the past half-century between spiritual direction and the human sciences that have grown out of the pioneering work of Freud, Jung and Adler, among others. Training programmes for spiritual directors now have to include both psychological theories and their application through various psychotherapies and counselling techniques. Discussions take place about the similarities and differences between spiritual direction and these human sciences.²⁵ From the 1970s onwards psychology has had a strong influence on spiritual direction, as its insights and skills have been incorporated into the older tradition. More recently, psychological and counselling practitioners have begun to show a reciprocal interest in learning from the spiritual tradition.

The influence of psychology on the ministry of spiritual direction has in the main been positive. But some directors have allowed psychology not to enrich, but to replace, the traditional understanding of spiritual direction. The therapeutic model takes control, and the focus is no longer on seeking the will of God so as to grow in union with

²⁵ See Maureen Conroy, *Growing in Love and Freedom: Personal Experiences of Counselling and Spiritual Direction* (Denville, NJ: Dimension Books, 1987).

God, but on the directee's psychological integration. The prophetic dimension, the cutting edge of the gospel challenge, is no longer present and the religious orientation of spiritual direction has been lost.

Directors in the Ignatian tradition are less likely than some to succumb in this way to the seduction of psychology. It remains a component in their ongoing training and practice, but it will not take over. This is because they remain rooted in the experience of the Spiritual Exercises. Nobody can accuse Ignatius, or the text of the *Exercises*, of simply advocating psychological wholeness. The entire dynamic of the Exercises is geared to searching for and finding the will of God in the concrete circumstances of a person's life. They are totally theocentric, having God our Creator and Lord at their centre, not the creature—the exercitant. The Exercises are an experience of being drawn more deeply into the Christian mystery. If psychological healing takes place through the Exercises it will be welcomed as a gift from God, but many people seek and find God, and serve him faithfully, in the midst of their own continuing brokenness. Ignatian practitioners bring the same convictions and the same wisdom to their ministry of ongoing spiritual direction.

Different Spiritualities

As an Ignatian director, there is a significant difference between working with a directee who shares the Ignatian tradition, and with a person from a different tradition. For example, when I am faced with a directee whose fundamental orientation is monastic, I see my role as helping this person to live the monastic charism more authentically. It would be unethical for me to attempt to draw the directee into the Ignatian fold. Therefore, while I will inevitably call on my experience of the Ignatian tradition (for that is what has made me who I am), I will also be obliged to make use of whatever familiarity I have with the monastic tradition. There will be emphases and nuances in the Ignatian tradition that I will not raise: I cannot encourage involvement with the world in a person whose vocation is withdrawal from the world. This can be quite difficult for a director who is steeped in the Ignatian tradition. I may need to restrain some of my spontaneous reactions to what I am hearing and try to imagine myself into the monastic way of living and praying. In a sense I will be working more out of the generic model of spiritual direction than out of a specifically Ignatian model.

The situation is different when the directee is already living out of Ignatian spirituality, or even when a person is a so-called beginner without any particular spiritual background. Here I can afford to be more upfront with an Ignatian approach, fostering an apostolic spirituality and emphasizing the process of becoming a contemplative in the midst of action. I keep mission in mind as much as formal prayer, the world and the universe as much as the person's soul, growth in freedom as much as liturgical worship. In this scenario there is a oneness of vision, a coherence between director and directee that in theory should make spiritual direction easier. In practice this may not always be so.²⁶

I have attempted to discuss specifically Ignatian spiritual direction in the context of the renewal of this ministry within the Christian community today. I have suggested that there exists a generic model to which most practitioners adhere. However, different historical traditions of spiritual direction modify or amplify this model in light of their own inherited wisdom. Ignatian directors will carry an awareness of the ecclesial nature of this ministry and will want to insist on its theological dimension. From the Spiritual Exercises they will bring a conviction of the central role of desire in the spiritual life, as well as applying appropriately the Rules for Discernment. In the midst of the multiplicity of approaches being practised today Ignatian directors can be confident of the richness of their own tradition and its specificity. But it is obvious that this should never make them self-sufficient or arrogant. No one approach to spiritual direction has all the answers.

Brian O'Leary SJ, an Irish Jesuit, has spent the first half of his ordained ministry on the team at Manresa Retreat House in Dublin, and the second half lecturing in spirituality at the Milltown Institute, also in Dublin. He has recently retired and works freelance in retreat-giving, lecturing and writing.

²⁶ These issues are well addressed by Paul Nicholson in 'Has Christ Been Parcelled Out?' *The Way Supplement*, 91 (Spring 1998), 101–111, at 108–109. The whole article raises similar questions to those posed in this paper.