

CHARISMATIC COMMUNAL DISCERNMENT AND IGNATIAN COMMUNITIES

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SINCE 1967 the Catholic Pentecostals have grown from a single prayer meeting to thousands of meetings affecting over 200,000 Catholics around the world. This 'charismatic renewal' began with an initial contact with the power of the Spirit and led to numerous communities of service and worship. Even the pattern of growth in this spirituality resembled an earlier movement of experience and renewal of the Body of Christ, the Spiritual Exercises and the Society of Jesus which emerged from them. In particular, a trust in the particular guidance of the Spirit of God and consequent concern for discernment mark both renewal movements. The contemporary charismatic renewal complements the ignatian focus on personal discernment with a rich experience of communal response to the leadings of the Spirit.

It is the intention of this paper to examine the charismatic experience of communal discernment and present some implications for contemporary ignatian communities. This will entail an initial overview of the theology of pentecostal spirituality and then a description of communal charismatic guidance with an emphasis on the exercise of the gifts of the Spirit. The concluding section will suggest some applications for communities whose spirituality stems from the Spiritual Exercises.

I. PENTECOSTAL SPIRITUALITY

The basic inspiration for the charismatic renewal comes from the role of the Spirit in building the early communities of the apostolic Church. It was a reading of the Acts of the Apostles which prompted the first catholic pentecostals at Duquesne University in Pittsburgh to pray for the same dynamic gift of the Spirit for themselves.

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The writers of Acts and the epistles attribute to the direct influence of the Spirit the foundation and guidance of both apostolic communities and the ordinary lives of individual christians. What happened to the disciples at Pentecost was meant to happen to every new christian. They were to receive God's Spirit in a clear way and personally recognize the outpouring of God's love which marked the dawn of the messianic age. In his kerygmatic sermon, Peter sketches the basic pattern of christian initiation.¹ The accounts of the initiation of christians in Samaria, Ephesus, the house of Cornelius, all show that this promised 'gift of the Spirit' was a matter of experience as well as dogma. Visible signs witnessed the internal liberation: praising God aloud in joy, speaking in unknown tongues, prophesying.

The New Testament authors outside of Acts presuppose a common experience of the holy Spirit in the congregations they addressed. In writing to a congregation he had not yet met, Paul could still appeal to this experience of theirs as radiating christian joy even in suffering: 'This hope does not disappoint us, for God has poured out his love into our hearts by means of the holy Spirit who is God's gift to us'.² More than some pale horizon of faith-interpretation, this is a communication of love, a personal presence to the believer. In Galatians, Hebrews and Titus, the authors argue from the common experience of the signs and wonders of God's Spirit which should have led those groups to rely on God's grace rather than the Law.³ Why could this experience be presupposed? It seems likely that some such conscious reception of the Spirit was a regular part of the catechumenate in all these communities.

The Spirit not only ratified conversion, but remained as an active principle of behaviour.⁴ This gift of the Spirit came to influence Timothy where he was naturally weakest and to continue to direct him in his office of leader of the community; and it continues to testify to our transformed condition.⁵ A radical new dimension of knowing God and responding to him and our fellows was promised as part of the new covenant in Jeremiah 31. In some mysterious way the formative role of the law would be personalized and interiorized.⁶

Communities which were formed by the inspired witness and preaching of the apostles felt the guidance of the Spirit. Yet the continuing inspiration came through media which many would find

¹ Cf Acts 2, 38.

² Rom 5, 5; cf 1 Jn 4, 13.

³ Cf Tit 3, 5-7.

⁴ Cf 2 Tim 1, 6.

⁵ Cf Rom 8, 16.

⁶ Cf Rom 8, 2.

objectionable today. The crucial decision to welcome gentiles into the Church came out of Peter's vision and the surprising visible signs of the Spirit in the family of Cornelius⁷. Through direct prophecy the holy Spirit commissions Barnabas and Saul in Antioch to set out as evangelists.⁸ Paul is prevented by the Spirit from preaching in Asia and led by a vision to evangelize in Europe.⁹ The constant testimony of Acts is of the presence and power of the Spirit directing individual apostles and apostolic decision. The astonishing words which express the conclusions of the First Council of Jerusalem frankly indicate a communal discernment, 'For the holy Spirit and we have agreed . . .'¹⁰ Obedience to the Spirit's guidance is met by confirmation as the signs of the Spirit validate the message preached.¹¹

Contemporary Charismatic Renewal

It was this evidence of the New Testament which led catholics in 1967 to pray for a new Pentecost in their own lives.¹² The charismatic spirituality that is emerging centres on two distinctive poles: prayer for the 'baptism of the holy Spirit', in order to be open to the full work of the Spirit; and the ensuing charismatic gifts which are used to build up the Body of Christ.

The phrase 'baptized in the holy Spirit' sounds strange to catholic ears, even though it is mentioned several times in the New Testament. It corresponds to the promise of John the Baptist concerning the special mission of the Lamb of God.¹³ It is the personal appropriation of the outpouring of the Spirit heralded in Joel and announced by Peter on Pentecost.¹⁴ Theologians in the charismatic renewal believe that the Lord is using the movement to restore this experiential component to the ordinary christian catechumenate. Simply put, the baptism of the Spirit is a personal awareness of the Spirit's presence and power in the individual's life.

It functions for adult christians as a *release of the Spirit*, of the same Spirit definitively communicated in the sacrament of baptism and strengthened in confirmation. This release comes as a response from Christ to the prayer of the individual to be totally docile to the presence of the Spirit. Ordinarily, this prayer is made in a charismatic community in conjunction with other members of the Body of Christ. This grace marks a change in a person's relationship with

⁷ Acts 10.

¹⁰ Cf Acts 15, 28.

¹² Cf Ranaghan, Kevin and Dorothy: *Catholic Pentecostals* (New York, 1969), ch 1.

¹³ Cf Jn 1, 33.

⁸ Cf Acts 13.

¹¹ Cf 1 Thess 1, 5.

¹⁴ Cf Acts 2, 39.

⁹ Cf Acts 16, 7-10.

God, the beginning of a new dimension of sensitivity to the Spirit's leadings and of the gifts of the Spirit, presuming the continued co-operation of the individual. Similar experiences have always been a part of christian spirituality (indeed, one might speculate that such an awakening was the aim of Ignatius in the Exercises); but the charismatic renewal focuses on this release of the Spirit in its scriptural fulness, and sees it as an ordinary part of christian life in the local community. For one of the near-universal effects of this gift of the Spirit is to draw one into a charismatic group for worship and service.

As part of christian initiation, baptism in the Spirit comes only after repentance and belief in the Lordship of Jesus Christ, as Peter outlined at Pentecost. For some it represents the completion of their initial conversion to Christ. For others who have been pursuing serious christian life for some time in faith, the baptism of the Spirit occasions the beginning of a deep personal renewal which accords with their state in life. There is one important pre-condition, as Donald Gelpi writes:

... to pray for full docility to the Spirit of Christ is in effect to express one's willingness to do whatever God may be calling one to do, no matter what the personal sacrifice or suffering that call might entail. The person who cannot pray such a prayer and mean it is not yet ready for 'Spirit-baptism'.¹⁵

In addition to a new awareness of the Spirit's leadings, common fruits of this prayer are a new peace and joy, an attraction for prayer and Scripture, a restoration of the prayer of praise as thematic in prayer, new zeal in witnessing about the Good News to others and a growing awareness of the power of the sacraments, especially penance, the sacrament of the sick and the Eucharist. Underlying all of these is the distinguishing characteristic of the movement, 'the direct and manifest operation of the holy Spirit'.¹⁶

The other pole of the pentecostal spirituality centres on the gifts of sanctification and the gifts of service. The former are the fruits of the Spirit mentioned in Galatians.¹⁷ Baptism of the Spirit does not produce instant spiritual maturity, but, through this prayer Christ usually gives an increase in these created dispositions to respond to the transforming action of the Spirit. They mirror a deepened consecration to become like Christ, and indicate that a healing of

¹⁵ Gelpi, Donald, S.J.: *Pentecostalism: a Theological Viewpoint* (New York, 1971), p 183.

¹⁶ O'Connor, Edward D.: *Pentecost in the Modern World* (Notre Dame, 1972), p 41.

¹⁷ Cf Gal 5, 22.

one's affectivity is an expected fruit of the redemption of Christ.

The gifts of service, or charisms, are not for the individual's sanctification but are powers to build up the Body of Christ. They fit the traditional category of *gratiae gratis datae*.¹⁸ Through their coordinated impact, the local microcosm of the Body of Christ extends into its milieu the full range of Christ's saving proclamation and power. They include both 'office' and 'charism', and their cumulative effect is to bring the whole community to maturity.¹⁹ This lofty aim is actualized in every member, since through each one some gift has been given for the common good.²⁰

What is a charism? Donald Gelpi uses the theology of Aquinas to show the connection of the gifts of service with the gifts of sanctification:

Hence, Thomas concludes, the gifts of the Spirit are enduring endowments of the graced person which keep him open to the activity of the Spirit, just as the moral virtues render the active powers of men docile to rational direction.²¹

Any natural capacity for service can be touched by grace so that its operation becomes 'a manifestation of the Spirit'.²² It can then evidence the gracious presence and saving love of God. When a charism is being employed, we are drawn to give thanks to God present with his people rather than admire human talent. In addition to these transformed human capacities, the sign-gifts of healing, miracles, tongues and interpretation, etc., confirm the truth of the message in ways that are more than natural.

These charismatic gifts have always been present in the Church.²³ The pentecostal experience is meant to open the individual and the community to a more regular exercise of the gifts of the Spirit, just as it did for the disciples after Pentecost. It is a 'moment of heightened awareness and of intensified purpose within the charismatic experience'.²⁴ While catholics have associated such gifts with extraordinary individuals in the history of the Church, the contemporary renewal points out the Lord's intention of giving them to all who ask, to communities through individuals, and to average christians as the ordinary equipment of the people of God. This new economy of gifts reforms the apostolate from an overly-clerical model which

¹⁸ Cf 1 Cor 12; Eph 4; Rom 12; and see Gelpi, *loc. cit.*, p 143.

¹⁹ Cf Eph 4, 13.

²⁰ Cf 1 Cor 12, 7.

²¹ Gelpi, *loc. cit.*, p 124.

²² Cf 1 Cor 12, 7.

²³ Cf Rahner, Karl, S.J.: *The Dynamic Element in the Church* (New York, 1964), esp ch 2.

²⁴ Gelpi, *loc. cit.*, p 124.

seemed to restrict the transmission of light and life from cleric to laity, or from superior to subject, into a truly corporate enterprise of mutual support and service. Charismatic communities are beginning to witness the profound renewal intended by Vatican II through these powers.²⁵

II. DISCERNMENT IN THE CHARISMATIC RENEWAL

In any spirituality which expects God to deal directly with the soul, there is a need for the gift of discernment. It is not surprising to note that the same charges of illuminism which were levelled at Ignatius and his Exercises should be repeated today to the charismatic renewal. In response, the movement is developing a doctrine on discernment which has incorporated and corroborated many of the ignatian insights.

There are two types of charismatic discernment to investigate: ordinary and extraordinary. Either or both of these can be operative in two distinct arenas, in the private inspirations of the individual and in the community as a whole.

The charism 'discernment of spirits' mentioned by Paul in 1 Cor 12 is an ability to recognize the spiritual origins of the actions of others. Is this behaviour of God or not?, is the question it addresses. It is neither ecstatic nor clairvoyant, but rather a graced sense of peace or power which distinguishes the action of the good spirit. It is also capable of recognizing the influence of alien spirits on others. It is frequently given to the community through those who serve as spiritual directors, confessors, and leaders of the worshiping assembly. This gift is sometimes accompanied by a gentle sense of urgency or of caution which is physically perceptible, but the gift does not depend on such 'anointings'. The common element is an authoritative insight comparable to the instance of Peter 'seeing' the roots of Simon Magus's intention.²⁶ Its exercise comes only when the Spirit prompts, though docility to the gift usually leads to its more consistent exercise. It may function in the individual in an extraordinary manner, or it may form a part of his ordinary manner of pastoral contact with others.

Extraordinary inspirations of discernment 'have the character of messages coming to us from a source other than ourselves'.²⁷ These

²⁵ Cf *Lumen Gentium*, 12.

²⁶ Cf Acts 8, 23.

²⁷ Cf O'Connor, Edward D.: 'Discernment of Spirits', in *Pastoral Newsletter* (Ann Arbor Community, May, 1971), p 7.

may be manifest through a vision, words or intentions which form in our minds abruptly and with no seeming natural cause. Although there is obvious need for caution here, one cannot deny that the authors of scripture attributed significant guidance of the Spirit to such inspirations.²⁸ This mode of guidance would be similar to the ignatian 'First Time of Election'.²⁹ It should be noted that these inspirations have content, a definite direction to act in. In contrast to ignatian 'First Time' elections, charismatic discernment is usually ordered to others and is not confined to a process of decision-making.

Ordinary discernment, on the other hand, works more from within, the impulses of the Spirit in love or peace urging one to action or word. These are the ways which the Spirit prefers to employ, so that Christians may be moved continually by love rather than sporadically by surprising communications. Many persons notice an enhanced awareness of the guidance of the Spirit in their lives after receiving the baptism of the holy Spirit. The habitual development of this discernment leads to the spiritual gift of wisdom, which more fits the category of 'gifts of sanctification' mentioned above. This type of discernment is roughly comparable to the second and third times of election in the Exercises.

Communal discernment in charismatic communities demonstrates a procedure which traditional spirituality has developed less fully than its teaching on individual discernment. When the community assembles in prayerful recollection, and the full range of the charismatic gifts is permitted to be exercised, a new kind of discernment emerges. There is a common and spontaneous perception of the source of inspiration in those who speak, lead or suggest. A kind of peace and light develop in the meeting as it progresses, which is qualitatively different from natural group enthusiasm or satisfaction. This sense of peace forms a touchstone for what is said or done by individuals. Paul seems to have urged the Colossians to employ this spiritual criterion in their meetings.³⁰ From the tradition it seems that the basic structure for individual discernment lies in identifying the valid basis of consolation within one's affectivity, and employing it as an affective norm for particular options. This same testing is found in the worshipping assembly led by the Spirit. Worship and common prayer generate a unifying intention to seek the Lord. Those words and actions which strengthen this intention harmonize

²⁸ *Ibid.*

²⁹ *Exx* 175.

³⁰ *Cf Col* 3, 15-17.

with this united desire, while those which are not 'of the Spirit' clash with it.

This is actually an unconscious instance of Ignatius's *Rules for Thinking with the Church*. Inspiration is measured by obedience to the visible Church, zeal by the discretion of reason led by faith. The same Spirit which inspires charismatically leads hierarchically: 'For I must be convinced that in Christ our Lord, the bridegroom, and in his spouse the Church, only one Spirit holds sway, which governs and rules for the salvation of souls'.³¹ In a word, the locus of discernment is within the Body of Christ. Clearly the outer limits of this locus are set in the authoritative teachings of the hierarchical Church and the words of scripture (which, of course, include general moral principles). Yet within these boundaries further objective criteria lie. The constant recommendation of spiritual writers to be completely open to one's spiritual director and docile to his suggestions shows one of these tests. In a real sense, the director or superior represents the Church, not simply someone with whom to share one's inspirations. The least he can offer to the individual is confirmation of the Spirit's leadings. The advice of elders is a continuing clear charismatic service to the Church, whether or not it is dubbed such. Reason, and one's state in life are likewise tests that are more than subjective.

In a charismatic prayer meeting, teachings, exhortations, prophecies and practical suggestions are advanced to seek the discernment which lies in the Body of Christ. No single individual possesses all the gifts of the Spirit, or has an infallible private index for his every inspiration. As in the ignatian formula, the leading of one person should be expected to converge with the leadings of the Spirit expressed through others. One would be reluctant to accept one course of action, no matter how strongly proposed or received by the individual, if it failed to achieve congruence with the other gifts in the community. This leads to a convergence of individual expression and common intention. In an assembly docile to the Spirit of Christ, the basic affective thrust to conform to the image of the Incarnate Word produces both tolerance and vigilance, as Paul commands.³² Presuming that the content of teachings, etc. is doctrinally sound, attention must be paid to the lives of those who propose them, as the pastoral epistles prescribe. Gradually a sensitivity develops in a praying community to contain qualities and undercurrents in what is offered.³³

³¹ Exx 365.

³² Cf 1 Thess 5, 19-22.

³³ Jas 3, 13-18.

The remote preparation of the charismatic group for discernment is probably more important than the actual attempt to come to a decision. For there are a number of conditions which seem necessary to hear the call of the Lord as a group. First, there is a need to have a common history and vocation; and this needs to be raised to explicit recognition. Ignatius referred to this verbal disclosure of how one was called by the Lord and the relationship which developed as the grace of our vocation. Pentecostals refer to the same practice as 'giving your testimony'. It enkindles a bond among those who listen as they come to recognize in each other the same calling from the same Lord. This leads to ease in praying together, and prevents theological differences or political labels from becoming the primary means of identifying the others in the group.

A common past is a considerable help towards having a unified purpose. But this is more than an ideological common ground. As the group meets for prayer over a time, the Lord begins to form them into a people. He speaks to them through the gifts and gives a sense of identity to them. For months our community in San Francisco was urged to see itself as a tree planted by the Lord, as the foundation of a spiritual temple, as stones in the wall of the Jerusalem being rebuilt by the Lord. And the over-riding theme was the vocation to be a people, embodying the mission of John the Baptist in heralding the coming of Christ. This identity gives a context to measure pastoral strategy and personal life-style.

A third effect of a common history is the development of the charismatic gifts within the group. Prayer and fasting are needed to seek the full equipment of the saints, to have more 'media' through which the Lord can address and encourage all. Pastoral care focuses on encouraging people to use the gifts that they have already been given. Members of the group would feel moved to share their reflections on a scripture passage, for example, and would notice words and thoughts coming with a real clarity during the delivery. After the meeting they would probably seek the reactions of others to their fledgling exercise of the gift of teaching. Individual occasions of charismatic preaching would increase in some members, so that eventually they would exercise a regular 'ministry' of preaching. This would need to be purified by use and the reactions of others in the community. A true docility must pervade this, since often one person might have the gift of prophecy for the group, but would not have the clarity of charismatic discernment that others in the same group would have to ratify and complement the prophecy. People

also require time to distinguish what came from the Spirit in their inspiration and delivery and what they added to it.

In preparing for discernment on specific issues that concern the whole group, the pastoral leaders have special responsibilities. They must search out the pressing issues in the whole body, gather information and formulate the various options. Teaching provides the context of New Testament principles which should inform any decision on these issues. Certainly their most important task is to structure the process as a prayerful rather than a political exercise. Most of us approach group-decisions with worldly models which are the more influential for being unchallenged: for example, if one group wins, some other group loses; support must be rallied for our favourite solution; debate and discrediting the opposition are the normal instruments for victory, etc. This political manoeuvring simply destroys the peace and unity in the group which is needed as a basis for discernment.

The model needed is not rhetoric aimed at persuasion, but a religious stance of waiting and listening for the Lord's invitation. Fasting is an excellent preparation and reminder of the position we are adopting before God. The meetings tend to begin in prayer, and to return often to prayer for light and reconciliation. Various people will have brought the results of their own private discernment on the issues to present to the group. Different techniques are employed to afford everyone the opportunity to speak in a context which allows him comfort and acceptance. Usually, small groups alternate with the full assembly. Although small groups stimulate discussion, they often lack the resources to do the complete discernment; hence the return to the assembly.

Whatever the subsequent structure of the meeting, the prayer period at the outset must set the context for discernment. The fundamental intention to seek first the Kingdom of God needs to be raised to affective awareness so that it can function as a norm. Without demeaning rational calculation and prudence, the relation of means to end is not a purely intellectual exercise. For the end - God's glory - is present to man in desire; and hence the reaching out for the Kingdom and the peace that stems from it can assess the means (the options for decision which are brought into this context). A brief scenario for such a communal charismatic discernment might run as follows:

The customary way for pentecostal meetings to centre on God is through the prayer of praise, in song and spontaneous expression.

This unites the community by shifting their consciousness to the Lord in their midst. Into this context of worship, intercessory prayers of confident faith can be voiced. Frequently at this time, calls for repentance and reconciliation from divisions or a spontaneous communal confession of faults might arise from the group. Silence is also usual for reflection and adoration.

The leader would remind people to wait until they felt the urging of the Spirit to speak. With no prearranged order, various gifts would be exercised, punctuated with times of silence or prayer. One might offer a scripture passage which had impressed him previously to illumine the decision. Another might relate his experiences in praying over it. The group would try to use its common perception of peace, to register agreement through praise, or its neutrality through silence and moving on to another point. The leader might speak forth an emerging consensus and then pause to ask for any feelings of disquiet that remained unspoken. Another technique is to ask people to relate what they have been led to pray for, what their hopes are for the community. If the meeting's flow is diverted through inappropriate or lengthy sharing, or the atmosphere of prayer evaporates as the discussion and rebuttal emerge, the leader should call the group back to worship for a time.

Decisive shifts in the consensus may come when someone presents the 'supremely right' solution. This might be an instance of the gift of wisdom. Or another might offer a prophecy that crystallizes a particular direction. Charismatic prophecy is the expression of a particular image or word which the Lord wants spoken to this group now. Hence, it is presented in the Lord's name, not the prophet's. It is quite close to the description of prophecy found in the Old Testament, though it is not often used for telling the future.

In sum, this is not a process of counting up the supporters who have predetermined their stance for either side. A new and unifying religious experience occurs in the session, as gifts converge to create a prayerful consensus. Sometimes an entirely new option emerges with great clarity. Other times it is through the weighing of patterns of consolation and desolation of the whole body that makes clear the Lord's call. Or a more calculated weighing of reasons leads to this awareness.

Prayer for confirmation is often answered through the sign-gifts which demonstrate God's power and choice. Physical or psychological healings, miraculous blessings, are indications of the Spirit at work in this microcosmic body of Christ. Another sign-gift used

in seeking light is the ancient practice of praying for a scripture passage. With faith that the word of God is alive for us today and under an inspiration to do so, someone would open the bible at random to see if any passage strikes his heart. Although this practice is as old as Augustine and as recent as Thérèse of Lisieux, it causes concern to some observers. It could be that the reason for countless instances of its success as a medium of guidance and confirmation lies in the intention of the Spirit to draw ordinary catholics back to a lively appreciation for the inspired word. Another source of confirmation is the 'open door' of circumstances. But the ultimate confirmation must come in the lives and relationships of the members of the community.

III. COMMUNAL DISCERNMENT IN IGNATIAN COMMUNITIES

Daniel Berrigan once remarked that jesuits were the sort of men who would have rushed to Pentecost with fire extinguishers. That would indeed be surprising, since the charism of Ignatius has such a large role for the Spirit. His religious experience rested on God as the Director of souls and yielded practical means to enable others to perceive the Spirit's action in their lives. Since all jesuits share in some way the founder's charism, we might inquire whether discretion would be applicable to communal as well as individual response to the Lord's call.

The pentecostal experience has shown that communal discernment rests on a convergence of inspirations through the exercise of spiritual gifts within a worshipping assembly. A distinctively ignatian approach would incorporate into that procedure some basic principles of discernment from the Exercises and the Constitutions.

In the following paragraphs we will attempt to sketch out this combination of ignatian principles with the charismatic gifts already present in the ignatian community.

The Lord invites particular religious responses from men at certain moments. The subject matter of discernment is a religious question, not a moral one.³⁴ These responses are bipolar, inter-personal responses to another, not instances of conformity to some predetermined blueprint. They are particular to us as concrete individuals, rather than being reasoned applications of abstract

³⁴ Exx 170.

principles. The possibility of such invitations and responses is beyond doubt for a catholic.³⁵

The colloquies of the Kingdom, the Two Standards and the Three Degrees of Humility make clear that the decision of the retreatant is such a religious response to a particular invitation from God.³⁶ The retreatant prays that he is willing not only to choose, but to embrace what he has been chosen for by the divine Majesty. If the Lord of History makes such invitations to individuals to draw them more fully into the economy of salvation, can we rule out similar communicable divine intentions for groups? A note of caution is also in order. If an individual did not believe that God was so personally involved in the lives and plans of men, it would seem impossible even to begin the Exercises with him. Consequently, if significant parts of a community held such a position, any attempt at communal discernment would probably seem absurd to them.

Indifference must precede election

This is seen most clearly in the plan of the Exercises, as enunciated in the first annotation.³⁷ Ignatian indifference, an active purity of heart and single-minded generosity, is a precondition for individual election in the Exercises. It is also a precondition for communal discernment, though it might not seem so necessary as in the case of the individual.

The structure of the Exercises might be seen as indifference and election. The structural meditations and the contemplations of the life of Christ are meant to set a context for subsequent response. Their purpose is to ground a man affectively in the person of Christ, so to order his desire that he would prefer to choose whatever would lead all things back into union with the Father through the person of Christ.

Indifference, stated abstractly in the Foundation, is made concrete in the following of Christ. The christian takes the same stance towards all human values that he sees his Lord take. The liberty of spirit which this brings about in him is a positive attraction to share the labours of Christ in the world today, a disposition to respond, a readiness in his felt preferences to obey the will of the Father. It is a grace which he asks again and again to receive, not stoic detachment.³⁸ Attachments are re-ordered by this longing to be personally

³⁵ Rahner, *loc. cit.*, p 92.

³⁶ Exx 98, 147, 168.

³⁷ Exx 1.

³⁸ Cf Phil 3, 8.

united with Christ, which is itself the action of the Spirit. This 'transcending experience', as Karl Rahner describes it, forms the principle of the affective logic of ignatian discernment. Without this no election is possible, because without this experienced action of the Spirit within us, we would be as lost as an ethicist with no spontaneous inclination to the good. This principle is, as one would expect, in the background of our affectivity as it forms the context of every partial aspiration. This context of liberty of spirit is a necessary condition for the three times of election in the Exercises.

The testimony of the Exercises is that considerably more time and attention must be given to attaining indifference than to the actual election. The favoured 'second time' would be impossible without this committed and experienced liberty of spirit, the desire for God's greater glory. It functions as the ground, the dominant chord against which the particular options are to be gauged for harmony.

We can extend this structure of indifference-election to communal discernment, and ask how is it that a community arrives at this single-minded generosity? Neither command from above nor abstract statements of the principles which are supposed to unite us are adequate for this group indifference. What is needed is for the community to sense God's call to them all. The invitation of the Spirit is mediated to the community precisely through the gifts of those who compose it: the human services to the whole body of Christ which are permanent endowments, docile to the action of the Spirit, are the means for achieving the unity outlined in Romans, First Corinthians and Ephesians.

The experience of the charismatic renewal is that group prayer and sharing of religious experience through the charismatic gifts is crucial to communal discernment. Yet even this can be done prematurely, if indifference has not been arrived at by the group. Plunging into 'election' without the spiritual disposition of the whole community to be open to the Spirit would be like demanding that the retreatant make his election before beginning the first week. The foundation would be lacking in either case.

The disordered affections which would cloud the judgment of the man without indifference are mirrored in the disordered relationships found in groups. Factions, envy, rivalry and old grudges are incompatible with group indifference: that is, a unified and corporate preference to seek active conformity to Christ. Another aspect of personal relations which could also sabotage this preference would be the inability to see the Spirit manifest himself through some of

our brothers. It may be difficult to reconcile ourselves to the Lord's call in our manner of living or apostolate; but that difficulty is compounded if the call is spoken to the group by its 'weaker members'. Hence the need for preliminary 'sharing the grace of our vocation' which engenders a new level of respect and attention to these others.

The final ignatian principle reminds us that 'not everyone is capable of making the election'. In the ninth annotation, Ignatius begins to distinguish the persons to whom the different rules for discernment of spirits are applicable. There are obviously two levels: one for the immature, one for the mature. The first-week tactics are given to those who believe but have not committed themselves to the Lord. Because of this, they lack the basic affective orientation that is needed for discernment. The rules for the second week are given to those who possess the goal of God's glory in intention; and hence can decide on the means with some purity.

The problem is how to tell the difference between the two types of men. Some criteria for this spiritual immaturity are found in the Exercises. First, there is no openness to the Principle and Foundation. There is no inclination to maintain the order of creation and there may be overwhelming attachments which the person is unwilling to terminate. Secondly, the director should see how the man is tempted, in accord with the ninth annotation.³⁹ Thirdly, 'one who wishes no further help than some instruction and the attainment of a certain peace of soul', is incapable of going on to the second week.⁴⁰ A fourth criterion might be summarized from the text: one whose christian life is based on the avoidance of God's punishment and is therefore characterized by fear. Fifthly, it would seem that one who did not have a regular prayer life which would afford the sensitivity and experience of spirits needs for discernment would be also asked to terminate the Exercises after the first week. Because the wisdom of discernment is founded on an ordered affective life, the retreat director ought not even to let the immature man see the rules for the second week. He is not tempted by the subtleties of the apparent good but to moral evil.

The classic pauline distinction between spiritual maturity and immaturity⁴¹ can make little sense to the unspiritual man of the first week. Would it be presumptuous to say that the *de facto* presence of a man in religious life does not automatically qualify him as ready

³⁹ Exx 9.

⁴⁰ Exx 18.

⁴¹ Cf 1 Cor 2, 14; Heb 6, 13-14.

for the second week? Because they lack the peace which is the basis for discernment, some individuals and some communities are temporarily incapable of making an election. One could extend the five criteria to communities, to estimate the dominant level of religious maturity and to find out whether communal discernment would be a fruitless endeavour.

I have stressed the preliminary conditions for discernment in communal situations (companionship, familiarity in spiritual exchange, a unified disposition) because some groups have already attempted the procedure without attending to the preparation. The result has been a premature dismissal of communal discernment as a means for direction and renewal. On the other hand, elections are not only for the already perfect; nor is the level of companionship and unity of purpose requisite for discernment to be set at too lofty a plane. What is important in both cases is the desire: and, failing that, the desire for the desire!

Another limitation on the process can come from our training in private prayer. The prayer of most mature religious would be characterized by a quiet passivity, as quiet inspiration and illumination for action might occur at rare intervals. Coming into a praying group, jesuits tend to bring along their expectations and habits from private prayer. For example, it is difficult for novices to be comfortable with silence in the group, while it is difficult to get mature jesuits to say anything at all aloud. And when others offer a passage or a prayer we may feel as though our own prayer were being interrupted. There are different habits needed for group prayer, to make the prayer or lights of one member become the prayer for all.

Limited experience with communal discernment has shown that religious are open to the direction of the Spirit in their private prayer, yet expect little from the assembly but the tallying of votes on the issue. Hence, they structure only brief times of prayer into their common sessions for discernment. The testimony of the charismatic renewal is that the Spirit does indeed speak to the whole group in prayer through the gifts operative in the members. There can be a new spiritual experience of sifting and weighing the movement of the Spirit in the very sharing of private discernment. When done in a prayerful atmosphere, there is often a perceptible peace and enlightenment which greets the words that lead to the Lord's will. As a grace this is by no means automatic, but it does create a strong consensus among those present. This itself is a source of unity in the

stage of implementation which will follow discernment and election. Indeed, the whole group can emerge from prayer with an entirely different resolve from the one hitherto intended. Finally, the assembly can be a potent witness of confirmation by the Spirit for a decision rightly taken.

The charismatic gifts are already present in our religious communities; yet few expect that the inspiration they receive in confessional counselling or in preaching might also be given them for the sake of their religious community. With the right kind of encouragement, open reception from those who listen, and with the right atmosphere of prayer so that the whole group can test these suggestions peacefully, these gifts of the Spirit can be powerful forces for renewal. They can show how to love is to serve, and at the same time manifest God's love and power in our midst. Although a detailed treatment of the role of superior is not possible here, it is clear that part of his emerging function is to facilitate discernment, and serve as a 'talent scout' to encourage the charisms of all in the community.

The diversity of gifts can work together to manifest the unity of one Body, led by a single Spirit. For God's people are a gifted people, and he is proving that once again in the Church today.⁴²

⁴² Cf 1 Pet 4, 10-11.