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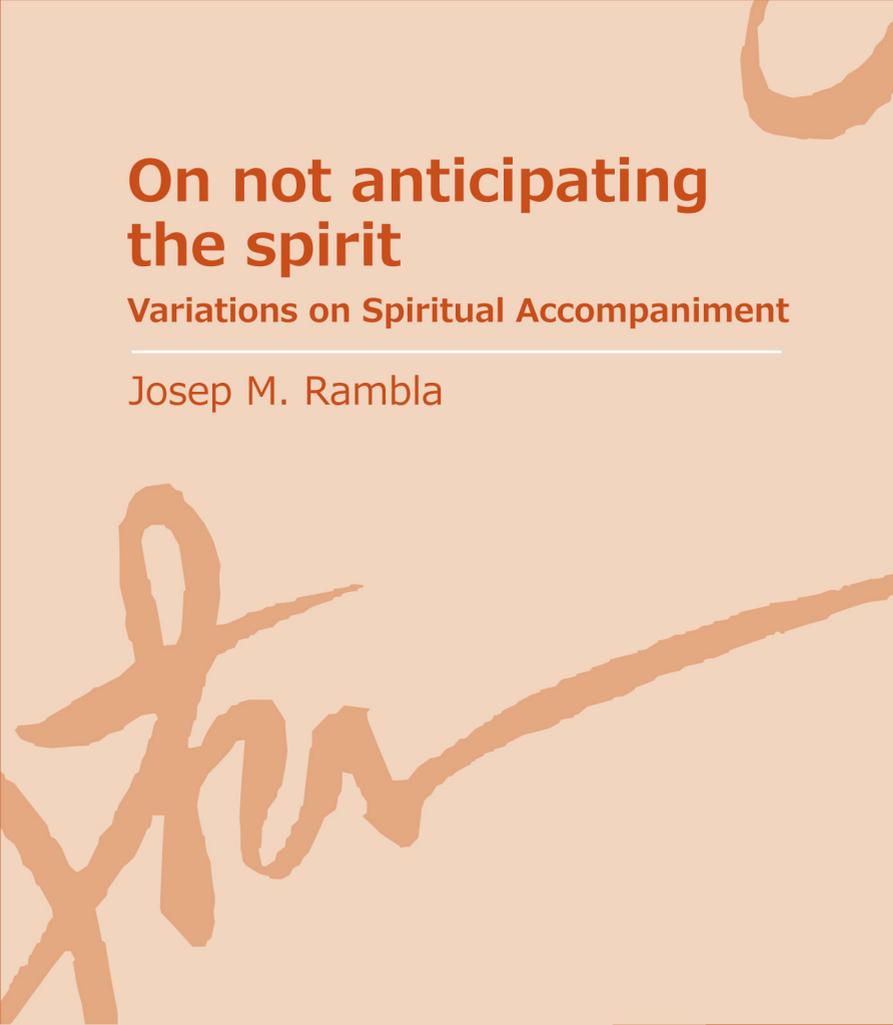
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## On not anticipating the spirit

Variations on Spiritual Accompaniment

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Josep M. Rambla





**ON NOT ANTICIPATING THE SPIRIT**  
**VARIATIONS ON SPIRITUAL ACCOMPANIMENT**

Josep M. Rambla, sj

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**Josep M. Rambla Blanch, sj.** Theologian. Specialist in Ignatian spirituality. Study spirituality from insertion into a popular environment and social action. Among his publications: *Dios, la amistad y los pobres. La mística de Egide Van Broeckhoven* (Santander, Sal Terrae, 2007); *Ignacio de Loyola, lay and Jesuit* (EIDES no. 48).

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People's interest in the varied forms of spiritual accompaniment has been growing apace. Nowadays there is accompaniment in spiritual growth, accompaniment in social or medical assistance, accompaniment in different kinds of spiritual experience (Christian, non-Christian, secular), accompaniment in grief, etc. The ways of practicing accompaniment are numerous and keep growing. At the same time, theoretical and practical publications on accompaniment have proliferated.

While I am therefore fully conscious that I cannot contribute anything new to all that has already been written on the theme of accompaniment, this essay can be justified because it seeks to offer a set of data and reflections that can help the reader toward a greater awareness of what the task of accompaniment involves. Moreover, it can also help those who provide this service to evaluate themselves personally. The word «variations» in the subtitle reveals the broad and at times summary nature of this text.

The perspective that provides the setting for this booklet is that of accompaniment in Christian living and the following of Christ, but certainly much of the advice the booklet offers may be useful for other practices of accompaniment aimed at assisting with deep human experiences. The Ignatian tone that prevails in most of what follows the first, more general part of the essay is not only in keeping with the objectives of the «Guide» collection of EIDES-CJ; it also arises from my conviction that one of the most outstanding contributions of Ignatius to the spiritual tradition has been the art of mystical and spiritual accompaniment.

# I. A GENERAL VISION<sup>1</sup>

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Spiritual accompaniment, however it is understood, is concerned with the most intimate, personal, and inviolable dimension of human beings. Those who take on this role can do so only with the utterly modest realization that they are being allowed to enter another person's inner sanctum. They must be humble enough to realize that they are being invited to accompany others on the path by which the Spirit is leading them, but only as a guide.

## **1. «AMONG YOU AS ONE WHO SERVES» (LUKE 22,27)**

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Since it is a matter of participating in the work of the Spirit, every spiritual guide must approach the task with profound respect, as if on tiptoes, and realize that one is walking on holy ground. This guide will be above all help the reader to recognize the genuine action of God and to distinguish it from what is merely appearance. Often the guide's attitude will consist of amazement and adoration before the One who always and in every way takes the initiative and thoroughly overwhelms us.

I will now try to set out what I believe to be the most fundamental elements of this theme.

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1. This first part is an expanded and slightly revised version of my monograph, *El acompañamiento espiritual*, published in Sal Terrae, September 1997, pp. 619-628.

## 1.1. The forms of accompaniment

What we call «accompaniment» currently takes several rather different forms, all of which can be encompassed in the concept of «pastoral accompaniment.» *Initial* accompaniment takes place when someone begins to pursue a Christian way of life in a conscious and profound manner. Subsequently, there is the accompaniment offered to a person whose spiritual experience of God is deepening or to one who is seeking orientation for his or her future life. Finally, there is the accompaniment needed by those who have already made a choice of life and are trying to harmonize it with the rhythm demanded by the following of Christ. Thus, at the risk of reducing a living reality to a conventional schema, we can distinguish three types of accompaniment: the accompaniment of *formation*, the accompaniment of *spiritual initiation*, and the accompaniment of *following* Christ as an adult Christian. It is important to be aware of the diverse forms of accompaniment and to realize that individuals needing accompaniment do not exist in a chemically pure state of Christian life.

It is quite true that spiritual accompaniment is not possible in practice unless a person has already taken definite steps toward living as a Christian in a relatively committed, adult way, one that requires its own type of spiritual accompaniment. True Christian living has, I believe, four characteristics. 1) *The practice of an evangelical style of life* (within the limits of human fragility) in one's work or study, in the use of money, in family relations and human relations in general, in fidelity to personal prayer, in facing difficult situations (such as unemployment), etc. 2) *The development of the social dimension* along with the personal dimension of Christian living, which means life in Christ, the «man for others.» These two facets of Christian life grow as a person progressively interiorizes the Gospel so that the Gospel becomes not so much something that is received and learned but rather something that is experienced and grasped. 3) *The experience of prayer and a certain degree of biblical and theological formation*, in accord with the person's capacity, form part of this essential interiorization of faith. 4) Finally, *a community relationship* (through participation in a parish, an apostolic movement, a study group, etc.) is important so that one's personal life can find ecclesial expression and interact with a community context.

In a person's formative stage the accompaniment can be quite different from that practiced in other situations. The director's role at this stage, more than at others, is to provide formative elements that the directee presumably lacks.<sup>2</sup> Since this period has more of an educational nature, the intervention can be more explicit than in other situations. Also, the accompaniment need not be limited to individual dialogue; it can be partly realized in groups.

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2. Translator's note: in this English translation we use the term «director» to refer to the person offering.

## 1.2. Spiritual accompaniment<sup>3</sup>

### 1.2.1. Starting point: the spiritual level

As was just stated, spiritual accompaniment properly speaking supposes that the directee already has some personal experience of God. That is to say, the person's life is being guided by the light and interior strength of the Spirit. The directee will have already passed through a more or less long period of formation with all its difficulties, and will have established a good foundation for a personal Christian life graced to a certain degree with experience of the Spirit. If it happens that the person requesting accompaniment has not reached this level of spiritual experience, then the first task of the director should be to help the person to acquire it (directly or through someone else).

Spiritual accompaniment differs from other forms of pastoral dialogue in that it is not concerned with moral counsels or orientations but with experience of the Spirit and recognition of the Spirit's action. In other words, the task involves helping the directee to objectivize what he experiences, to discern the paths by which he should move, and to understand the means that he can use.<sup>4</sup> Communication between director and directee will therefore dwell on those interior resonances or reflections (the «motions» and «thoughts» of ancient Christian tradition) that need to be deciphered in order to recognize the paths of the Spirit and the possible deviations. The director should not offer her opinion about any doubts expressed, nor should she instruct, plan, or exhort the directee; rather she should allow the life of God to flow through the person and bring forth fruit. Precisely because of the objectivizing role of accompaniment, a certain regularity in sessions is needed, though not necessarily great frequency.

When we speak of the spiritual life and spirituality, we should not forget that we are referring to the whole of a person's life. The «spiritual» dimension extends to the whole sphere of the Spirit's action: individual life and collective life, interior life and social relations, explicitly faith-related matters (prayer, sacraments, virtues, etc.) and profane matters (economy, culture, politics, etc.). Accordingly, accompaniment should not be seen as limited to the interior life but should extend to all those areas of life that are within the dominion of the Spirit of Jesus. The Spirit led Jesus to prayer and to liberation of the oppressed, to peaceful relations and to confrontation, and even to temptation.

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3. What follows can be found in more developed form in Josep M. RAMBLA, *L'acompanyament personal als joves. Vers una vida cristiana adulta*, Delegació Diocesana de Pastoral de Joventut. Arquebisbat de Barcelona, 1996. From the immense bibliography that exists on the topic of spiritual accompaniment, I cite only the following: A. LOUF, *La grâce peut davantage. L'accompagnement spirituel*, Desclé de Brouwer, Paris, 1992, and Carlos Rafael CABARRÚS, *Cuaderno de Bitácora, para acompañar caminantes. Guía psico-histórico-espiritual*, Desclée de Brouwer, Bilbao, 2000.

4. Translator's note: throughout the text, to avoid confusion, the «director» will be designated with feminine pronouns (she, her), and the «directee» will be designated with masculine pronoun (he, his, him).

### 1.2.2. Dialogue

Dialogue is the proper medium of accompaniment and must be given exquisite attention. The dialogue of accompaniment is based on an previous *alliance*. The person seeking spiritual accompaniment desires to grow in a profound relation with the Lord by developing a life in the Spirit. The person who agrees to collaborate in the process makes an alliance with that desire so that a *working agreement* is established between the two persons in order to fulfill the desire.

The collaboration of accompaniment requires of both persons *reciprocal confidence*. As Ignatius advises in his *Spiritual Exercises* (which are an extended experience of spiritual dialogue), this confidence consists in always putting a positive interpretation on what the other person says or reveals. When such an interpretation is not possible, before the director corrects (or worse, condemns) the directee, the directee should be asked to explain what he means. In this way most misunderstandings are readily eliminated. Nevertheless, if the misunderstanding is still not resolved, or if a clear error is apparent, then it is time for a more profound dialogue. Naturally, this attitude is reciprocal; it works both ways.

What underlies the relationship of accompaniment is the basic attitude of *acceptance*; such an attitude avoids a moralizing tone (even when it is meant to justify or pacify the directee) and manifests itself in attentive listening. The director, like the friend portrayed by Saint Exupéry, is «the person who never judges.» What is needed, more than words, are looks, gestures, and a generous personal attitude that in some way reflect the welcoming love of God. This acceptance of the person is obviously clearly related to *empathy* and its liberating force.

While the dialogue will supply plentiful references and resources for perceiving the action of the Spirit and interpreting it better, it will always maintain a *profound respect for freedom* and will refrain from interfering in personal decisions. The director has a valuable and important role to play, but it is limited to shedding light on the paths by which the directee is advancing and on the resources by which he can be helped. Exquisite spiritual wisdom will provide the balance required for accompaniment that does not become intervention. The role of accompaniment is crucial but should not reach the point of being essential since the only essential action is that of the Spirit, and it is solely to the Spirit's action that the freedom of the directee should respond.

Spiritual dialogue is especially useful for helping to *expose the deceptions* which present themselves in covert form («under the appearance of good») as a person makes progress in the following of Christ. Here as well, the director should not judge prematurely; she can and should help discernment by asking simple questions, by attentively interpreting the spiritual process, or by proposing some points for prayer. Her collaboration will always be quite modest, but it can be decisive. The most valuable and effect assistance will take the form, not of confused instruction, but of guidance on how best to discern the strands of the directee's spiritual history.

### 1.2.3. «Choosing a way of life»

One especially delicate moment of great spiritual intensity is that of choosing a state of life. It is a privileged time in the life of a mature Christian. In this regard, all that we have said about the need to offer aids and resources without interfering in the decision is of special importance. «Choosing a way of life» does not mean «adopting» something that is exterior to oneself but recognizing the profound meaning of one's own existence (that is, the action of the Spirit in one's life) and freely embracing it. Who can recognize this action except the very person affected by it? Obviously, no one can take that person's place in making the free decision to follow one path or another. Nevertheless, at this supremely important moment (a moment that some ancient authors called «childbirth») the person needs most especially not only information about the object or objects being chosen but also aids for prayer, for discernment of spiritual thoughts and movements, and for the election itself. Describing the characteristics of these forms of assistance would require extensive treatment, which is not possible in this present summary exposition.<sup>5</sup>

## **2. «IN VESSELS OF CLAY» (2 COR 4,7)**

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A director is not ordinarily capable of performing this service without previous training, and even after training she is not immune to providing the service incorrectly. She therefore needs adequate preparation, regular review, and continual updating. I indicate here a few of the areas that deserve attention.

### **2.1. Spiritual experience, experience of life**

The director's wisdom should not be a stagnant deposit but should possess a life transfixed by brightness. Only if she has true experience of God will she be able to sense the movement of the Spirit in the directee. Knowledge of theology, especially spiritual theology, is indispensable, but all such knowledge is insufficient if the person who is accompanying someone else does not keep alive within herself the spiritual *sensibility* that is a trait of Christian maturity (cf. Heb 5,14). It is not a matter of the director reaching extremely high levels of divine experience (or even of reaching higher levels than the directee). Rather, she must, even in her limited condition, truly encounter God in the different circumstances of life. That means that she must be a person who has a deep experience of life.

Given that the accompaniment must be open to the great variety of personal situations and to the inexhaustible creativity of the Spirit, the director should

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5. On this point see J. M. RAMBLA, *Escoger la vida*, Sal Terrae, 1993, pp. 689-700.

have an experience of God not only in prayer but also in other areas of her life (sacramental, religious, family, professional, social, etc.). In other words, she should be able to perceive in herself the movements of the Spirit who acts not only in prayer but in daily life as well. Otherwise we face a danger that is often detrimental to «spiritual direction»: that of reducing God's actions, and consequently the accompaniment, to a world that is alienated or alienating. For this reason it is very important that the ministry of accompaniment be exercised not only by priests but more and more by lay people and especially women (as is already happening in some places).

## 2.2. The prayer of the director

The eminently spiritual service of accompaniment relies greatly on prayer. There are few apostolic activities in which a person so clearly mediates God's action as in this one. Communion with God and communion with the directee are the two poles of this prayer of intercession, in which the director places herself before God and before the directee, prays for him and for herself, and —totally abandoning her own personal interests and ways of seeing things— allows God to transform her heart. In this way the director makes herself ever more docile and transparent to the action of the Spirit so that it is the Spirit alone who communicates in the process of accompaniment. Many of the essential qualities of spiritual dialogue (acceptance, respect, balance, mediation, and invigorating love) have their source in this habitual prayer for the directee.

The practice of the *examen* rounds out the prayer of intercession. The *examen* means viewing the directees in the light of faith and gratefully accepting God's gifts to them. In this *Eucharistic* setting the director keeps broadening the horizon of her service and at the same time feels movements in her heart that lead her to be ever more faithful to the Spirit in carrying out that service.

## 2.3. Psychology as well

Experience of the Spirit is not something vaporous; it happens concretely in particular persons; it has a psychological dimension that is different from the spiritual dimension but intimately connected to it. To forget that psychological dimension would be to reject the teaching of the best spiritual guides of Christianity; these guides were thoroughly familiar with human psychology, and they used that knowledge (which was pre-scientific but quite sound) to help others spiritually.<sup>6</sup>

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6. It suffices to recall names such as Anthony, Evagrius of Pontus, Diadocus of Photicea, John Cassian, Benedict, Catherine of Siena, Ignatius, Teresa of Jesus, John of the Cross, etc. A fundamental work on the primitive Christian roots of spiritual accompaniment is Irenée HAUSHERR, *Direction spirituelle en Orient autrefois*, Institutum Orientalium Studiorum, Rome, 1955.

The basic psychological preparation for a director involves personally traveling the route of mature spiritual experience and becoming conscious of that experience. Since spiritual experience is also a human experience, reflecting on it with the help of a good guide provide excellent training and knowledge in human psychology and its implications for the spiritual life. Such preparation is comparable to that of a psychoanalyst, who as part of her training must also undergo analysis. A person who has had no mature spiritual experience and who has not objectively reflected on her own personal spiritual process is not a suitable candidate for accompanying others.

But even that is not enough. Such essential elements of accompaniment as dialogue and religious experience need a minimum of psychological knowledge in order to avoid getting lost in confusing quandaries. *A little* knowledge is needed to know what is to be done, and *much* knowledge is needed to know what is *not* to be done. Psychological wisdom has much to say about such areas as prayer, images of God, affectivity, desire and desires, moral imperatives, etc. Psychological wisdom has also much to say regarding dialogue and the possibility of transference, dependency between director and directee, projections of the director, etc.<sup>7</sup> This is true even for normal situations, but since the director sometimes encounters persons who suffer certain disorders or pathologies, she should be prepared for that. She should be knowledgeable enough to be able to refer them to persons who can help them deal with their problems, without attempting to do therapy herself.

#### **2.4. The director directed**

Both the counsel of the great masters and simple common sense show the need for the director to consult with a more experienced person about how she is carrying out her work. This is especially true when first beginning, but even then, cultural evolution and the Spirit's dynamism always carry us toward novelty and overwhelm the wisdom and experience that one has acquired at any given time.

Furthermore, it is not enough simply to consult with another person about the way one is practicing accompaniment. The *supervision* provided to the director should be quite extensive since the way the director performs her service obviously affects the directee for better or for worse. The need for such supervision is all the greater at the present time since accompaniment is reemerging forcefully within the church and since the situations, both of directors and directees, take many forms.

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7. An excellent work on spiritual accompaniment from a psychological perspective is W. A. BARRY and W. J. CONNOLLY, *The Practice of Spiritual Direction*, HarperOne, San Francisco, 2009<sup>2</sup>. A collective, two-volume work containing very practical high-quality essays is C. ALEMANY and J. A. GARCÍA-MONGE (ed.), *Psicología y Ejercicios ignacianos*, Mensajero-Sal Terrae, Bilbao-Santander, 1992.

## 2.5. Becoming dispensable

Accompaniment is a kind of assistance that is always needed in Christian living, even for those who are spiritually mature. Nevertheless, the director should lead the directee toward a degree of autonomy that allows him to rely on «discreet charity,» that is, love infused with discernment. The directee will still need support in *maintaining objectivity*, but the director's tendency to disappear will prevent the accompaniment from degenerating into a situation of permanent dependency. The byword of every director should therefore be the Ignatian phrase, «not anticipating the Spirit but following him.» It is the Spirit who, by his «unction,» bring Christians to the point of maturity where «they no longer need anyone to teach them» (cf. 1 John 2,27).

## II. THE IGNATIAN TRADITION OF SPIRITUAL ACCOMPANIMENT

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In his now classic study Heinrich Bacht argued that, if the Spiritual Exercises and the Constitutions of the Society of Jesus were not always producing the fruit that was expected, it was because of a failure to recognize their rootedness in the primitive monastic tradition. Referring to the Exercises, he wrote: «Ignatius summed up in his compendium all the substantive elements that the spiritual father of early monastic tradition communicated to his disciples in the course of their years of active instruction.»<sup>8</sup>

More recently T. Spidlik portrayed Ignatius Loyola as reflecting the spiritual pedagogy of the Desert Fathers. He stressed how Ignatius embodied the classical qualities of the spiritual father: experience of God, discernment of spirits, knowledge of the human heart, and ability to transmit the right counsel.<sup>9</sup>

### 1. IGNATIUS AND SPIRITUAL ACCOMPANIMENT

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These days we are not surprised by having the Exercises of Ignatius compared to the spiritual tradition of the great Desert Fathers, but we are still mostly unaware of how thoroughly impregnated the whole Ignatian corpus is with that ancient wisdom

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8. H. BACHT, «Die frümonastischen Grundlagen Ignatianischer Frömmigkeit. Zu einigen Grundbegriffen der Exerzitien», in: *Ignatius von Loyola. Seine geistliche Gestalt und sein Vermächtnis (1556-1956)*, Würzburg, 1956, pp. 259-260.

9. T. SPIDLIK, «Ignacio, Padre espiritual,» *Manresa*, 69 (1997), 19.32.

of spiritual accompaniment. Even the exercise of authority and obedience, which is an essential characteristic of the spirituality of the Society of Jesus and makes considerable spiritual demands, takes on the qualities of spiritual accompaniment. The exercise of authority in the Society is inconceivable without the account of conscience, which has resisted and overcome all the difficulties placed in its way by Canon Law<sup>10</sup> since it is basically a practice of spiritual accompaniment oriented toward the apostolic mission. The above-cited T. Spidlick shows that Ignatius understands authority and obedience in the Society of Jesus basically in terms of the relation of the spiritual «parent» to the spiritual «child.» In this way we can understand how obedience of judgment can be achieved, and we can justify the spiritual demands that come with the exercise of religious authority. It is therefore possible to affirm that spiritual accompaniment truly has a central place in Ignatian spirituality.

### **1.1. Ignatian accompaniment: a general overview**

Overall, the Ignatian position with regard to accompaniment consists in these key moments:

#### *1.1.1. Accompaniment of initiation*

The initial conversations Ignatius had in Manresa and Barcelona, and most especially the simple exercises he gave in Alcalá, which are characterized in the 18<sup>th</sup> Annotation of the Exercises, were a form of accompaniment in which a person was helped to pass from a life of sin, if such was the case, to a life of greater fidelity to the Lord. Not only that, but those exercises were a true initiation into spiritual experience by means of group accompaniment that was also personalized. The initiation included examination of conscience, methods of prayer, «service of God,» and orienting the whole of one's life toward the Lord.

#### *1.1.2. Accompaniment of the Spiritual*

Exercises. What is described in the previous paragraph are already Ignatian exercises properly speaking since they are proposed in the book of Exercises. Nevertheless, in a more narrow sense they are the Exercises proposed in the 20<sup>th</sup> Annotation, and also in the 19<sup>th</sup> when they last for a whole month. The accompaniment in this case means helping the directee to have a totally personal experience of God, with all the characteristics detailed in both the initial annotations (nos. 1-20)

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10. Canon 630.5 prohibits superiors from requiring their subjects to manifest their consciences. However, the Society has the privilege of keeping the obligatory account of conscience as a condition of true spiritual governance. See the interesting study by Fr. Hans KOLVENBACH, «La cuenta de conciencia,» *Manresa* 79 (2007), 183-190.

and those found later in the Exercises. Even though the spiritual orientations offered in the Exercises are aimed at having a particular, concrete experience, they nevertheless contain all the elements of spiritual accompaniment, and they are applied to the different needs of a person who is requesting accompaniment: initiation in prayer, instruction on how to maintain a personal experience of God in the course of the day, organizing points for prayer, guidance on discernment of motions and thoughts, instruction on how to use things that are necessary or useful in life (e.g., «Rules to Order Oneself in the Taking of Food»), guidance on the Christian way to exercise service to or solidarity with others (e.g. «Rules for the Distribution of Alms»), guidance for making truly Gospel-inspired decisions, and help in choosing a state of life. The Exercises also indicate the proper relationship between director and directee so as to facilitate the experience of God.

### *1.1.3. Accompaniment in Christian formation*

The pedagogy of Ignatius —who had an extraordinary teacher himself, as he tells us in his Autobiography (no. 27)— realizes that in just thirty days no one can acquire all the practical spiritual wisdom needed for a life of progress in the following of Jesus. A person will also need further instruction so as to be able to respond to the specific situations that present themselves in the course of life. For this reason Ignatius, thinking not only of Jesuits in formation but of any Christian caught up in the travails of life, proposes an accompaniment of instruction and formation that is adapted to each person's situation. That it why he insists that it is not enough just to instruct; one must also repeat and remind.

### *1.1.4. Accompaniment in the life of the mature follower of Christ*

What Ignatius says of formed Jesuits —«they will be spiritual persons»— can also be applied to persons who have achieved a certain Christian maturity. Such persons will be guided by «discreet charity,» which means that their discernment-infused love (cf. Phil 1,9-10) will enlighten them and lead them in making personal decisions about their own lives. Nevertheless, Ignatius does not completely eliminate the need for appropriate accompaniment: our confessor or spiritual father (or superior, in the case of Jesuits) should be the person with whom we consult concerning what seem to us to be the movements of the Spirit.

### *1.1.5. Does accompaniment come to an end?*

We might ask whether accompaniment should come to an end or whether it should cease at a certain moment or stage of the spiritual life. I believe that it is necessary to affirm that spiritual accompaniment is an important element in the path of the spiritual life, something required for communion in the faith; it provides light and support in our dealings with personal deceptions, weaknesses, and obscurities.

According to Ignatius, however, it does not seem to be something absolute and indispensable at every moment of life; it is rather a matter of «relative necessity,» something that has a tendency to diminish with the years as we progress in the spiritual life.<sup>11</sup>

## 1.2. Conclusion

Drawing on what has preceded, I believe that Ignatius distinguished several types or «times» of accompaniment: 1) accompaniment of spiritual initiation, 2) properly mystagogical accompaniment, 3) formative accompaniment, and 4) accompaniment in the life of a mature Christian. Since the first two types of accompaniment refer to different ways of giving and making the Spiritual Exercises,<sup>12</sup> I will limit my exposition to 3) formative accompaniment and 4) the accompaniment that provides support for a mature Christian life that is making progress. However, I will not make distinctions in an area that does not allow for quasi-anatomical dissections of a life that is permeated by the Spirit. We should realize that there are no directees in general but only particular believers situated in extremely diverse contexts.<sup>13</sup> Just as Ignatius thought that some Jesuits were more suitable for giving the Exercises in their entirety and others were prepared only to give those of the First Week, so also with regard to spiritual accompaniment: we should realize that «a spiritual guide is not necessarily able to accompany every type of person or any given person at every stage in the spiritual life.»<sup>14</sup>

Jerome Nadal considers spiritual accompaniment to be the first and most effective among the ministries of the Word.<sup>15</sup> Insofar as the wisdom of accompaniment permeates the experience of those who have made the Exercises, all

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11. Cf. J. STIERLI, «L'art de la direction spirituelle,» *Christus*, no. 153, pp. 42-44.

12. The Exercises provide an experience of initiation. It is not the experience of ordinary life but a period of initiation that helps the exercitant to learn practical ways of being open to God's action and docile to it. For this reason the method of Exercises is highly directive but absolutely respectful of the content of the exercitant's experience. In the case of Jesuits, Ignatian formation assumes that, even after the tests proper to the novitiate are completed, the subject will still need further formation and accompaniment.

13. Fr. Surin distinguished worldly directors, spiritual directors, and divine directors. The objective pursued by worldly directors is to help people make a good confession and lead a good Christian life. Spiritual directors attempt to encourage an interior life in the directees through prayer, asceticism, and the practice of virtue, and they do so by proposing spiritual practices, methods, and examens. They accompany the ordinary progress of Christian living and sometimes set down certain requirements. The divine directors still pay heed to a certain need for observance and a certain rigidity. They help their directees to discern the action of the Spirit and to be faithful to it. They do not disapprove of pious practices but consider that the Spirit has a particular path for each person. The ideal is what people in the Orient call synergy, collaborating with God's action in the world. In sum, people's situations are very different, and the director must discern carefully the moment or the stage of each person's development. (cf. J. LAPLACE, *La liberté dans l'Esprit. Le Guide Spirituel*, Chalet, Paris, 1996, p. 11-14).

14. STIERLI, p. 46.

15. Epp. NADAL, V, 833, cited by Piet VAN BREEMEN, p. 363.

forms of whatever pastoral activity they engage in will be infused with that wisdom. This was the view of Luis de la Palma, who in his commentary on the Exercises referred to those who give the Exercises *even when they aren't giving them*.<sup>16</sup>

## 2. IGNATIAN SPIRITUAL ACCOMPANIMENT

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First principle: the initiative in the spiritual life is with the Holy Spirit, and the primacy in the life of every person is held by love.

### 2.1. The initiative of the Spirit

Ignatius obviously gives primacy to the role of the Spirit in the spiritual life, and he makes a number of explicit statements in this regard. Wanting to justify the appropriateness of writing the Constitutions, he began the preamble by emphasizing the absolute character of the Spirit's action: in order for God's project to become a reality in our lives, «what helps most toward this end must be, more than any exterior constitution, the interior law of charity and love that the Holy Spirit writes and imprints upon hearts.»<sup>17</sup>

At another time, when treating of the orientations that are to be proposed to Jesuits in formation so that they will know how to relate apostolically with the great variety of persons with whom they will come in contact, Ignatius writes that «the prudence which God our Lord communicates to those who trust in his Divine Majesty» is very important (and that «some suggestions» are also useful), but that such practical wisdom regarding apostolic relations and activity «can be taught only by the unction of the Holy Spirit.»<sup>18</sup>

In the Exercises Ignatius states that, when a Christian submits to certain ecclesiastical decisions or orientations, he does so «because it is by the same Spirit and Lord of ours that gave the ten commandments that our Holy Mother Church is guided and governed.»<sup>19</sup>

Therefore, even though Ignatius makes a clear distinction between the attitude the spiritual director should have *during* the Exercises and the attitude she should have *apart from* them (since in the latter case she can give some counsels that

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16. *Camino espiritual*, Book 5, chapter 9, n. 2. On the theme of Ignatian conversation, the following works are very interesting: Darío RESTREPO, *Diálogo: Comunión en el Espíritu*, Bogotá, 1975; Thomas H. CLANCY, *The Conversational Word of God*, St. Louis, 1978.

17. *Constitutions*, 134.

18. *Constitutions*, 414.

19. *Exercises*, 365.

should be avoided during the Exercises<sup>20</sup>), it must always be the case that, in line with what Jerome Nadal said was the practice of Ignatius himself, «there be no anticipating of the Spirit but rather a following of him.»<sup>21</sup> Consequently, the primary quality of the director is that she be truly «spiritual»; that is, that she should already have experienced and discerned the action of the Spirit in her own life and have acquired a certain degree of connaturality with the Spirit's action. This quality or requirement in the director is stressed by those who have written treatises on spiritual accompaniment.

### 2.1.1. *The Spirit fills the universe...*

It is important to make clear that the action of the Spirit is not exclusively restricted to a person's interior experience, nor is it confined to the type of activities that we usually call «spiritual.» For, as we recite in the ancient words of the liturgy, the Spirit «fills the universe.» The action of Spirit is not limited to predetermined sectors but extends to the corporeal and the material, to the individual and the communal, to the ecclesial and the socio-political. This is more important than ever today since Christians live immersed in an immense network of relationships within a notably secular society. Even so, the Spirit of God is not absent from that society. Recall what Pedro Arrupe said about the spiritual person: «Spiritual persons [*homo spiritualis*] are capable of loving even their enemies in this evil world. They are capable of transforming the world, and because they have the charism of discernment, they are capable of discovering and becoming active agents in the most profound and effective dynamism of history, the one which moves history toward the building of the Kingdom of God, which is already underway.»<sup>22</sup>

Accordingly, an important characteristic of contemporary spiritual accompaniment, «perhaps its most outstanding aspect,» is «the integration of all the dimensions of one's existence into a life lived authentically according to the Spirit.» In this regard, Ignatian spirituality has had a decisive influence.<sup>23</sup>

### 2.1.2. *Some practical consequences*

The director should:

- Help the directee to hear and decipher spiritual emotions and feelings.
- Avoid making accompaniment a form of moral counseling.
- Refrain from giving answers to problems or questions but instead offer resources to help the directee find the answers.

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20. *Exercises*, 15.

21. FN II, 252.

22. «Formación para la promoción de la justicia», in: *La Iglesia de hoy y del futuro*, Mensajero, Sal Terrae, Bilbao, Santander, 1982, p. 358.

23. C. FLIPO, «L'accompagnement spirituel: un enjeu ecclésial», *Christus*, no. 153, Hors série, p. 9.

- Go the heart of what is being said and grasp the significance of words and reactions.

## 2.2. Love gives form to the spiritual life

The primacy of love is obvious, but it is not always taken into account in the practice of accompaniment. Too often the spiritual life is measured by the type of acts performed (prayer, sacraments, devotions) or by the spiritual sentiments of consolation or desolation.

But it is ultimately love that determines the quality of whatever we do and gives a spiritual aura to all our activities. This is well known, but it is often forgotten in practice, such as when the director insists mainly on the practice of prayer and fails to stress purification of the heart, or when the director places too much value on spiritual consolation and ignores the spiritual richness that comes from a prolonged period of tranquility—or even from desolation if the directee is able not only to feel it but to understand it and react to it satisfactorily.<sup>24</sup>

The whole process of the Exercises consists in freeing up the love that has been poured into our hearts by the Spirit (cf. Rom 5,5). The Exercises take us on a spiritual journey that allows us to be moved by the love «that descends from above, from the love of God.»<sup>25</sup> At the end of the long experience of the Exercises, the exercitant emerges ready to make life an adventure in love: «to love and serve the Divine Majesty in all things.»<sup>26</sup>

Nothing in what is said above presumes to say how the director should behave in each concrete case, much less what the director should actually tell the directee. I seek simply to explain the nature of the horizon and the implicit knowledge the director should possess in order to offer concrete aids; these aids are often very simple but should never be pragmatic counsels lacking in evangelical wisdom. In any case, since spiritual accompaniment is not a purely human profession or skill, it is obvious that the director should be a seriously spiritual person. As Spidlik reminded us above, the way Christians of the early centuries conceived of the spiritual father or mother gives us an indication what the authentic director should be like.

### 2.2.1. *Accompaniment as an experience of love*

While I will not treat of the actual form that accompaniment should take, I want to stress that, since the Spirit and love give direction to the spiritual life, the practice of accompaniment should be an exercise in love. The well-known «Presupposition» of the Exercises (SpEx 22) makes it clear that the relation between the director

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24. *Exercises* 313.

25. *Exercises* 184; cf. 338.

26. *Exercises* 233.

and the directee should be one of love, and this presupposes transparency and confidence.

Not only will this relationship of love have its source in an affective attitude toward the directee, but it will also guide the director to seek what is best for the directee and to make every effort to achieve what is best. The director will also accompany the directee with her own prayer since the relationship is properly spiritual and not simply «professional.» Carl Jung stressed the importance that love, understanding, and empathy have in a pastoral relationship, and P. van Breemen coincides with Jung when he says that «accompaniment should transmit something of God's love.»<sup>27</sup>

The words with which Paul VI described the nature of dialogue express quite well the relationship of love that should characterize the dialogue of accompaniment: «This internal drive of charity which seeks expression in the external gift of charity, we will call 'dialogue.'»<sup>28</sup>

### *2.2.2. Some practical consequences*

- Placing the accent of the spiritual life on the theological (God-oriented) life
- Making prayer center on the relationship of love and not just on reflection or review of one's life, keeping in mind that love is always practical
- Theological love unites love of God with love of neighbor. We love God and neighbor with the same love. This should be experienced in the relationship between the director and the directee but also in every type of human relationship, in the apostolate, in social action, etc.

## **3. SOME KEY AIDS FOR THE SPIRITUAL LIFE**

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Having explained the capital importance of the Spirit as the true guide of the directee's life and of love as the soul of the spiritual life, we will now examine the most basic traits of the spiritual task that should be kept in mind by every director.

### **3.1. Right intention**

The Principle and Foundation of the Exercises continues to be the principle and foundation of everyday Christian living for we must keep ourselves constantly oriented toward God. This is a source of profound peace since it keeps us from

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27. *Breemen*, p. 371.

28. *Ecclesiam suam*, no. 64.

wandering and looking all about to see if some other form of life might be better. Each of us should experience fidelity to our vocation or our «state of life» as part of our fidelity to God. It is therefore important that the election be done well, for it will be our guarantee of a life oriented toward the kingdom of God and a source of profound peace and joy. Ignatius placed great value on the stability of a person's state; he would not allow a Jesuit to transfer to a different religious order, though this was a general norm that allowed possible exceptions.

One should have the right intention «in all particular matters»<sup>29</sup> or in «all intentions, actions, and operations,» as stated in the Exercises. This is a particularly important point because it is possible for someone to live in complete faithfulness to his vocation or state of life but still deviate from what God desires in the concrete, particular choices of his private life or his professional, apostolic, or ecclesial activity.

Such was the counsel that Ignatius gave to Pedro Contarini. Even though the basic orientation of Pedro's life seemed correct, he was advised to orient his possessions toward the service of God: «You should especially be careful lest you be trapped by any temporal possession you may have. You should direct all things to the service of the One from whom you have them. For a person who is unable to be completely devoted to the only thing that is necessary should make sure to have well ordered the many different things in which he is busy.»<sup>30</sup>

Ignatius also insists on right intention when referring to students who are preparing themselves for the apostolate: «When study is purely ordered to divine service, it is excellent prayer.»<sup>31</sup> Also, by commission of Ignatius, his secretary Polanco wrote in the same vein: «As regards intention, I want all of you to maintain it as right as possible, seeking the glory of God in your body and soul and all activities.»<sup>32</sup>

It is a matter, then, of orienting the whole of one's life not just in a general way but in all its dimensions toward God and his Kingdom. This total orientation involves not just a single will but a certain union of wills; it is a true spiritual experience. This was the plea that Ignatius so often expressed at the end of his letters: that God would concede, to him and to those to whom he was writing, knowledge of God's will and the fulfillment thereof.

### *3.1.1. Some practical consequences:*

- Not being satisfied with a general intention about one's life or vocation; one must orient to God and his reign «all the intentions, actions, and operations» of one's concrete personal life in all its dimensions.

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29. *Constitutions*, 288.

30. Letter of August 1537: BAC, 2nd ed., p. 632.

31. Letter to P. Bartolomé Hernández: BAC, 2nd ed., p. 874.

32. Letter to P. Urbano Fernández: BAC, 2nd ed., p. 769.

- Paying attention to concrete priorities in carrying out one’s proper mission, that is, principal criteria by which one discerns and acts, etc.
- Seeking the integration of life that becomes manifest when inner peace and harmony exist among the various dimensions and diverse activities of life.

### 3.2. Seeking and loving God in all things

If right intention is a prolongation in life of the Principle and Foundation of the Spiritual Exercises, then seeking and loving God in all things is the lasting fruit of the Exercises, and it crystallizes in the Contemplation to Attain Love. This contemplation crowns the process that begins in embryonic fashion in the Principle and Foundation; conversely, the Principle and Foundation provides the starting-point for the itinerary that finally culminates in the Contemplation to Attain Love. Thus, the Principle and Foundation is being continually actualized in the ordinary life of a «spiritual person» when the person orients his entire life toward God. Such a person relates to God according to the spirit of the Contemplation to Attain Love, that is, with a generous love that often resonates in the hearts of others who live in like manner.

In the biblical tradition the search for God is expressed in many ways. One of the most characteristic ways is by seeking to know God’s will and be wholeheartedly faithful to it. When the first Christians asked, after Jesus’ disappearance from earthly life, how they would keep alive their loving relation with the Lord, they found the answer in the words of Jesus himself: «You will remain in my love if you keep my commandments... as I keep the commandments of my Father and remain in his love» (John 15,10). Thus, when right intention is expressed in a person’s countless acts, it leads to the experience of seeking God and loving God in daily life. In this way, by means of an asymptotic expression, Ignatius is able to formulate what is characteristic of this experience of God in the midst of life: love for an incarnate God and love for a transcended earthly reality.

We find this well expressed by the contemporary Jesuit mystic, Egied van Broeckhoven, when he laments our empty forms of spiritualism and our inhibited incarnationalism:

If we truly dared to see the divine in the efflorescence of the human, we would love other persons, our friends, our work, art, etc., with a divine passion, and we would love God with a human spontaneity. But we constantly constrict our love of the human on the pretext of our love of God even as we constrict our love of God on the pretext of our love of others.<sup>33</sup>

This experience of seeking and finding God in all things has at its base the annulment of the separation between the sacred and the profane. This annulment is

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33. Josep M. RAMBLA, *Dios, la amistad y los pobres*, Sal Terrae, Santander, 2007, p. 34.

the fruit of the resurrection of Jesus, which is an emphatic «Yes» to life and to our world. As Jesus himself declared, the true worshipers of God do not have to make their way to a special mountain, nor do they have to enter any temple. Rather, guided by the word and the life of Jesus as these are illuminated and interpreted by the Spirit that guides us to complete truth, they are able to find and love God in all things, even at the occasional risk of being immersed in social realities that are replete with ambiguities.

In fidelity to this *worldly* conception of Christianity, Ignatius counseled his companions to find God in the most common things of life: «when conversing with someone or when seeing, tasting, hearing, understanding, or doing whatever we might do.»<sup>34</sup>

This orientation of one's entire life in the love of God should fill the hours of each day. Even though one's relationship with God will not always have the same affectionate component as does the relationship with a person who is near and visible, it is nevertheless no less real, as Jesus himself made clear: «Just as the Father loves me, so I have loved you; remain in my love. Whoever loves me keeps my commandments» (Jn 15,9-10). Such faithfulness to the will of God in the ordinary things of one's daily existence is in fact a form of union with God, but it is something even more when one has a certain awareness of being in communion with God. Such awareness does not require further reflection but only the simple sensing of the presence or the feeling that accompanies the faith that is impelling one's actions. Ignatius observes that this sense of God's presence and companionship can be made more vivid with a short prayer.<sup>35</sup> As Henri Sanson maintains, there is a type of encounter with God that flows from the experience of faith; it occurs in prayer and is more cognitive. But there is another type of encounter with God that flows from the experience of love; it occurs in action and is more affective.<sup>36</sup>

In accompaniment, then, it is important to direct the directee's attention to prayer and to the interior life but without limiting it to that. Attention must also be paid to way the directee experiences all the dimensions of life, for the Ignatian view is that the spiritual life serves to integrate the whole of a person's reality. This was expressed by GC 31 of the Society of Jesus: «The [spiritual] life involves the whole man and all his activities, by which he as a Christian corresponds to every

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34. Letter of Polanco to Antonio Brandao, by commission of Saint Ignatius (01.06.1551): BAC, 2<sup>nd</sup> ed, p. 763.

35. Cf. *ibid.*

36. «It is possible to be united with God in prayer, and it is also possible to be united with God in action, but the type of union in each of these cases is noticeably different. In the course of activity, one may remain united to God by way of faith and by way of hope, which are the modes proper to knowledge and prayer, but one can also be united to God—and have a mystical sense of that union—by way of charity, which is the mode proper to action. One can be united to God both in the face-to-face of prayer and in the elbow-to-elbow of action» (*Espiritualidad de la vida activa*, Barcelona, Herder, Barcelona, 1964, pp. 289-290).

impulse received from God. It does not consist only in individual acts of devotion, but ought to animate and direct our whole life, as individuals and in community, together with our relations to other persons and realities.»<sup>37</sup>

### 3.2.1. *Some practical consequences*

- God is not found simply by intention; a person's attitudes also play a part.
- Not all things mediate the encounter with God in the same way; there is need for discernment and for choosing among them.
- Nevertheless, *all* things are capable of mediating the encounter, and it is therefore necessary to move beyond spiritualism.

### 3.3. **An indispensable practice: the examen, or praying about one's life**

As brief as it may be, prayer is always necessary and fruitful, and Ignatius assumes that Jesuits will «devote to prayer the time requested in the constitutions.»<sup>38</sup> Polanco, a faithful interpreter of the saint, explained that the «excellent exercise» of seeking God in all things «will bring great visitations of the Lord, even if the prayer is short.»<sup>39</sup> In a paradoxical and very Ignatian manner, however, Nadal stated that one must «find prayer without depending on prayer or on preceding sentiments.»<sup>40</sup>

The foregoing remarks help us to understand better Ignatius's insistence, both in his life and in the spirituality he taught, on the importance of the examen. This daily exercise, which can be practiced in various places and forms, provides a moment of lucidity, of «being alert.» Without it the idea of encountering God in our lives is practically impossible. The highest priority in the examen is the vision of faith and the loving acceptance of one's own life; indeed, this is the first point of the examen proposed by Ignatius. In the light of faith, all that we do and receive is seen clearly in God, who is present in all the circumstances of our lives. Acknowledging God and thanking him is an invitation to love, for which we are always in debt to him (cf. Rom 13,8). What Ignatius says about life as loving God in all things and all things in him is revealed to us and becomes real in this exercise. In the examen we are aware of the call to continual conversion, and we also feel the motions and thoughts that are the basis of discernment. To speak of the examen, therefore, is to speak of discernment.

Without discernment the encounter with God is impossible because we cannot just seek God abstractly but must seek him where and when and how he comes forth to meet us, for it is God who at every moment takes the initiative in coming

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37. General Congregation 31, D. 13, n. 5.

38. Letter to Bartolomé Hernández: BAC, 2nd ed., p. 874.

39. Letter to Antonio Brandao: BAC, 2nd ed., p. 763.

40. *Monumenta Nadal*, IV, 691.

to us. For Ignatius, then, what distinguishes spiritual persons is their ability and willingness to conduct themselves with «discrete charity,» that is, with a love that reveals the maturity of their discernment (cf. Phil 1,8-10). Not all things lead equally to God, and not all the ways we relate to things are of themselves ways of encountering God. Again we see the importance of paying attention to «all particular things.»

The director should therefore take care that the directee make the examen and should pay close attention to how he makes it. Ordinarily the examen will offer good material to discuss in the process of accompaniment. Mastery of the rules of discernment of the First Week and the Second Week of the Exercises is necessary. The rules of the First Week being especially relevant given the emotional alternations of the spiritual life, but for «spiritual persons» the rules of the Second Week are more relevant because they provide the «greater discretion» which helps toward spiritual refinement and regular progress despite the habitual monotony of daily life. Concretely, these rules help us greatly in discovering the true depth and authenticity of our thoughts and feelings, not only in prayer but also in ordinary life. They keep us alert to the evolution of our thoughts and of the many steps we take in our personal lives and in our apostolate. For this kind of discernment it is helpful to recognize the different forms that the spiritual feelings of consolation and desolation take in the midst of our lives. (See the Appendix.)

### *3.3.1. Some practical consequences*

- Encourage daily practice of the examen as the basis for communication during the accompaniment.
- Insist on the starting point of the examen: giving thanks and experiencing reconciliation with God and with oneself.
- Include the incidental aspects of daily life in the examen, situating them in the perspective of faith (the loving presence of God, the significance of events, the emerging sense of being called, etc.).

### **3.4. «Thinking as God does, not as humans do...» (cf. Mark 8,33)**

Now, the style of life that Ignatius proposes is conditioned by the attitude of «removing from oneself as far as possible love of all creatures in order to place it in the Creator of them, loving him in all creatures and all creatures in him.»<sup>41</sup> This formulation spells out a spiritual task that obviously consists not in refraining from love (which would be a Christian absurdity!) but in progressing toward the living synthesis or integration proper to a Christian life grafted onto life of the risen Jesus. It is true, nevertheless, that a certain effort or labor is proposed to us, always with the awareness that in Christianity asceticism follows on mysticism.

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41. *Constitutions*, 288.

A man sells everything and buys the field with the buried treasure only after he has experienced the joy of encounter. Taking this into account, then, we can affirm that «the effort to free people of disordered affections is characteristic of Jesuit spiritual accompaniment.»<sup>42</sup>

In what does this task consist? Ignatius described it in very different ways, with various shades of nuance, but the positive content was always the same:

### 3.4.1. *Exodus*

«Divesting oneself of self-love, self-will, and self interests.»<sup>43</sup> The task involves an exodus from the land of slavery to the land of freedom. It means freedom from any love that is fragile and contaminated so that true love —and the very source of love— can reign in one’s heart. It means freedom from norms and desires that are not of God but of human beings. It means seeking first the interests of the Kingdom of God.

### 3.4.2. *Seduction*

«That love which moves me and brings me to choose the matter in question should descend from above, from the love of God.»<sup>44</sup> The task involves liberating the heart from all ties «from below» (cf. Col 3,1-2) so that it is moved by the love that has been poured into our hearts from on high.

### 3.4.3. *Interior combat*

The task requires mortification of the will and judgment, as Ignatius repeatedly taught.<sup>45</sup> It is a struggle unto death against everything that prevents Gospel values from reigning in one’s heart so that one wholeheartedly embraces those values.

### 3.4.4. *Integration*

The synthetic work of Christian love is found in the apparent contradiction of the dialectical affirmation about «removing from oneself as far as possible love of all creatures in order to place it in the Creator of them, loving him in all creatures

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42. VAN BREEMEN, p. 365. We have this precious Ignatian memory from the early days of the Society: «I have always wanted members of the Society to be more concerned about doing than thinking. You will notice how little our Constitutions say about prayer; they insist more on mortification, humiliation, hospital work, pilgrimages, obedience, indifference, and detachment from everything. As our Lord Jesus Christ said, «*Non omnis qui dicit, Domine, Domine, sed qui fecerit voluntatem Patris mei, intravit in regnum caelorum*» (From an instruction of Saint Ignatius to Peter Faber. Text seen by Fr. Gil González Dávila. See *Pláticas sobre las Reglas de la Compañía de Jesús*, Barcelona, 1964, p. 291).

43. *Exercises*, 189.

44. *Exercises*, 184.

45. Cf. Memorial of Gonçalves da Câmara, nn. 195-196.256.

and all creatures in him.» This phrase describes the theological love with which one loves God, neighbor, and all things that are ordered toward love.

Abnegation is therefore the cure for the love that was given us by the indwelling Spirit but has been either muzzled by selfishness or dispersed by an unfocused heart or infected by worldly contagion and therefore in need of purgation. Abnegation means a life of struggle, and if the word has a negative connotation, its reality is no more negative than the realities denoted by words such as «purge,» «cleanse,» «disinfect,» etc.

#### *3.4.5. Some practical consequence*

- Liberating the love that already dwells within us. Practicing abnegation from the experience of love.
- Focusing the abnegation on criteria and on will: thinking as God thinks and not just crying out, «Lord! Lord!»
- Testing our Christian abnegation, to see whether it is a source of the interior harmony and profound peace that dispose us for mature, positive human relations.

## **4. SOME CONCRETE ORIENTATIONS**

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### **4.1. Life is not homogeneous**

Accompaniment should take into account the possibility that the directee may not yet be on a regular, stable path of discipleship and fidelity. That is to say, it is not unusual for there to be alternations of high points and low points in the spiritual life. That is why Ignatius, while assuming that a Jesuit or any formed individual is a «spiritual person,» also adds that it is good for the person's superior or confessor—whom we would now call a «director»—to be informed about his interior life and other personal options.<sup>46</sup> Likewise, when Ignatius counsels people to seek God in their daily lives rather than devote much time to prayer, he adds: «provided there is no special problem with bothersome or dangerous temptations.»

### **4.2. Prayer**

Prayer is extremely important for Ignatian spirituality, both in the Exercises and apart from them, but it is necessary to insist on the theological character of prayer, that is, its rootedness in the heart. It is for this reason that there is a need for

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46. *Constitutions*, 582.

abnegation, which is purification and offering of one's being, intelligence, and will, as we have seen. A consequence of this spiritual teaching is that what is most important thing in prayer is not the amount of time given to it but the disposition of one's heart. Nevertheless, it is also true that the theological attitude, as a profound loving relationship with God, naturally leads persons to seek time for prayer, as can be seen in the experience of Ignatius, Faber, Xavier, and many others.

Another characteristic of Ignatian prayer, important for our own day, is the great flexibility allowed in forms of prayer. Ignatius recommends contemplative prayer, Eucharist and communion, the liturgy of the hours, short elevations of the heart to God, etc.

### **4.3. Fervor and discretion**

The mystagogy of the Spiritual Exercises, which reflect the experience of Ignatius himself, leads the person seeking accompaniment to tend ever more to perfection and to the following and imitation of Christ. A person is moved to make «offerings of greater worth and moment» and to «better serve him and follow him,» in the third manner of humility. But Ignatius, the great guide on the path of generous devotion to the Lord, is also a master of discretion, understood as the just mean; it was a lesson that he himself took a long time to learn. We know that when he first traveled to Montserrat he was still not discreet in moderating virtues; as a result, despite his great fervor, he came close to striking down a Moor. Once he was at the head of the Society of Jesus, he had to deal firmly with the misdirected fervor of the students in Portugal and with the contemplative excesses of the Jesuits in Gandia. That is why he was very cautious with regard to corporal mortifications, which can weaken individuals and distract them from more important matters, such as their studies or the apostolate: «With regard to mortifications, it seems that they should not be spurred on but held in check.»<sup>47</sup>

### **4.4. Instruction**

The spiritual director should not interfere with the intimacy of the person being accompanied; she should allow the Creator to communicate directly with the creature. But apart from the possibility of giving advice without pressure (outside the Exercises), as indicated in the 15<sup>th</sup> annotation, Ignatius felt it necessary to give some instruction on certain types of behavior, such as that given in the rules of the Exercises. In any case, it is more necessary to give instruction in day-to-day life, given the great variety of situations and the many unique circumstances in which people find themselves. For such cases the director clearly needs not only spiritual experience but also human, psychological, and theological learning and wisdom that will allow her to propose without putting conditions.

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47. Letter to Urbano Fernández: BAC, 2<sup>a</sup> ed., p. 768.

Each director should therefore be conscious of whether she is erring by letting things proceed on their own for fear of intervening excessively, or conversely, whether she is erring by being overly «directive» (while appearing to be *only accompanying*). In this regard, it is important that the director engage in *permanent formation*, that is, in reflection on her experience and in acquiring information that will enrich her personal resources.

#### 4.5. Some current deceptions

With the help of Ignatian orientation, people are able to perceive some of the most common deceptions that take on the appearance of good. Of capital importance in this regard is the *exagoreusis* recommended by the fathers and mothers of the desert; it is the manifestation of thoughts (*logismoi*) that is required first of all of the director in her effort to be transparent before God.<sup>48</sup> By way of example, I list some of the most common deceptions:

##### 4.5.1. *Being guided by the surface of things*

This means evaluating spiritual activity by the kind of particular acts, such as prayer, and not by the love and the grace that infuse those acts. In some cases this failing is obvious; for example, some people take refuge in prayer instead of seeking God in all things, such as in the use of money, in family or work relationships, in social or political commitment, in professional ethics, etc.

##### 4.5.2. *Quantifying prayer*

This means evaluating prayer according to the time dedicated to it more than by one's attitude of abnegation. Recall the classic episode when Nadal had doubts about requiring more prayer of the Jesuits in Spain. Ignatius wrote back saying that abnegation was what was most important and that a mortified person gains more fruit from a quarter-hour of prayer than an unmortified person does from much more.

##### 4.5.3. *Thinking that «everything is prayer»*

At the opposite extreme we find those who take refuge in activity in order to avoid prayer or those who claim that «all activity is prayer.» Pedro Casaldàliga makes a strong statement in this regard: «Activity is activity; it is not prayer. Liberation is liberation, and prayer is prayer. ... It is true that all Christian activity performed in faith and a «state of prayer» is in some sense an experience of prayer, but it is not comparable to prayer itself. Charity is charity, service is service, and prayer is

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48. On this point see VAN BREEMEN, pp. 365-8.

prayer.»<sup>49</sup> We do well, then, to avoid the deception of taking refuge in activity as a way of excusing ourselves for having ceased to be faithful to prayer.

#### 4.5.4. *Overvaluing feelings in spiritual experience*

It is dangerous to place excessive value on feelings, sentiments, tears, sensible consolations, the visible effects of spiritual tasks or apostolic works, etc. Solid spiritual experience is founded on the theological life; tears and consolations are to be received with gratitude, but without putting much weight on them. What should be valued and fomented most are «the true and solid virtues, whether with many spiritual visitations or few, by endeavoring always to go forward in the path of the divine service.»<sup>50</sup> The success of the apostolate and the progress of the Kingdom are not always verifiable in a perceptible or tangible manner.

#### 4.5.5. *The seduction of «myths»*

As in the time of Ignatius, so also today in the Church we run the risk of uncritically following *fashions* (personalities, spectacles, faddish ideas and activities, etc.) and letting ourselves be carried along by their energy. Ignatius addressed this matter in the 12<sup>th</sup> rule for thinking with the Church, and he commissioned Polanco to write about this theme to Francis Borgia, thinking especially about the exaggerated practice of some Jesuits of Gandia.<sup>51</sup>

#### 4.5.6. *The alienation of the abstract and the universal*

God is concrete, and often we run the risk of restricting ourselves to the abstract or universal plane of «principles» without considering the concrete situation of particular persons, which is precisely where God comes forth to encounter us. When Ignatius in his autobiography confesses that he was a «blind» soul, he explained what he meant by saying that he paid no attention to circumstances.<sup>52</sup> This comment shows us how conscious the saint was of the need to take into account the stage of the director's spiritual life —whether incipient or proficient— when giving spiritual instruction.

#### 4.5.7. *Not paying heed to one own social place*

The director must have the most objective view of reality possible. «An error about the world results in an error about God.»<sup>53</sup> However, one's view of reality is

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49. Pedro CASALDÁLIGA and José M<sup>a</sup> VIGIL, *Espiritualidad de la Liberación*, Sal Terrae, Santander, 1992, pp. 185-6.

50. *Constitutions*, 260.

51. Letter of July 1549, BAC 2nd ed., nn. 1-15, pp. 723-731.

52. *Autobiography*, 14.

53. Thomas Aquinas, *Summa Contra Gentes*, II, 3.

always conditioned by the space from which one contemplates it; it is influenced by one's environment, one's ideas, one's formation, one's social or family situation, etc. Discernment is therefore required to overcome such conditioning, beginning with suspicion about one's own objectivity. A good means to this end is praying for a pure heart, but other means are also necessary, such as honest dialogue with persons with different ideas or of different cultures, insertion in the world of real poverty, personal experience of collaboration in social action, or living in some kind of poverty as an aid to knowing the true reality of poor people, who are in fact the majority of humanity. In any case, we should not forget Machado's advice: «Seek your true partner, who always walks with you and is usually your opposite.»

### III. CONCLUSION

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«All this I have told you so that my joy may be in you and your joy may be complete» (Jn 15,11). The Gospel is a message of joy, and the spiritual director in the Ignatian tradition should help the directee draw deeply from this source of true joy. This joy that characterizes mature Christian experience is found at the culmination of the Spiritual Exercises. «The Lord wants you to live rejoicing in him,» Ignatius wrote to Inés Pascual.<sup>54</sup>

In Ignatian spirituality joy appears in two forms. The first comes from contemplating and fully identifying with the joy of the Risen Christ. During the Spiritual Exercises the retreatant, while considering the joy and happiness of the Risen Lord, is invited to «think about things which bring pleasure, happiness, and spiritual joy.»<sup>55</sup> Since the itinerary of the Exercises involves complete integration of one's being, spiritual pleasure and joy are not simply interior or «spiritual» in the sense of being unrelated to a person's sensual side. That is why penances do not form part of the retreatant's practice during the Fourth Week; rather, one should practice «temperance and moderation» (SpEx 229) and should «order oneself,» not deny oneself, «in the taking of food» (SpEx 210). For Ignatius, therefore, part of the spiritual life involves seeking pleasure in identifying with a human Christ who is a lover of life.

The second Ignatian form of spiritual joy or pleasure is known as «fervor,» a word that was exhumed from the Ignatian tradition by Fr. Arrupe, who was very fond of it.<sup>56</sup> For Ignatius fervor was another path leading to true joy: «You

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54. Letter of 6 December 1525: BAC, 2nd ed., p. 612.

55. *Spiritual Exercises*, 229.

56. GC 35, 1:10, states that fervor is an essential aspect of a worthy human life, and Adam Zagajewski writes: «True fervor does not divide but unites. It leads neither to fanaticism nor to fundamentalism. Perhaps some day fervor will return to our minds and our libraries» (*En defensa del fervor*, Acanitlado, Barcelona, 2005, p. 34).

will feel the benefit of holy fervor not only in the perfection of your souls but also in the enjoyment of your present life» since it will make it possible for you to do good «easily and happily.»<sup>57</sup> Accordingly, an especially important task in accompaniment is that of guiding the directee in such a way that his fidelity to his personal path through life becomes for him the deepest source of joy. This is a real challenge in a society characterized by hedonism and a frenzied search for happiness.

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57. Letter to the Fathers and Brothers of Coimbra, 7 May 1547: BAC, 2nd ed., p. 682.

When classical spiritual language speaks of consolation, it includes weeping tears of sorrow for one's sins, for the passion of Christ, or for any Christian action. When Christ shed tears before the tomb of Lazarus, or when he was deeply moved by the misery and injustice the people were suffering, he was feeling something very positive.

### **The significance of consolations and desolations**

When classical spiritual language speaks of consolation, it includes weeping tears of sorrow for one's sins, for the passion of Christ, or for any Christian action. When Christ shed tears before the tomb of Lazarus, or when he was deeply moved by the misery and injustice the people were suffering, he was feeling something very positive. The tears Saint Augustine shed for his sins and for having known too late the love of Christ, the tears of Teresa of Jesus as she contemplated the suffering of Christ in his passion, the tears of Iñigo when, on his way down from Montserrat, he saw a poor man being mistreated—all these are evidence of true spiritual consolation for they express profound Christian sentiments and help those who experience them to follow Christ more closely and live more evangelically.<sup>59</sup> Similarly, what is called «desolation» is not always a bitter or painful experience. It can often take the form of callous comfort, insensitivity to the pain of others, or a *dolce far niente* attitude. The most important defining characteristic of desolation is its tendency to carry us in a direction contrary to where the Gospel leads.<sup>60</sup>

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58. See also J. M. RAMBLA, *El viento sopla donde quiere (Jn 3,8)*, Sal Terrae 97 (2009), pp. 629-641.

59. *Spiritual Exercises*, 316.

60. *Spiritual Exercises*, 317.

We also want to stress that consolation and desolation do not indicate whether one is at a higher or lower level of spiritual life. Sometimes desolation is experienced at stages of great Christian maturity, as is evident in the history of saints like Theresa of the Child Jesus or Mother Teresa of Calcutta, both of whom underwent difficult trials of faith in the last years of their lives.

### **Consolations and desolations in the midst of life**

It is helpful to translate the different spiritual sentiments and emotions into the circumstances of daily life and not just limit them to our interior life, as is usually done. Some examples of such consolation are the following:

- Living our faith and intimacy with God in a natural way amid our daily activities (family, work, leisure, etc.).
- Experiencing unity in the different moments of the day: moving with ease from prayer to work, from individual life to community life, from church involvement to social involvement, etc.
- Feeling profound sorrow for the exclusion and the injustice suffered by the poor.
- Living with a theological sense the various dimensions of our personal existence: seeing things from the viewpoint of faith, hoping in the midst of environmental despair, loving ever more freely and inclusively.

As regards desolations, I indicate a few examples:

- Experiencing darkness and meaninglessness in our apostolate, our sense of commitment, our family, etc.
- Feeling turmoil or confusion regarding the ecclesial or political climate or regarding the future perspectives of the faith or the family.
- Finding oneself progressively more inclined to seek out comfort or wealth, to desire affective compensations not in accord with the Gospel, etc.
- Experiencing deep uneasiness about the little influence faith and the Gospel have in our lives, and about our desire to abandon the evangelical lifestyle.
- Apathy and indolence in everything we do: work, family, Church, interior life, etc.
- Feeling that God is far away, that we don't matter to him...

### **Navigational map**

Discernment is something personal since God knows each one of us by our name and communicates with us in an individual, personal way. Nevertheless, there are «epochal winds» that may become calls or common risks in the following of Christ as we seek the Kingdom of God. Let us look at some of these breezes that blow in one direction or another.

### *Good News for the poor*

The Gospel is Good News for everyone. This is a universal principle since the Good News can be threatening for no one. According to the New Testament, however, it is also true that the message of Jesus and the content of the following of Christ must be Good News above all for the poor. Perhaps we can be inspired today by the example of Zacchaeus, the tax collector who lived very comfortably and had a privileged social position. When he met Jesus, however, he felt moved to practice justice and to share generously by means of unequivocal gestures.

### *Solidarity*

*the religious factor.* Even granting that solidarity is a requirement of humanity, our Christian religious experience entails a new and profound impulse toward solidarity since it is Trinitarian communion, that is, participation in the same communion and source of communion. Solidarity, then, is a test of the authenticity of our faith; it is founded on the baptism which is our immersion in the Trinitarian mystery.

### *Greed, a kind of idolatry*

One of the strongest roots of our contemporary crisis has been greed. This view is sustained by many analyses and commentaries. Of course, greed is not a specialty of our epoch. Jesus warned that money was an adversary of God («it is impossible to serve God and money»), and the letter to the Colossians states that «greed is idolatry.» In other words, money and possessions are not only adversaries of God but can become substitutes for God. Accordingly, the Christian tradition has stressed the two poles of greed and poverty of spirit to indicate that what threatens us is not so much something external to us, like money, but the uncontrolled inclination to possess things. History shows us how the poor, after winning a victory, often end up sitting in the armchairs of the exploiters and the powerful. Ignatian spirituality has learned from the Exercises that the collapse of Christian life begins with the «desire for riches.»

### *Individualism*

Insecurity about the future, compounded by the present situation of crisis, results in everyone looking out for themselves, and it weakens (or erodes) the sense of solidarity that is the basis for building a truly human and Christian society. Competition invades not only the world of business but also the worlds of work, of learning, and of culture. The passage from the «I» to the «we» is not easy, and it is therefore skirted almost unawares. Realism (not being utopian!) decides many of the ordinary choices we make... And all this is nourished by a pragmatism that considers only what is immediate, useful, and verifiable. Warning: We are not islands!





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### Cristianisme i Justícia

Roger de Llúria, 13 - 08010 Barcelona  
(+34) 93 317 23 38 - [info@fespinal.com](mailto:info@fespinal.com)  
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