

# CONSOLATION

By LAURENCE MURPHY

THE EXPERIENCE of desolations and consolations and discernment of diverse spirits<sup>1</sup> is the lynch-pin of the Spiritual Exercises. In this article I want to discuss this experience with particular reference to the election and the rules for the discernment of spirits. As Hugo Rahner remarks, 'the Election alone reveals the meaning and goal of the Exercises'.<sup>2</sup> Certainly, the experience of making an election during the Exercises in one of the ways indicated by Ignatius is a unique school for learning what he meant by consolation and desolation; and what is learned in that experience is intended to become for the exercitant, as it did for Ignatius himself, the guiding light of his life. The point holds true particularly of the second time of election, commonly agreed to have been the one favoured by Ignatius.<sup>3</sup>

This preference in Ignatius was born of his own experience, first on his sick-bed at Loyola and subsequently at Manresa,<sup>4</sup> where 'God treated him as a schoolmaster treats a child'.<sup>5</sup> The story of Ignatius's first steps in discernment during the long hours of recuperation has often been told. Alternating between contradictory fantasies, he found delight both in the thought of 'the worldly deeds he wished to achieve' and in thinking of 'the deeds of God'. At first he could detect no difference within these experiences themselves; delight felt the same in both cases. He was impressed, however, by a profound difference in the after effects: the one left him dry and discontented (*seco y descontento*), the other 'content and happy' (*contento y alegre*).<sup>6</sup> In this way 'little by little he came to recognize the difference between the spirits that agitated him, one from the demon, the other from God'.<sup>7</sup> By the time his recovery was complete, he had passed through a gradual education in the ways of the Spirit in which three stages are distinguishable.<sup>8</sup> He

<sup>1</sup> Exx 176.

<sup>2</sup> Rahner, Hugo: 'The Christology of the Spiritual Exercises', in *Woodstock Letters* (PASE), p 182.

<sup>3</sup> Exx 89, 213, 344, where Ignatius himself suggests this preference.

<sup>4</sup> This period is well treated in *Discernment of Spirits*, Guillet et alii (Collegeville, Minnesota 1971), a translation of DS III, 1222-91.

<sup>5</sup> *Autobiography*, 27.

<sup>6</sup> *Ibid.*, 8.

<sup>7</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>8</sup> Cf Giuliani, Maurice: 'Les motions de l'Esprit', in *Christus* 4 (1954).

experienced 'lights, consolations and divine inspirations'<sup>9</sup> as well as deeply felt desolation; he discerned the spiritual value of these 'movements'; finally, he was confirmed by 'very great consolation'. This triad — spiritual experience, discernment and consolation — left so deep an impression on Ignatius that from then onwards it characterized his work, his spiritual direction and his whole life. The spiritual awareness gained at Loyola was to be further refined in the course of his period at Manresa:

Sometimes he found himself so disagreeable that he took no joy in prayer or in hearing Mass or in any other prayer he said. At other times exactly the opposite of this came over him so suddenly that he seemed to have thrown off sadness and desolation just as one snatches a cape from another's shoulders. Here he began to be astounded by these changes that he had never experienced before.<sup>10</sup>

For anyone who wants to understand Ignatius's unique and original contribution to a well-studied area of christian spirituality, it is of prime importance to keep this personal experience in mind. For his own mystical experience was certainly the greatest single influence on Ignatius's life. As Hugo Rahner puts it:

One could even go so far as to say that we will really understand the structure and wording of the book of the Exercises only if we place ourselves in the mystical position of St Ignatius, and especially in his Trinitarian contemplation of all things from God's viewpoint.<sup>11</sup>

An attempt to adopt Ignatius's own position, to appreciate his contemplative approach to all things — especially to the realm of decision and choice — from God's viewpoint is a prerequisite to any study of consolation as Ignatius understands the term.

#### *Consolation in the Text of the Exercises*

The passages in which Ignatius deals with consolation are among the most difficult in the whole book of the Exercises.<sup>12</sup> The student quickly becomes aware that the word covers a variety of meanings which

<sup>9</sup> Exx 213.

<sup>10</sup> *Autobiography*, 21.

<sup>11</sup> Rahner, Hugo: *The vision of St Ignatius in the Chapel of la Storta* (*Centrum Ignatianum Spiritualitatis, CIS*, Rome, 1975), p 79.

<sup>12</sup> In this section I have made use of the excellent index to the scholarly edition of the Exercises and related documents by Calveras: *Ejercicios: Directorio y Documentos de San Ignacio* (Barcelona, 1958).

Ignatius is not always concerned to distinguish. Moreover, the ignatian doctrine obviously draws upon theological and psychological principles familiar to Ignatius's age and in some respects alien to ours. It will be well to start, then, by taking a glance, necessarily perfunctory, at Ignatius's language and presuppositions.

In the rules for the discernment of spirits, Ignatius offers a lengthy descriptive definition of what he means by consolation:<sup>13</sup>

I call it consolation when an interior movement is aroused in the soul, by which it is inflamed with love of its Creator and Lord, and, as a consequence, can love no creature on the face of the earth for its own sake, but only in the Creator of them all. It is likewise consolation when one sheds tears that move to the love of God whether it be because of sorrow for sins, or because of the suffering of Christ our Lord, or for any reason that is immediately directed to the praise and service of God. Finally, I call consolation every increase of faith, hope and love and all interior joy that invites and attracts to what is heavenly and to the salvation of one's soul by filling it with peace and quiet in its Creator and Lord.<sup>14</sup>

Many of these elements recur in two passages in the *Autograph Directory*, where Ignatius speaks of consolation in the context of the second time of election:

The second part, which involves consolation and desolation, demands a full explanation of what consolation is, explaining its elements (*sus miembros*): interior peace, spiritual joy, hope, faith, love, tears, elevation of mind, all of which are gifts of the holy Spirit.<sup>15</sup>

and again, a little later:

The director is to explain clearly to him what consolation is: spiritual happiness, love, a hope of things eternal, tears and every interior movement which leaves the soul consoled in our Lord.<sup>16</sup>

While these citations reveal the variety of meanings in Ignatius's term — strong consolation, tears, quiet peace, are somewhat different — they also suggest a common unifying characteristic.

<sup>13</sup> The noun consolation (*consolación*) occurs thirty-three times in the book of the Exercises and the verb to console (*consolar*) seven times. Cf Calveras *op. cit.*, p 462.

<sup>14</sup> Exx 316.

<sup>15</sup> MHSI vol 76 (1955) *Directoria*, Doc. 1, no 11 (I have used the english translation published by PASE, New Jersey).

<sup>16</sup> *Ibid.*, no 18.

Consolation is always, to use ignatian terminology, an 'interior movement', a felt inclination lifting up the soul to what is heavenly (in contrast with the opposite inclination, desolation, towards what is low and earthly).

A question that immediately arises concerns the origin of these movements. For although Ignatius's practical interest is with effects rather than with causes, his doctrine clearly presupposes a particular view of the psychological and spiritual components of religious experience. Without some knowledge of this view, his teaching would be hard to understand. How, then, do the various movements within the soul arise? On one level, they proceed from ourselves; arising, as Ignatius indicates in his prescriptions for the third time of election, either from our reason or from our sensuality.<sup>17</sup> But while he acknowledges the place of purely human activities of this sort, Ignatius's real interest lies elsewhere, and his doctrine becomes intelligible only when we appreciate that for him human consciousness is continually affected by supernatural and preternatural influences of various sorts. In the first place movements may — and frequently do — proceed directly from God, whose sole right it is 'to come into a soul, to leave it, to act upon it, to draw it wholly to the love of his Divine Majesty'.<sup>18</sup> This is the consolation without previous cause. Then, on a lower level, the soul is subject to the influences of the good angel and the demon,<sup>19</sup> the former giving genuine consolation, the latter a semblance of consolation in order to further his own ends.<sup>20</sup> Their operations, however, are not and cannot be on a par with those of God, but necessarily mingle and interact in complex ways with our natural cognitive and volitional processes. For Ignatius *their* consolation is always preceded by a cause, such as the perception or knowledge of some object 'by which a soul might be led to such consolation through its own acts of intellect and will'.<sup>21</sup>

Our natural psychological processes, the influence of the good angel and the demon, the direct action of God upon the soul — these are the possible sources of the highly diversified movements that the exercitant will discover within himself. But it is one thing to recognize these as abstract possibilities, another to identify the particular origin at the source of any given spiritual experience. True, the direct action of God is inherently recognizable. But when Ignatius speaks of the

<sup>17</sup> Exx 182.

<sup>18</sup> Exx 330.

<sup>19</sup> Exx 329-331.

<sup>20</sup> Exx 331.

<sup>21</sup> Exx 330.

'spirits'<sup>22</sup> — the variegated natural and preternatural forces which bear on inner experience — his ideas often lack clarity. Given Ignatius's method this is not important. For him what matters is first of all the fact: we do experience stirrings within ourselves, independent of our will, hard or even beyond our power to control. And in dealing with these what directly concerns Ignatius is not so much the origin of these spirits as the effects they produce in the realm of thoughts and decisions. While he speaks directly of the effects of the spirits he is only indirectly interested in their origin as a criterion for judging the worth of these effects. 'Just as consolation is the opposite from desolation, so the thoughts which spring from consolation are the opposite of those which spring from desolation;<sup>23</sup> when we are in consolation it is rather the good spirit who guides and counsels us, whereas in desolation it is the evil spirit, following whose counsels we can never find the way to a right decision'.<sup>24</sup>

The ignatian language of spiritual experience abounds in fine distinctions, either implicit or explicit. While it would take us too far here to discuss this language in detail, two further points may help to elucidate the originality and precision of Ignatius's doctrine. First, in addition to his concern with consolation and desolation as 'states', to some extent settled and persistent, he also draws attention to the 'agitation of different spirits'. It seems clear from the Exercises that Ignatius considers this a distinct realm of spiritual experience, possessing an importance of its own. In the sixth annotation, for instance, careful instructions are given for dealing with the exercitant who is 'not affected by the spiritual experiences of consolations and desolations or is not troubled by the different spirits'. Again, the second time of election is defined as a time when sufficient light and knowledge is received 'through the experience of consolation and desolation and the experience of the discernment of various spirits'.<sup>25</sup> We have already noticed such distinctions in Ignatius's own early experience.

The other point to notice is that the antithetical experiences of consolation and desolation, together with the closely related agitation of various spirits, are distinguished by Ignatius from numerous other graces and effects of grace that may be expected to occur during the

<sup>22</sup> For the meaning which Ignatius attached to the words 'spirit' and 'spirits' which is not the same as the understanding current at his time, cf Iparraguirre, Ignacio, S.J.: *Vocabulario de Ejercicios Espirituales* (CIS, Rome, 1972), p 103.

<sup>23</sup> Exx 317.

<sup>24</sup> Exx 318.

<sup>25</sup> Exx 176. I have used the translation given in *The Way Supplement*, no 24 (Spring, 1975), p 4, because it brings out this distinction.

Exercises. Ignatius employs the expression 'gifts and graces' to designate the entire scope of God's gracious action to which the exercitant lays himself open by 'solitude and silence'<sup>26</sup> and by exterior penance.<sup>27</sup> God rewards the exercitant by 'consolations and signal favours' (*crecidas favores*).<sup>28</sup> Perhaps the nuance and diversity of Ignatius's language are most apparent when he is dealing with the repetitions: times when the movements of consolation and desolation are contrasted with 'spiritual appreciation' (*sentimiento espiritual*),<sup>29</sup> understanding (*conocimiento*),<sup>30</sup> and spiritual relish (*gustos espirituales*).<sup>31</sup> When he comes to the second method of prayer, his advice is to meditate on a word of the prayer so long as one finds in it special meanings (*significaciones*), comparisons (*comparaciones*) and relish (*gustos*), as well as consolation.<sup>32</sup>

Finally, to the distinctions drawn by Ignatius himself it may be helpful to add a division suggested by a modern authority on the Exercises, José Calveras.<sup>33</sup> For Calveras, the varieties of consolation in the Exercises are reducible ultimately to three main modes: unitive, elective and false consolation. Under 'unitive' would come many of the expressions used in Ignatius's classic definition: 'inflamed with love of its creator and lord', unable to love any creature for its own sake 'but only in the creator of them all'; 'every increase of faith, hope and love . . . tears that move to the love of God'.<sup>34</sup> In other places he refers to 'intense love' (*amor intenso*) and 'overflowing love' (*amor crecido*). The effects of this unitive consolation have already come to our notice: the soul is left 'fervent and favoured with the grace and after-effects of the consolation which has passed';<sup>35</sup> it experiences 'abundance of fervour',<sup>36</sup> 'true happiness and spiritual joy'.<sup>37</sup> References to these and other effects of unitive consolation are to be found throughout the book of the Exercises.<sup>38</sup>

We may speak of elective consolation where there is a movement or assent of the will to what God proposes. When consolation is without previous cause — and hence without possible deception — this assent is given 'without hesitation or the possibility of hesitation'.<sup>39</sup> But consolation is also elective in the case when, brought about by the good angel<sup>40</sup> and with preceding cause,<sup>41</sup> it contains a movement or inclination of the will towards one of a number of objectively possible

<sup>26</sup> Exx 20.<sup>27</sup> Exx 87.<sup>28</sup> Exx 322.<sup>29</sup> Exx 62.<sup>30</sup> Exx 118.<sup>31</sup> Exx 227.<sup>32</sup> Exx 252.<sup>33</sup> Cf Calveras *op. cit.*<sup>34</sup> Exx 316.<sup>35</sup> Exx 336.<sup>36</sup> Exx 320.<sup>37</sup> Exx 329.<sup>38</sup> E.g. 'Spiritual delight and joy' (336); 'peace' (150, 153, 333).<sup>39</sup> Exx 175.<sup>40</sup> Exx 331.<sup>41</sup> Exx 176.

options. False consolation is the illusory light and comfort produced by the evil spirit. The effects of that spirit are never true happiness or spiritual joy, for it is precisely against these that the enemy works, hoping in the long term to bring sadness and disturbance.<sup>42</sup>

*The Letter to Sister Rejadell*<sup>43</sup>

The letter of Ignatius to Sister Rejadell, of 18th June 1536, has always been regarded as a commentary on the rules for the discernment of spirits.<sup>44</sup> Here I want to consider a passage which comes towards the end of the letter.

It remains for me to speak of how we ought to understand what we perceive is from our Lord and, understanding it, how we ought to use it for our advantage. For it frequently happens that our Lord moves and compels the soul to this or that activity. He begins by enlightening (*abriendo*) the soul; that is to say, by speaking interiorly to it without the din of words, lifting it up wholly to his divine love and ourselves to his disposition (*sentido*) without any possibility of resistance on our part, even should we wish to resist. This disposition (*sentido*) of his which we take is of necessity in conformity with the commandments, the precepts of the Church, and obedience to our superiors. It will be full of humility because the same divine Spirit is present in all. We can frequently be deceived, however, because after such consolation or desolation, when the soul is still abiding in its joy, the enemy tries under the impetus of this joy to make us innocently add to what we have perceived from God our Lord. His only purpose is to disturb and confuse us in everything. At other times he makes us lessen the import of the message we have received and confronts us with obstacles and difficulties, so as to prevent us from carrying out completely what had been made known to us.<sup>45</sup>

Several aspects of Ignatius's spiritual teaching, especially on consolation without cause, find clear expression in this text. First, the reader is made keenly aware that Ignatius's concern here is not with states of consolation and desolation in themselves, but as means of discovering the will of God. If pride of place is given to consolation without preceding cause — the consolation which God alone can give and which admits of no deception — it is

<sup>42</sup> Cf Exx 329.

<sup>43</sup> For this section I have been helped by Leo Bakker's *Freiheit und Erfahrung* (Wurzburg, 1970), pp 49ff.

<sup>44</sup> *Obras Completas de San Ignacio de Loyola* (Madrid, 1963), p 623.

<sup>45</sup> I have used but adapted the translation of this letter by Fr Young in *Letters of St Ignatius Loyola* (Chicago, 1959), p 22.

because of the clarity afforded by such consolation to the person who seeks to do what God is asking of him.<sup>46</sup> There exists a mode of consolation which is not simply an experience of God — this of its nature is invariable — but an experience within which something specific is known that makes decision possible. It is precisely this conviction that leads Ignatius carefully to distinguish between the moment of consolation itself and the period following such consolation, 'open to the trickery and deceptions of the enemy' as well as the deficiencies of human reason, and to insist in the Exercises that any resolutions formed in this after-period be carefully examined.<sup>47</sup> What is implicit in the Exercises is spelled out in the letter. During consolation itself a message (*lección*) is received which the recipient is moved to carry out (*cumplir*).

We have already noted Ignatius's insistence on the divine origin of consolation without preceding cause.<sup>48</sup> This claim is repeated in the letter, particularly in the following words, which have been a source of great difficulty for translators:

*alzando toda a su divino amor y nosotros a su sentido, aunque quisiésemos, no pudiendo resistir. Y el sentido suyo que tomamos.*<sup>49</sup>

I have translated *sentido* by 'disposition', the english word which seems to me closest to the rich sense of the original in this context.<sup>50</sup> A disposition or attitude is not something static, but rather dynamic. It contains both a cognitive and an affective component. Attitudes are dispositions that express a state of readiness to respond. If we have his disposition (*sentido suyo*), we are in possession of the *sensus Christi*. It has been said that:

<sup>46</sup> In this practical attitude a theological position seems to be implicit. For if this clarity is to be genuine it seems to follow, as Bakker *op. cit.* has argued in his careful and illuminating exegesis of the letter, that to equate consolation without cause and consolation without an object would be inconsistent with Ignatius's position. On this point Bakker is in disagreement with the view of Karl Rahner in 'The Logic of Concrete Individual Knowledge in Ignatius Loyola', in *The Dynamic Element in the Church* (London, 1964).

<sup>47</sup> Exx 336.

<sup>48</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>49</sup> I have followed the spanish edition of this letter given in the work of Calveras already referred to; other editions render translation almost impossible.

<sup>50</sup> The importance of *sentir*, *sentimiento*, and *sentido* for understanding the thought of St Ignatius may be gauged from a few contributions: Dumeige, Gervais: 'Esperienza Ignaziana: La Esperienza Interna Della Grazia Divina' in *Bibbia, Teologia ed Esercizi* (Rome, 1972), p 411; Futrell, John: *Making an Apostolic Community of Love* (St Louis, 1970), p 111; Giuliani, Maurice: *Saint Ignace, Journal Spirituel* (Paris, 1959) states that '*sentir* refers to a properly spiritual knowledge which is neither purely intellectual nor purely affective' (quoted in Futrell, cf above).



This is the disposition of the third mode of humility: so to be one with Christ in heart and mind . . . that it becomes in practice impossible to choose anything other than what is seen to be conducive to God's greater glory and the good of the neighbour, in Christ, in the Church, in the christian community.<sup>51</sup>

To have the *sentido* of Christ is to have what St Paul claims for himself in chiding the unspiritual Corinthians: 'We are those who have the mind of Christ'.<sup>52</sup> It is to have the attitude, the disposition, the thoughts and feelings of Christ. 'I live now not I but Christ lives in me'.<sup>53</sup> In the context of the Spiritual Exercises and the election, this is the disposition of the one who is indifferent; the one purified of inordinate attachments; the one who has heard the call of the King and has contemplated the mysteries of Christ's life, begging for that 'intimate knowledge of our Lord, who has become man for me'; the one who has been given the knowledge of the deceits of the enemy and of the true life exemplified in Christ together with the grace to imitate him by seriously seeking 'only to will and not to will as God our Lord inspires'. Such a one has the *sentido* of Christ and his whole person will resonate in conformity with Christ's mind and heart. In a word, he will experience the consolation of Christ.

What Ignatius seems to be saying in this letter is that God is frequently (*muchas veces*) active in us in such a way that his thoughts and feelings become ours. We take his attitude (*el sentido suyo que tomamos*). We lose ourselves in him, forgetting ourselves when we thus become aware of his presence in us. Ignatius reminds us, with characteristic shrewdness, that Christ's attitude is necessarily in accord with the commandments, the Church's precepts and obedience. The whole movement begins with God, who moves us; God thinks in us and feels in us so that we become sharers in his love: that love by which God loves himself and all creatures in him. Spiritual consolation is God's way of intimating to man that he is loving and living with the love and the life of Christ himself.

If this is the nature of all true consolation, what meaning can we attach to Ignatius's distinction between consolation with and without preceding cause? Part of the difficulty that surrounds the question lies in the complexity of Ignatius's own language. Sometimes the term consolation refers to our perception of the underlying reality itself,

<sup>51</sup> Walsh, James: 'Discernment of Spirits', in *The Way Supplement*, no 16 (Summer, 1972), p 61.

<sup>52</sup> I Cor 2, 16.

<sup>53</sup> Gal 2, 20.

namely God's love within us; elsewhere it refers to interior movements such as tears, joy and peace, which are the fruits of consolation, the *effects* of God's love. Nevertheless there is also something of positive value in the shifting and fluid equality of the ignatian terminology; for what it conveys is the immense richness of this state of soul. The difference between with cause and without cause seems to me to amount to a difference between the intimation of God's presence attended by little or much in the way of other interior movements. Substantially the two are the same; the differences are accidental. As one writer puts it:

Spiritual consolation is substantially a felt increase of the theological virtues of faith, hope and charity, especially of charity which is the queen of all the virtues and which brings greater consoling strength. *The other movements which accompany it are accidental.*<sup>54</sup>

*Some practical Conclusions*<sup>55</sup>

If consolation were simply a matter of religious experience having no reference to action, comparatively few problems would be posed. It might even be seen as a religious luxury, a kind of fringe benefit in no way essential to the specific gains to be obtained in the Exercises. Although not every experience of consolation is strictly elective, the characteristic thrust of ignatian consolation is towards finding the will of God in order to do it. Consolation is for action, even if that action remains interior. There is therefore an apostolic aspect to consolation. It is to this aspect, with its practical implications for both the director and the exercitant, that I want to turn in conclusion.

The basic principle of retreat guidance is made clear in Ignatius's introductory observations:

. . . while one is engaged in the Spiritual Exercises, it is more suitable and much better that the Creator and Lord in person communicate himself to the devout soul in quest of the divine will, that he inflame it with his love and praise, and dispose it for the way in which it could better serve God in the future.<sup>56</sup>

<sup>54</sup> Cf Casanovas, Ignacio: *Comentario y Explanación de los Ejercicios Espirituales de San Ignacio de Loyola* (Barcelona, 1945): italics are mine.

<sup>55</sup> I have been helped by the following: Buckley, Michael, s.j.: 'Rules for the Discernment of Spirits' in *The Way Supplement*, no 20; Beirnaert, Louis, s.j.: 'Discernement et Psychisme', in *Christus* no 4, p 50; Rulla, L. M., s.j.: Riddick, Joyce, s.s.c.: Imoda, Franco, s.j.: *Entering and Leaving Vocation: Intrapsychic Dynamics* (Rome, 1976), pp 209ff.

<sup>56</sup> Exx 15.

Ignatius expects that in the Exercises God will communicate himself to the one doing them, inflaming the exercitant with *his* love, to do *his* will. In the experience of the Exercises, God directs the life of his creature in a particular way.

But to make this claim is to find oneself confronted with certain questions which assume particular urgency in our own age of heightened psychological awareness. How does God communicate himself? And what are the resistances, coming not only from conscious weakness or prejudice, but from the deeper layers of the mind, that stand in the way of God's self-communication? A valuable approach to the first question has been worked out in a recent article by Michael Buckley. Buckley begins by showing that traditionally three answers have been given to the question: how does God direct men to himself? These are: through the mediation of preternatural personalities or realities: saints, angels and devils; through human processes of intellect or imagination; through human attractions of affectivity. In his rules for discernment, Ignatius offers a unique co-ordination of all three vectors in such a way that any one of them seldom predominates to the exclusion of the other.<sup>57</sup> The point to notice here is that 'affectivity' has a much greater causal influence in the structure proposed by Ignatius than is often attributed to it. Furthermore, this third vector of religious experience, affectivity, is not identical in the first and second weeks. In the first week, affectivity is qualified by the moral worth of the attraction: it is consolation when a person is drawn towards God, desolation when he is drawn towards evil. They are obvious states of affectivity, but they are not denoted by their sensible or even spiritual enjoyment, but by their *direction*, by their *terminus*.<sup>58</sup> In the second week the exercitant is tempted not so much by obvious evil as by obvious good. Second week affectivity is qualified as true consolation by our feelings of joy and peace which have a continuous consistency throughout our past-present-future. It seems to me that Buckley is correct in his conclusion that:

<sup>57</sup> Buckley *op. cit.*, p 27. For our purpose the most important aspect of Buckley's presentation consists in his drawing attention to the *two-way* causal interaction which exists among the three factors of religious experience. The three vectors can move causally downward (from good or evil spirit to thoughts and to affectivity) or upward. In the latter case, as Buckley points out in connection with the rules for the first week 'certain affective conditions, consolation and desolation, can spontaneously generate commensurate thought'.

<sup>58</sup> *Ibid.*, p 29.

Affectivity is not the criterion in the first week; it is the criterion in the second. And between these two moments lies the conversion and reorientation of human sensibility worked through the purifications and completions of the first week.<sup>59</sup>

Unfortunately, however, this 'reorientation of human sensibility' does not always come about. And if for whatever reason it does not happen, a director would be ill-advised to allow decisions to be made on the basis of consolation and desolation. Consolation in such a case can and often will be deceptive. Ignatius's observations on the subject of who is and who is not suitable to make the Exercises deserve and reward our close attention. They should prompt us to ask far-reaching practical questions, including a fundamental question relevant to the topic of this paper: are there people who are not able to make fruitful use of the experience of consolations and desolations and the discernment of different spirits?

To that question Ignatius, both in his teaching and practice would seem to answer: Yes. There are some to whom, at least temporarily, this particular road is closed. The *Directory* written by Fr Vitoria at Ignatius's dictation has some light to shed on who these people might be. For here we find Ignatius insisting in various ways on the necessity in the exercitant of a quality of inner freedom. He must possess a certain measure of autonomy, of self-determination: he must be able to do what he wants with himself (*determinar de su persona*).<sup>60</sup> He needs to be capable of real choice between alternatives, to be free from any attachment that would make it 'hard to bring him to the attitude of placing himself in an equal balance before God'.<sup>61</sup> He must be equal to the demands of calling himself seriously in question. 'He ought to be somehow uneasy (*angustiado en alguna manera*) and in some doubt (*ambiguo*)'.<sup>62</sup> These demands, expressed admittedly in the language of a pre-freudian culture, bring forcibly home to us the importance of what we today recognize as unconscious motivation. For there is no doubt that the autonomy and openness asked for by Ignatius will be wanting in people unconsciously moved in one or other direction. Such people are driven without knowing it along paths not of their own free choosing. Equally, the uncertainty, even ambiguity, which will surely emerge if there is to be discernment of various spirits will

<sup>59</sup> *Ibid.*, p 35.

<sup>60</sup> MHSI *Directoria*, Doc. 4, no 1.

<sup>61</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>62</sup> *Ibid.*

produce a degree of anxiety quite intolerable to an exercitant who is unconsciously fixated.<sup>63</sup>

What can be done for such people? In the same *Directory* Ignatius has some advice to offer about 'those who enter with certain plans and intentions':

... it is very fitting that all diligence be exerted in order that they might be rid of such an imperfection, because it is a moth which infests this precious garment of the true vocation, and does not permit one to know the truth by any means. And he who is known to be very obstinate in this way before entering the Exercises, should not be encouraged to make them, nor be admitted to them, until by frequent confessions he has become more mature.<sup>64</sup>

Now the 'plans and intentions' which are an obstacle to knowing the truth may well be unconscious, and will remain so in one who is not helped to become more mature. Experience shows that where the conditions laid down by Ignatius for entering on the Exercises are not in a large measure met, the authentic experience of consolations, desolations and the discernment of spirits cannot be hoped for. This is not to say that such people should not eventually make the Exercises, still less that they are incapable of the highest sanctity. Indeed their very incapacity may become the source of their growing in Christ. The point I wish to make is that some people need much help and direction to prepare them for the Exercises. After all, Peter Faber was kept waiting by Ignatius for four years!

There is a temptation to which those interested in the Spiritual Exercises easily succumb. In our attitudes if not in our words we identify God's consolation, his gift to man, as the perquisites of an *élite*. It is true that spiritual consolation can be savoured only by believers. But consolation is what God desires for every christian; in this sense it is the normal state of a follower of Christ. The unique contribution of Ignatius lies in his rules for the discernment of spirits which help us to grow in discernment as an art as well as a charism. In a period of history exposed to widely diversified forms of religious experience, such help is more than ever necessary for those who wish to use consolation and desolation as a way of knowing God's will. What is at issue is not only the quality of personal prayer: our ability to discern and help others to discern correctly affects our capacity to know and to do the will of God.

<sup>63</sup> For a full and excellent treatment of this point, the reader is referred to the book of Rulla *et alii* and the article by Beirnaert.

<sup>64</sup> MHSI *Directoria*, Doc. 4, no 20.