

YEAR 2

SPIRITUAL DIRECTION FORMATION

Student Syllabus 2021-22



Sustainable Faith

PREFACE

- Simple
- Deepening
- Transforming
- Grounding
- Developmental

Preface

In our Year 2 curriculum we wanted to keep five things squarely in focus: simplicity, greater depth with the themes and topics of Year 1, your spiritual formation, theological grounding and, not least, your skill development. The last three in this set of goals often overlap and feed into each other. In fact, exercising patience and holding silence are more accurately seen as fruits of spiritual formation, i.e., growth in humility and the experience of God's patience. We also know that our theological grounding brims over the borders of our brains. For instance, a trinitarian starting point (image of God) and biblically rooted view of humans (image of man) – something more ancient and orthodox than what we're typically given! – have real consequences for the way we actually experience both the God we seek to know and love as well as the directee who sits in front of us. Theological grounding is meant to impact us at the formational level *and* aid in skill development. So although we talk about spiritual formation, theological grounding and skill development as tidy categories, that's simply for convenience. In real life, the distinctions are messier.

Simple

What's simple is memorable and transferable. Simplicity enhances focus. Good directors pose one simple question to their directees rather than two (or more!) as a way of winnowing attention. Likewise, we'd rather you hold fewer things but hold those few things well. In short, we want this Year 2 curriculum to have a kind of hospitality. We want it to be easy to read, easy to understand, easy to execute.

Consequently, each module has:

- ▶ a theological focus
- ▶ a formational focus
- ▶ a skill developmental focus
- ▶ 1 book (module 3 excepted)
- ▶ 1 chapter from Pickering's *Spiritual Direction: A Practical Introduction*
- ▶ group supervision

Deepening

In the Year 1 curriculum, *stories* served as the centerpiece of Modules 1-2. We used them as a training ground to ask good questions, make observations, notice interior movements, and have conversations around the nature of spiritual direction. In Module 3, we encountered the Enneagram as a tool for gaining *self-awareness*. In Module 4, we covered *discernment*, using Ignatian spirituality and group spiritual

PREFACE

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direction as a way of delving into the topic. And in Module 5, we looked at *stages of faith*, using “Critical Journey” language.

Except for transposing the modules on *self-awareness* and *discernment* (which are certainly related), Year 2 follows the same outline. Stories figure prominently in Modules 1-2, but we push deeper into ways of listening. Module 3 goes further with *discernment*, strongly accenting desire and Ignatian spirituality. Module 4 continues with *self-awareness* by coming back to the Enneagram, broadening the latter by considering Instinctual Variants, Harmony Triads, and its use with directees. Module 5 again picks up the topic of faith development, filling out our understanding of “the critical journey” by looking in greater detail at how we accompany directees through stages 3-5 and “the Wall” (where most of our spiritual direction occurs). So all in all, Year 2 feels like circling back to familiar places, yet this time going much deeper.

Transforming

Our curriculum is intended to form us as children of God, followers of Jesus and those who “temple” the Spirit. Content matters, of course, and we’ve always wanted “good stuff” to put into our brains. But more so we want to engage the *whole* person, including heart and body. The very experience of God (knowing God / being known by God) is appropriately at the forefront. Consequently, Year 2 is full of transformative exercises and practices that engage you holistically. Among these is the 18th Annotation of the Ignatian Exercises, the crown jewel of our formational practices in Year 2. (This is a 12-13 week version.)

We *will* make exceptions on a case by case basis for you to do the 19th Annotation (about 9 months) provided: 1) you have adequate time and energy; and 2) you meet *weekly* with a spiritual director who is specifically trained in accompanying others through the Ignatian Exercises. (We ourselves have a number of capable directors who have been trained to do exactly that.)

Grounding

The Year 2 curriculum deepens our *theology of spiritual direction*. Without a healthy theological grounding or spiritual philosophy, our direction is untethered from distinctives of the Christian faith. Without this grounding our direction devolves into a fruitless introspection whose goal is mostly self-improvement and the alleviation of pain – which is a far cry from the greatest distinctive of our faith: the bedrock confession of the resurrected Jesus as Lord (Kyrios) and the life-altering implications of that embrace ... which may certainly *not* alleviate our pain or even look like self-improvement, though it will always be an increase in love.

PREFACE

- Simple
- Deepening
- Transforming
- Grounding
- Developmental

So we need help to consider (in the light of Scripture and the church's historic reflection) questions like: *What's the Kingdom of God and how does it come to us? What's spiritual formation and how does it relate to the Kingdom of God? Where does spiritual direction fit in the context of spiritual formation? What's our controlling, operant image of God? Of Jesus? Of the Holy Spirit? What's our view of humans and human nature? How do Scripture, conscience and community play into discernment? What are the means and tools of spiritual transformation? And to what end?*

Consequently, Year 2 puts us in front of Jesus and invites us to theological reflection via books, exercises and videos ... but without the dryness and heaviness often associated with "doing theology." We think this will be an enlivening, formative and integrating experience.

Developmental

Our Year 2 Curriculum (inside and outside our time together) pushes *skill development*. Group supervision is the most robust and obvious place for that to occur. Consequently, it's a key element of every module. Yet it also occurs in moving through Pickering's excellent book chapter by chapter, in the way we are guided to listen to stories, and in the teacher-student feedback loop, especially as it pertains to offering direction to others.

BOOKS

- **Spiritual Direction, Pickering**
- **Renovated, Wilder**
- **God's Many Splendored Image, Harrison**
- **God's Voice Within, Thibodeaux**
- **The Way of Discernment, Liebert**
- **You Are What You Love, Smith**
- **The Critical Journey, Hagberg & Guelich**

The Books

Since Year 2 involves more field experience and includes the 18th Annotation, the reading material is kept to a useful minimum. Accompanying the books are reflective exercises to help you consider your understanding and experience of, say, the Kingdom of God, the Trinity, etc. We also consider the implications of each topic for the ministry of spiritual direction. Additionally, we have short videos available where various teachers share about the intersection of these important topics with spiritual direction.

The books for Year 2 are presented below module by module. Not included is Sue Pickering's excellent book, *Spiritual Direction: A Practical Introduction*, which is "trans-modular" and spans all five modules. Chapter 1 goes with Mod 1, chapter 2 with Mod 2, and so on.

Module 1 Reading

Renovated: God, Dallas Willard & The Church That Transforms, Jim Wilder

The ministry of spiritual direction is pastoral in nature and has its eye on forming directees. But pastoral, spiritually formative ministry is guided at a higher level by meta-questions, the principle of which is, "What's the nature and scope of this 'Kingdom of God' (so often on the lips of Jesus!) that's meant to show up in the directee's life? What exactly are we talking about?" But there are other big questions, like, "What's is the human experience of 'salvation' and 'spiritual maturity'?" Building on Dallas Willard's theology of the Kingdom of God and spiritual formation, Jim Wilder integrates what we now know from the field of neuroscience to align our practices for spiritual transformation with how the human brain works.

Module 2 Reading

God's Many-Splendored Image: Theological Anthropology for Christian Formation, Nonna Verna Harrison

Nothing says it better than the title, and almost no one talks about it better than Harrison. We need a strong dose of the ancient and orthodox view of humans to correct the "depraved sinner" narrative that many Christians still carry. As an Eastern Orthodox Christian and patristics scholar, Harrison does just that. A slow and reflective reading of this book has the effect of overhauling the way we see ourselves, our directees, and people in general. Additionally, it expands our understanding of what human flourishing looks like.

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Module 3 Reading

God's Voice Within: The Ignatian Way to Discover God's Will, Mark Thibodeaux

The Way of Discernment: Spiritual Practices for Decision Making, Elizabeth Liebert

As *discernment* (especially as practiced in the Ignatian way) is the central focus of Module 3, these two books are superb additions. Thibodeaux gives a classic exposition of the Ignatian model. Liebert builds it out, giving greater attention, for example, to traditionally neglected sources of discernment like the body, intuition and nature.

The primary book for this module is *God's Voice Within*, but we read the intro to Liebert's book ("An Invitation to Christian Discernment") and some handpicked chapters of Part 2.

Module 4 Reading

You Are What You Love: The Spiritual Power of Habit, James K. A. Smith

Module 4, with its accent on *self-awareness*, builds on Module 3's *discernment* theme. In offering direction, we recognize that a directee's willpower, sense of duty and espoused theology will carry her only so far before slowly evaporating and leaving her spiritually stagnant. James K. A. Smith makes a powerful case that above all else we're lovers, creatures of desire. Additionally he uncovers the power of implicit and explicit liturgies in directing and refining our loves. Smith's work grows our self-awareness by exposing our hidden liturgies and uncovering deeper desires.

Module 5 Reading

The Critical Journey, Janet Hagberg & Robert Guelich (Revisited)

Module 5 is about the recognizing and working with directees in various stages of faith. *The Critical Journey*, already familiar to our students, is listed here in order to concentrate on stages 3, 4, 5 and "The Wall" (where most directees are located). Consequently, those particular chapters are the focus. We want to explore in greater detail what it looks like to accompany directees well in each of these stages.

STUDENT AGREEMENTS

- Receive Spiritual Direction
- Offer Spiritual Direction
- Supervision
- 18th Annotation
- Core Reading
- Summary Reflections
- Module Intensives

Student Agreements

Here's an overview of what you'll need to complete in order to receive a certificate. Box contains a checklist you can use to chart your progress.

Receive 8-9 Spiritual Direction Sessions

You meet monthly with your regular spiritual director during Year 2. This is suspended during the 18th Annotation when you meet regularly with a director to whom you and others in your cohort are assigned.

Offer 10 Spiritual Direction Sessions (minimum)

The generally recognized U.S. standard for spiritual direction formation requires you to have 20 sessions under your belt *over two years of training*. This, however, is a *minimum* requirement. If you met the 10-session requirement of Year 1, you need 10 additional sessions for Year 2. With 2-3 directees per month in Year 2, our students typically exceed this.

Receive 6-7 Supervision Sessions

The goal is 10 supervised sessions over the course of Yrs 1-2. You likely had 3-4 supervision sessions in Year 1 (via debriefing of recordings and supervision during the last two modules). In Yr 2 you'll have 6-7 additional opportunities to be supervised. Most of these (4-5) happen in group supervision (Modules 1-5); the others happen in one-on-one meetings with the teacher (or supervisor) outside cohort time. You'll use the *Contemplative Reflection Form + Dialogue Form* to help you prepare for these sessions. (forms in Box)

Complete the 18th Annotation (Standard Option)

You'll begin the 18 Annotation in either the Fall or the Spring. Your teacher will let you know your cohort's schedule. Your cohort will be divided into smaller subgroups and you'll be assigned an Ignatian director. The director will host a 1-hr weekly online meeting with your group. The monthly cost for meeting with the Ignatian director is comparable to that of a "normal" director (\$60-80 per month).

Complete the 19th Annotation (Special Consideration!)

You may feel very drawn to do the 19th annotation (9 months). In this case you would meet *weekly*, with your Ignatian director and start during the very first month. If this is something you want to pursue, *first*: 1) get a green light from your teacher, and 2) get a "yes" from your Ignatian director (who has discerned a

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- Payment

spiritual readiness). Keep in mind that you can always do the 19th Annotation later. We just want to make sure you're spiritually ready, sufficiently motivated, have adequate margin, and can afford it. (The cost is \$143 per month.)

Complete Core Reading & Upload Reflections

You agree to upload a 1-2 page reflection on each required book (As a repeat book, *The Critical Journey* is an exception.) You can find a sample reflection in the Appendix. The teacher / facilitator determines the schedule for submissions.

Complete 4 Summary Reflections

As in Year 1, upload a 2-page maximum *Summary Reflection* prior to Modules 2-5. Reflect on your experience of receiving direction (or supervision), offering direction, and going through the Ignatian Exercises. Additionally you can comment on life circumstances and share questions that might be fodder for the upcoming Module intensive.

Attend All 5 Module Intensives

The face-to-face modules are critical. In the event of sickness or emergencies, form a plan with your teacher for making up missed work. You can do some through additional supervision and 1-on-1 time with another teacher in our organization. (There may be an extra cost for this, especially if you meet online with another one of our expert facilitators to cover material you've missed.)

Timely Payment

If you didn't pay the full balance up front but chose instead to spread out your tuition payments, please stay on top of it. It's a matter of personal integrity to make timely (i.e., monthly) payments. Keep in mind that *if you fail to pay for a month or more, then your teacher doesn't get paid*. As we're sure you can appreciate, we want our teachers to teach, not be bill collectors. Thanks for your attention to this.

THE 5 MODULES

- Kingdom of God & Spiritual Formation
- Image of God & Humankind
- Discernment & The Spirit
- Self-Awareness & Desire
- Theosis: The Journey of Love

The 5 Modules: A Forward

Structure & Flow

The basic structure and flow of each module is easy to grasp and follow, regardless of the content. This “sameness” to each module will help you get in the groove quicker and know what to expect. It will, in short time, become like a liturgy you’ve learned. In a summary glance, it looks like this:

- ▶ we begin each day with a practice or exercise
- ▶ mornings are largely devoted to *skill development* / lab work in the larger group
- ▶ we begin each afternoon with a very brief centering practice
- ▶ afternoons are largely devoted to *group supervision* in triads & quads
- ▶ the theology piece is in the afternoon of Day 1, right before supervision work
- ▶ we close Day 1 with Pickering
- ▶ we close Day 2 with prep for next module

Meta-Objectives

Each module, of course, has its own objectives, but there are three meta-objectives that are part of every module and, consequently, won’t be listed under each module.

- acquire a theological foundation for the ministry of spiritual direction
- deepen our own spiritual formation via contemplative practices & the 18th Annotation
- grow in skills needed for spiritual direction (through group supervision, triads, feedback on field experience, Pickering’s book and other work done in modules)

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Module 1 / The Kingdom of God & Spiritual Formation

Theological Focus: the kingdom of God, spiritual formation and spiritual direction

Formational Focus: experiencing the Triune God; adopting a 3-month spiritual practice

Skill Development: listening to stories, developing selective attention

Practices / Exercises: group supervision; others TBD

Reading Debrief: *Renovated*, Wilder

Video Clip: *The Kingdom of God and Spiritual Direction* (Sharon Wada)

Sue Pickering: Chapter 1: "What is Spiritual Direction?"

Going Deeper: *Surprised by Hope*, Wright

Resource: *Spiritual Disciplines Handbook*, Calhoun

Objectives:

- ▶ define the kingdom of God
- ▶ define spiritual formation; place spiritual formation in the context of the kingdom
- ▶ define spiritual direction; place spiritual direction in the context of spiritual formation
- ▶ grow in understanding / experience of Trinity
- ▶ isolate and develop listening skills
- ▶ acquire a model and experience of group supervision

In this module, we return to telling our stories after having been apart for several months. Just as a tennis player improves his game by isolating and focusing on an element of it (e.g., the serve, the volley, the backhand, approaching the net, etc), so we isolate and focus on ways of listening, paying attention to things like divine initiative, good human response, body language, cadence of conversation, head-heart-gut focus, own own internal movements, etc.

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- Self-Awareness & Desire
- Theosis: The Journey of Love

Module 2 / Image of God & Humankind

- Theological Focus:* The image of God & humankind; human flourishing
- Formational Focus:* Explore espoused vs. operant images of God;
explore God's hidden and manifest glory in ourselves and others
- Skill Development:* Listen to stories, applying selective attention
- Practices / Exercises:* Image of God exercise
Image of Humankind exercise
Visio Divina exercise
Group Supervision
- Reading Debrief:* *God's Many Splendored Image*, Harrison
- Video Clip:* *The Image of God* (Kris Miller)
- Sue Pickering:* Chapter 2: "Listening to God"
- Going Deeper:* *God's Unconditional Love: Healing Our Shame*, Au & Cannon
- Resource:* *A Guide to Christian Spiritual Formation*, Howard

Objectives

- ▶ consider our own images of God
- ▶ contrast the ancient orthodox understanding of humankind with our own
- ▶ note differences between orthodox view and more contemporary ones
- ▶ examine our own experience / internalization of Harrison's "domains of flourishing"
- ▶ isolate and develop listening skills
- ▶ acquire more experience in group supervision

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- Kingdom of God & Spiritual Formation
- Image of God & Humankind
- Discernment & The Spirit
- Self-Awareness & Desire
- Theosis: The Journey of Love

Module 3 / Discernment & The Spirit

Theological Focus: biblical discernment

Formational Focus: 18th Annotation of Ignatian Exercises

Skill Development: learning various modes of discernment; applying in direction

Practices / Exercises: group supervision; others TBD

Reading Debrief: *The Voice Within*, Thibodeaux

The Way of Discernment, Liebert

Video Clip: *Discernment (Kris Miller)*

Sue Pickering: Chapter 3: "Responding to God"

Going Deeper: *Weeds Among the Wheat*, Thomas Green

Resource: *The Discernment of Spirits*, Timothy Gallagher

Objectives

- ▶ review Christian tradition of discernment; see examples in biblical text
- ▶ learn the Ignatian rules of discernment
- ▶ become more sensitive to the ways in which the Holy Spirit moves, guides, prompts
- ▶ identify areas of over-attention / under-attention to particular modes of discernment
- ▶ isolate and practice a single way of discerning
- ▶ learn background, purpose and structure of Ignatian Exercises
- ▶ prepare mind, heart, body for the Ignatian Exercises
- ▶ gain experience in using discernment process with directees

In this module we go deeper into Ignatian spirituality by learning the "Rules of Discernment" and laying the final foundation for beginning the 18th Annotation (if your cohort did not engage with the Exercises in the Fall). We also practice how to apply discernment in working with directees.

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- Self-Awareness & Desire
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Module 4 / Self-Awareness & Desire

Theological Focus: Knowing Self, Knowing God

Formational Focus: 18th Annotation of Ignatian Exercises

Skill Development: probing for desire, liturgical awareness, using the Enneagram in direction

Practices / Exercises: group supervision; examining

Reading Debrief: *You Are What You Love*, Smith

Video Clips: *Instinctual Variants / Harmony Triads* (David Nixon)

Sue Pickering: Chapter 4: "Listening and Responding to Ourselves"

Going Deeper: *The Enneagram: A Christian Perspective*, Richard Rohr

Resource: *The Wisdom of The Enneagram*, Riso & Hudson

Objectives

- ▶ harvest fruit of 18th Annotation
- ▶ gain deeper appreciation for the role of desire in formation
- ▶ examine implicit liturgies
- ▶ choose a new and (very) simple personal or communal liturgy
- ▶ learn Instinctual Variants / Subtypes
- ▶ examine dominant and neglected Instinctual Variants
- ▶ learn Harmony Triads
- ▶ examine dominant and neglected "intelligence centers"
- ▶ learn to contour direction to specific Enneatypes

In Module 4, we focus on self-awareness through attention to 1) the role of desire; 2) liturgies; and 3) nuances of the Enneagram. Additionally, we explore how to apply these in spiritual direction.

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- Kingdom of God & Spiritual Formation
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- Discernment & The Spirit
- Self-Awareness & Desire
- Theosis: The Journey of Love

Module 5 / Theosis: The Journey of Love

Theological Focus: Theosis

Formational Focus: 18th Annotation of Ignatian Exercises

Skill Development: refining the practice of direction in various faith stages

Practices / Exercises: group supervision; others TBD

Reading Debrief: *The Critical Journey*, Hagberg & Guelich

Video Clip: *Theosis: Our Present and Future Glory* (Kris Miller)

Sue Pickering: Chapter 5: "Listening and Responding to Others"

Going Deeper: *Deification and Grace*, Daniel A. Keating

Orthodox Thinking on Theosis, Norman Russell

Resource: *Streams of Living Water*, Foster

Objectives

- ▶ understand better early Christian thought regarding the concept of theosis
- ▶ acquire a clearer understanding of St John of the Cross's "Dark Night of the Soul"
- ▶ acquire a clearer understanding of the "Wall"
- ▶ learn to differentiate between the Dark Night and Wall
- ▶ refine spiritual direction work with a greater understanding of stages 3-5 + Wall
- ▶ develop a "Continuing Ed" / growth plan for post-Year 2: education, formation, practice, supervision, etc.

In Module 5, we pull the camera back and frame the arc of Christian spiritual development as a progression in love and the process of becoming like the One we behold. We also look at ways to accompany better those on this journey. We conclude by celebrating our own journey through the 18th Annotation and Year 2 as well as considering what the journey looks like going forward.

APPENDIX

- **Sample Book Reflection**

Sample Book Reflection (Inner Compass : Margaret Silf)

What did you learn about spiritual direction from reading this book?

The chapter about tracking our moods seemed very relevant for spiritual direction (SD) since a big part of SD for directees is about noticing their moods and life experiences and how they see God as part of it. I can encourage directees to pay attention to moods and not be discouraged with their "inner furniture." I can help them notice when they overreact.

The book was extremely helpful in describing consolation and desolation, and this will be of great help in understanding our directee's situation and giving guidance during a time of desolation. Often consolation is experienced just before a difficult and challenging time, which is how I feel about the time before moving to the US. When experiencing God, we're being drawn and not driven - so noticing when a directee is driven will help me understand the directee better. It will also help me identify root fears, desires and negative inner movements driven by false spirits.

What were some "Aha!" Moments for You?

Wow - I truly enjoyed the rich metaphors throughout the book and the Scripture-based reflections available to do at the end of each chapter. One of the metaphors that really stood out for me was the oxen teams ploughing next to me and how, when ploughing, to keep your eye fixed ahead (on Jesus). The way she describes landmarks and signposts was also a different way of looking at past spiritual experiences and savoring them as a landmark. The second metaphor that moved me was about Lock 46 and how we can feel like a narrow boat in the lock chamber - and how examining every brick is pointless hoping that it will provide some meaning. Although this lacks perspective since the lock chamber makes no sense unless you know about the canal. I find myself in so many of these situations and now having a picture to realize that it happens helps a lot to confront reality. The book stirred a lot of hope and gratitude in seeing how God has worked in my life in the past and also will continue working.

I especially liked the fact that we should not make life-changing decisions when in desolation (the crisis in the tunnel) and giving thanks in times of consolation. I loved the image of spiraling when entering desolation and how it was described. Also, the advice to share your feelings with God and turn your attention away from yourself and toward other people.

How do you think this book might influence your understanding or practice of SD?

The Where / How / Who diagram gave me a lasting visual guide for seeing the entrapment of "where" and the value of pushing toward "how" and "who" in order to find freedom in the "where." The description about the two orientations (toward or away from God) and what effect our mood has both when moving away or toward God gave me a grid for considering my directee's orientation in life.

APPENDIX

- **Discernment of Spirits: Overview**
- **Rules 1-14**
- **Rules 1-8**

Appendix

Understanding the Discernment of Spirits

"The "discernment of spirits," as understood by the Jesuits, is "a process by which we become aware of the movements in our hearts, understand where they come from, and either accept or reject them." (Timothy Gallagher, *The Discernment of Spirits*)

Gallagher's succinct description names awareness, understanding, and faithful action as key elements of discernment: we pay attention to what's going on interiorly; we learn to make sense of it; we choose our response.

Awareness is the first door to enter, and for some some a very difficult one. Many people are largely oblivious to what they're actually feeling, and this is especially true when the feelings have been longstanding. These emotional states have been so chronic, so persistent that they feel completely normal to the person who has them, like one's very skin. Compare it to living next to the train tracks. First you always hear the train, then you don't ... sort of. Your ears, body and brain still register the roar and rumble, but the organism called "you" has come to terms with the unavoidable reality. You naturally adapt, and your brain "mutes" the audio signals even though the decibel reading never went down. It all fades into the background. So depressed people often don't know they're depressed; angry people don't know they're angry; and overly-sensitive people think others are consistently rude, offensive, critical or unthoughtful toward them.

Others may be a step farther in their awareness of interior movements. They're not completely oblivious, but they're nonetheless shallow, unable to name precisely what it is they feel. Emotions simply get lumped into indistinct piles of good, bad or neutral feelings.

Ignatius asks us to go farther, to leave emotional ignorance and arrested development behind. He invites us to become good at identifying all that we feel as well as the accompanying thoughts. You might say he invites us into emotional fluency. In time we can become expert observers of our inner life.

So from the room of awareness we then pass into the room of *understanding*. It's one thing to finally identify an internal state, but it's a distinctly different task first to consider how we're affected by our

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interior state (i.e., the complex of emotions and thoughts that produces a distinct mode of being) and then to determine the spiritual root of our state.

It's here in the second step where Ignatius's Rules of Discernment come into play. Here we find guidance for thinking about and understanding our inner states and how the spiritual life works, how the Holy Spirit and counterfeit spirits operate, what consolation and desolation look like, and how to reject spiritually destructive forces and find freedom. This discernment is an outgrowth of the biblical reminder "[not to] believe every spirit, but [to] test the spirits to see whether they're from God." (1 Jn 4.1)

The third and last doorway leads into *action*. Awareness and discernment are crippled without it. Just as in spiritual direction we routinely ask our directees how they want to respond to God's movement in their lives, so in discerning spirits we routinely choose our response. What will we accept? What will we reject?

Before continuing, let's pause to talk about the word "rule", which for many has a legalistic connotation. We may think of nuns rapping knuckles or harsh authoritarian figures. But Ignatius and others used it in the sense of "guide" or "measuring stick," not inflexible rules. They're simply guides for assessment, which is something we all need on the spiritual journey.

Ignatius's Rules of Discernment are comprised of two sets. The first set has 14 rules designed to help us resist and reject spiritually destructive forces. The second set of 8 rules is for those who are a little farther along spiritually.

Ignatius often names them as "evil spirits" or "the evil angel" – and for good reason, because nothing truly evil is impersonal! – but you can also broaden the category to include your own broken thoughts and feelings or the spiritually bankrupt philosophies of the world that have the effect of dehumanizing us and eclipsing our vision of God. The end, however is the same: learning to distinguish between the voice of the Good Shepherd and that of the Serpent.

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- **Discernment of Spirits: Overview**
- **Rules 1-14**
- **Rules 1-8**

Rules 1-14 // Better Suited for Week One

(rewritten in modern English by David Nixon)

1 If you're entrenched in sinful behavior, the enemy's normal tactic is simple: hold something attractive in front of you, lead you to imagine how good it would feel to have it, and hope you'll take the bait. The enemy's goal is to sink you deeper into destructive habits, slowly increasing his grip. The Holy Spirit works differently, pricking your conscience and sense of right and wrong.

2 If, on the other hand, you're making strong efforts to grow spiritually and serve the Lord, you can expect the reverse of Rule 1. The enemy's normal tactic is to harass you, make you sad, put up obstacles, and unsettle you with reasons that don't stand up – all to keep you from going forward. The Holy Spirit, however, very naturally gives you courage, strength, consolation, tears, spiritual momentum and peace, reducing and clearing away obstacles so that you can go forward.

3 Any interior movement that ignites your love for God is consolation. It's consolation when you no longer love any part of the created order for itself alone, but see God in all created things. Likewise, when you're moved to tears by sorrow for your sin or what Jesus did for you or other things related to God's love, that's also consolation. Finally, consolation is every increase in faith, hope and love, as well as the inner joy we experience that focuses our hearts on spiritual matters, on spiritual well-being, bringing us rest and peace in our Creator and Lord.

4 Spiritual desolation is the exact opposite of what I described in Rule 3. It's characterized by interior darkness and unrest, being drawn to what's vulgar, getting agitated in temptation, losing confidence, losing hope, and feeling cut off from love. It's being engulfed by spiritual inertia, experiencing a lack of enthusiasm, being stuck in sadness and feeling distant from your Lord and Creator.

5 When you find yourself in desolation, don't change your plans. Stick to what you previously determined was good and what you set out to do when you were in consolation. The Holy Spirit is guiding and speaking to you during consolation, but in desolation the enemy's voice is louder and will work against a good decision.

6 Although when in desolation it's a bad idea to change your plans, it's a good idea to aggressively change the way you *respond* to desolation. Spend more time in prayer and meditation. Take a spiritual inventory. Engage in a spiritual exercise that addresses the situation.

APPENDIX

- **Discernment of Spirits: Overview**
- **Rules 1-14**
- **Rules 1-8**

7 Desolation is an opportunity for learning how to resist the enemy's attack and lean on the Lord in a new way. You may not feel the Lord's help, but it's still there. The spiritual fervor, abundant love and intense grace that used to carry you are gone – as if God took them away! – and it may feel like you're doing all the work, but there's still enough grace for you to move forward spiritually.

8 Work on being patient in desolation. Patience will ease the difficulties. Remember, too, that consolation will eventually come, especially as do your part to resist desolation. (See Rule 6)

9 Desolation comes for three different reasons. First, it can occur when you're passive or negligent with regard to pursuing life with God. Second, it can come as a part of God's plan to grow you, so that you learn to extend yourself to love and serve God without the consolation and kind of grace you normally rely on. Third, God can use it to help you realize better that the deeper devotion, intense love, sweet emotions and consolation you desire isn't something you yourself can produce. You come to realize that consolation is God's gift to you, and not something you can claim for yourself.

10 When you're in consolation, spend some time thinking about how you can respond better the next time you're in desolation, drawing on the strength of your present consolation.

11 When in consolation, stay humble. Remember how weak you feel in desolation, how unable you are to access the grace and consolation you currently enjoy. When in desolation, believe that God's grace, as meager as it seems in the moment, is more than enough to resist your darkest struggles as you take strength in your Creator and Lord.

12 The enemy is weak in the face of strength and strong in the face of weakness. Consequently, be persistent in your spiritual practices, confront the enemy's temptations firmly and directly, and do the exact opposite of what's proposed. The enemy will then vanish, and temptation will drop away. But if you lose heart and cave in to a temptation, you'll feel the redoubled force of the enemy's malice as he tries to take you completely under.

13 People having affairs desperately want to keep everything secret. They know that if their actions came to light, if that information were made public, everything would unravel. Likewise, the enemy wants you to keep quiet about your own temptations and fantasies. Make them public instead. Confess them to a spiritual person so they can't be secretly nurtured and acted on.

14 The enemy acts like the leader of an army intent on subduing and plundering a city. He'll explore every fortification and defense, trying to identify the weakest point in order to attack it. Likewise, the

APPENDIX

- **Discernment of Spirits: Overview**
- **Rules 1-14**
- **Rules 1-8**

enemy examines us, looking to attack the most underdeveloped virtue (e.g., faith, hope, love, courage, self-control, justice, prudence / wisdom), the area where we need God's help the most.

Rules 1-8 // Better Suited for Week Two

(rewritten in modern English by David Nixon)

- 1** God works in you to produce spiritual gladness and joy, removing sadness and turmoil produced by the enemy. The enemy of course fights against this with flimsy reasons, nuanced arguments and constant lies.
- 2** God alone has the power to give you instantaneous consolation. It comes as a gracious, unexpected gift, having nothing to do with your prior thoughts, actions and circumstances. This is the work of God as *Creator*, stirring up your love for him.
- 3** Both the Holy Spirit and the Enemy console you, but for opposite reasons and goals. The Holy Spirit does it for your spiritual well-being, so you can grow and always prosper. The Enemy does it for your spiritual detriment, hoping to eventually bend your will and actions toward evil.
- 4** The Enemy poses as an angel of light in order to get a foothold in you, leading to thoughts that on the surface seem completely spiritual. But in fact these thoughts are tailored to get your attention and eventually draw you toward his deceitful and perverse intentions.
- 5** Pay attention to the flow of your thoughts and feelings from beginning to end. If every part seems good and right, and if they lead toward a tangible good, it's a sign of the Holy Spirit. But if anything at all feels off or distracting or less than hoped for, if anything unsettles you or produces misgivings, diminishing the peace and resolution you had, it's a clear sign it comes from the Enemy.
- 6** When you determine the enemy has taken you down a false path, it's helpful to examine how you got there. Start from those first good thoughts and their accompanying spiritual sweetness. Trace them to the point where things moved in an unhealthy direction. This exercise will expose where you're vulnerable, and the awareness you gain will guard you in the future against a similar line of attack.
- 7** If you're moving toward God, the Holy Spirit's action in you feels light, sweet and gentle, like a drop of water falling on a sponge. The enemy's touch will feel heavy and upsetting, like water splattering on a stone. For those moving away from God, it's just the opposite: the enemy's action feels good and the Holy

APPENDIX

- Discernment of Spirits: Overview
- Rules 1-14
- Rules 1-8

Spirit's action feels bad. How you experience God's action or the enemy's depends entirely on your internal orientation.

8 When God gives you instant, unmediated consolation (see Rule 2 above), it's important to distinguish that from what follows. In the afterglow of spiritual consolation it's easy to assume that whatever thoughts, opinions and decisions you have are equally God-given. That would be a mistake. Take time to examine carefully your thoughts and intentions before giving credence to them and taking action.