

From the Ignatian Tradition

A PEDAGOGY OF CONSOLATION

Patrick Goujon

IN THE CASE OF SOMEONE wanting to make a decision, Ignatius seeks to strengthen that person's sense of freedom by releasing him or her from whatever might either be an obstacle or obscure relevant criteria. The ability to lead one's life well and to reach one's proper goal requires many factors to come into play: such as a proper appreciation of the surrounding circumstances; a channel to persons of experience; a clear-sighted capacity to anticipate events; and an ability to weigh up alternatives when preparing to make a choice. All three steps whereby a person deliberates, considers and consults require both rational and interpersonal skills, and also a certain tact and sensibility. Over time, one learns by experience and practice how to set about the process of coming to a decision. There are rules and these serve to remind how one has acted in the past and how to prepare for new contingencies. A person comes in this way to face up to the unexpected events that are constantly occurring in life. Ignatian advice is concerned less with saying what should be done than with giving help so that I can find that for which I am looking.

At times a problem may be considered in the light of prudence and moral principles. It may seem a matter of trying to find the right criteria in order to make a decision. I may wish to be able to operate freely in a situation where the circumstances seem far from clear. One might then ask whether the moral tradition is not sufficient without recourse to any spiritual considerations. Does the spiritual life have a role here? But, for Ignatius, the fact that I have the capacity to lead my own life is itself a gift of the Holy Spirit, an action of God in the life of a human being. It is thanks to God that I have this ability to use my own resources. As he explains in a 1552 letter to those sent on missions, there is the 'anointing of the Holy Spirit', and also, 'we contribute to it by reflection

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and careful observation'.¹ Thus if one's conduct relies on such reflection and careful observation, it also requires what can only be described as a spiritual aura, thanks to which both the affective and the rational are supported by the work of the Holy Spirit. Ignatius is hinting here at a *pedagogy of consolation*, in which it is possible to pick out the key features of his vision of what it is to be human.

Entering the Situation of the Person Seeking Help

The letters of Ignatius do not provide immediate entry into the words of advice he offers his correspondents. Rather, they invite the recipients to an active reading, which presumes an effort to understand what is being said. Likewise, we have to adopt a similar attitude when we read these letters. And although some information about external details can be useful in order to grasp the context, what is needed above all is attentiveness to the way in which the letter constructs the situation, how it understands it, and the roles it assigns to the recipient. It will then be possible to analyze the reaction that these words are expected to arouse.

Briefly, then, to suggest a method: let us say that, having received certain contextual information concerning the correspondent and the historical circumstances (the sort of information usually to be found in critical editions of the letters or in modern anthologies), an attempt has to be made to reveal how the letter deals with a specific situation.

To Alfonso Ramírez de Vergara²

My dear Sir in our Lord,

May the sovereign grace and eternal love of Christ our Lord always be our continual help and protection.

Through your own letter of February 4 and another from Father Francisco Villanueva, I have learned about your personal situation and your decision. As for commending you to God our Lord and having others do the same, I most willingly accept

¹ Ignatius to those sent on mission, 8 October 1552, in *Ignatius of Loyola, Letters and Instructions*, edited and translated by Martin E. Palmer, John W. Padberg and John L. McCarthy (St Louis: Institute of Jesuit Sources, 2006), 394.

² Ignatius to Alfonso Ramírez de Vergara, 30 March 1556, in *Ignatius of Loyola, Letters and Instructions*, 647–648; the French translation used by Patrick Goujon is available in *Ignace de Loyola. Écrits*, translated and edited by Maurice Giuliani, Collection Christus 76 (Paris: Desclée de Brouwer, 1991), 983–984.

the charge; for I wish for you—as I ought—not only every perfection but every consolation as well.

The means for relishing with the affection and carrying out with sweetness a course which reason dictates to be for God's greater service and glory is something that will be taught you by the Holy Spirit better than by anyone else. Of course, it is true that in pursuing what is better and more perfect, it suffices to be moved by reason, and the other movement, that of the will, even if it did not precede the decision and execution, can easily follow it, as God our Lord repays our trust in his providence, our complete self-abandonment, and our giving up of our own consolation by giving us a deep contentment and relish, and a spiritual consolation that is all the richer the less we aim at it and the more purely we seek his glory and will. May his infinite and supreme goodness deign to guide all our affairs as he sees will best lead to this end.

The business matters you have entrusted to me will be taken care of. Master Polanco will write more fully about this, and I refer you to him.

As for the other matters you discussed with Father Francis [Borgia] in Alcalá and about which Master Nadal brought a memorandum, I commend them to him confident that he will not fail to do whatever he can for your service and consolation.

May Christ our Lord give to all of us his grace always to know his most holy will and entirely to fulfil it.

Ignacio,

Rome, March 30, 1556

The historical situation is clear: Alfonso Ramírez de Vergara is a doctor in the University of Alcalá.³ He has indicated goodwill towards the Society and the desire to join as a member, but has put off making any decision. The final paragraphs refer to topics that will be dealt with not by Ignatius himself but in letters to be written by others, and as they have no relation with the main topic of the letter they can be omitted here. Taking into account how the problem is presented, one can work out how Ignatius sets about giving his advice. The ability to profit from this

³ This information is provided in the two translations mentioned.

advice depends on the relationship established between the two persons. In normal circumstances, the exchange of advice between two people assumes that this particular human activity is possible because there is an intelligence at work that is practical, reasonable and involves the affections.⁴

In order to appreciate this, one needs to look closely at the terms used. The best indication of the relationship between the correspondents comes from the use made of pronouns. A link is established between the first person ('I', the counsellor), the second ('you', the addressee), their eventual alliance ('we') or their remaining at a distance, and the possible intervention of a third person ('he') who, by definition, is absent from the present exchange but who indicates the possibility of the relationship widening. Although grammar allows a rough sketch of the persons involved, such people are embedded in their historical situation. They can take part in an epistolary relationship in accordance with factual historical links but also in accordance with the stipulations imposed by custom, where authority, respect, reverence may play a part. A letter to a brother is not written in the same way as one to a prince, and a letter to a brother in the twenty-first century will differ from one to a Basque brother of noble rank in the sixteenth.

Ignatius addresses himself to Vergara with the deference expected then towards a doctor of a university who comes from a noble family: *Mi Señor*.⁵ However, by adding the ecclesial 'in our Lord', Ignatius makes clear from the start what will be at the heart of this epistolary exchange: everything will be in relation to God, the *Lord* who is recognised by both correspondents. This is reinforced by the first person plural (*our*) which is immediately introduced in what seems a customary formula, but which sounds a constant background note in the letter.

In fact, Ignatius' salutation—'May the sovereign grace and eternal love of Christ our Lord always be our continual help and protection'—is far from being inserted as a mere religious formula: with these words, Ignatius and his correspondent are both shown to be recipients of the grace of Christ. By using the subjunctive formula of desire (a prayer for them both) Ignatius raises his correspondent to a plane where he is hoping Vergara would wish to be placed: ready to receive the help of God.

⁴ The affective range involved in the giving of advice has been studied by Alain Cugno, *La Blessure amoureuse. Essai sur la liberté affective* (Paris: Seuil, 2004).

⁵ The English translation (*Dear Sir*) fails to convey this aspect; the French (*Mon seigneur*) comes closer.

Even though such a formula is in common use, and has a place in the liturgical salutations, themselves inspired by the Pauline epistles, it should not be considered merely as a formal mark of respect or a simple way of establishing contact. Its effect is to set up the dynamic situation of a spiritual relationship. The dynamic element is worth noting because it is not as if fixed positions were being created by an affirmation (we are all recipients of the love of God) but a wish is expressed: the letter points to a situation where an exchange is awaited. The eventual outcome will depend on the desire of the correspondent, on what circumstances will allow, and ... on God.

Ignatius then points out why he is involved in a letter to this particular correspondent. He outlines briefly the preliminary circumstances: the topic raised, the previous letters, that of 4 February and one from someone else. The letters of Vergara have not survived, unfortunately; but two by Villanueva, to whom Vergara had explained his problem, have been found and published.⁶

Ignatius mentions that he is praying as requested (for the person and his decision) and has urged others to do likewise. He is thinking of Vergara not only in a first- and second-person relationship ('I' and 'you'), but also as someone (a 'he') who can be recommended to the prayers of others. He is doing the same as Villanueva had done when he wrote to Ignatius asking him to shed light on the wishes of Vergara. With his prayer, coming as it does as part of a fraternal exchange of goodwill and advice, Ignatius puts his correspondent in the position of someone destined to receive a gift from God. Thus the spirituality involved comes not simply from one side—the person giving the advice—but from the overall activity of the Spirit, working also through the recipient and acknowledged by the counsellor. It is the Spirit who is shared and circulates between them, and whose work is due to be revealed by means of a spiritual conversation.

The recipient's situation is made explicit by an affirmation ('[you] will be taught by the Holy Spirit better than by anyone else') to which a further clarification is added on the role of reason and the affections ('it is true that ...'). The fourth and fifth paragraphs mention matters that will not be dealt with in this letter, and the sixth concludes by returning to the situation announced in the first paragraph in the form

***The Spirit ...
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⁶ Francisco de Villanueva to Ignatius, 15 March 1554, MHSJ *Epistolae mixtae* 4, 98–101 (letter 777); Francisco de Villanueva to Ignatius, 31 December 1555, MHSJ *Epistolae mixtae* 5, 147–148 (letter 1078).

of a prayer: 'May Christ our Lord give to all of us his grace always to know his most holy will and entirely to fulfil it'.

The counsellor places his correspondent in the position of recipient of the grace of God, from whom he will receive any advice; but, in doing this, Ignatius not only refers to his individual life and his relation to God, but includes him in the common lot of all those baptized—who, in their spiritual life, pray for one another as they seek for grace. Thus, the means that the correspondent should use in order to make his decision are integral to the prayers and careful attention that we have for another.

The counsellor's role requires the establishment of a relationship which combines clarity and rigour with a gentleness that gives encouragement. One is reminded of the instructions about the use of these same virtues given to anyone who guides another in making the Spiritual Exercises:

If the giver of the Exercises sees that the exercitant is desolate and tempted, it is important not to be hard or curt with such a person but gentle and kind, to give courage and strength for the future, to lay bare the tricks of the enemy of human nature, and to encourage the exercitant to prepare and make ready for the consolation which is to come (Exx 7).⁷

A climate is created between the correspondent, the counsellor and God in the dealings that are to follow. The counsellor has to adapt in accordance with what he or she knows about the correspondent, and bring into play the ability to form a relationship. In this particular case, Ignatius makes it easier for Ramírez de Vergara to come to a decision which is in accordance with the Holy Spirit by assuring him of prayerful support in such a way that Vergara will be encouraged—both by the gentleness of the reassurance and the firm insistence that it is up to him now to undertake the task.

In the process of 'giving advice', the way that this is done is as important as the advice given. Nothing will be gained by formulating a piece of advice unless attention is given to the manner in which it is offered. Nor is it just a question of skilful rhetoric in its most limited

⁷ The translation used here is that of Michael Ivens, *The Spiritual Exercises of Saint Ignatius of Loyola* (Leominster: Gracewing, 2004), 4. One should note that the gentleness and kindness mentioned here, along with the severity and harshness that may appear in the Letters, have always to rest upon a fundamental 'goodwill' which is presupposed in the Exercises (Exx 22). Early rhetorical teaching put a similar stress on such qualities and in this respect converged with Renaissance moral teaching, indebted to both Aristotle and St Thomas. It is interesting to see how the practice of counselling drew on these different traditions.

sense. It is necessary to address the recipient in such a way that his or her situation can be altered, not just by the substance of what is said but by the fact that it is said *in this way*. ‘Words of advice are always accepted as true precisely because they never elucidate the reason why they are so: it is just because they are lived out that they become pertinent—not for themselves and in themselves.’⁸ It is this that allows advice to be repeated (what Ignatius says to Vergara could be said to someone else) and to have a fecundity without limits. Ignatius relies on the fact that his advice does not allow for contradiction: what is at work here by means of reason and emotions is the Holy Spirit.

The Advice: How to Set about Making a Decision

The next step is to examine the advice Ignatius gives to his correspondent:

The means for relishing with the affection and carrying out with sweetness a course which reason dictates to be for God’s greater service and glory is something what will be taught you by the Holy Spirit better than by anyone else. Of course, it is true that in pursuing what is better and more perfect, it suffices to be moved by reason, and the other movement, that of the will, even if it did not precede the decision and execution, can easily follow it, as God our Lord repays our trust in his providence, our complete self-abandonment, and our giving up of our own consolation by giving us a deep contentment and relish, and a spiritual consolation that is all the richer the less we aim at it and the more purely we seek his glory and will. May his infinite and supreme goodness deign to guide all our affairs as he sees will best lead to this end.

What is the problem that the advice is trying to solve? The opening lines indicate this clearly: how can Vergara carry out a decision which by reason he has recognised to be for the greater service and glory of God? So what is being sought is not reasoned knowledge of what has to be done, but rather a decision to carry out what is known. It is a problem of the ‘will’, that is to say, what it is that will allow Vergara to put a decision into practice. Ignatius is replying to a question that may be formulated as follows: how is Vergara to set about carrying out what his reason tells him is for the service of God?

In his reply, Ignatius will appeal to measures outlined in the *Spiritual Exercises*, while trying to show Vergara that his understanding of the

⁸ Cugno, *La Blesure amoureuse*, 26.

means for making a choice may cause problems. Thus, while having recourse to the spiritual principle that it is the Holy Spirit who will teach him how to carry out a decision recognised by reason, Ignatius points out a possible misunderstanding of the measures that his correspondent already knows. While Vergara is right to think that ‘reason alone may suffice’, he should be aware that ‘the movement of the will’ should not be disregarded. This distinction made by Ignatius between movements of reason and those of the will, and how they are articulated, calls for separate treatment before considering further the actual letter.

The Need for Such Movements

Thoughts that pass through the mind have an effect upon us: ideas, intentions, dreams, regrets and so on do not simply come into the mind as memories, realisations and proposals, which we accept in a narrative mode; but, at another level, they also touch us in different ways, for which Ignatius uses the term *mociones* (‘motions/movements’). He groups these together in binary fashion as joyful or sad. The two levels mentioned, one discursive and the other affective, suppose a distinction of great importance. This is seen in the account given by Ignatius of his own experience at Loyola, and anyone who gives the Exercises has to be attentive to it.

Ignatius recounts how he came to recognise in narrative mode two quite different ways of life opening before him: on the one hand, as he read the romances of chivalry he called to mind a certain lady and he felt



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Ignatius convalescing at Loyola, by Carlos Saenz de Tejada, mid-twentieth century

the wish to undertake works of gallantry in order to win her over. On the other hand, as he read the lives of saints he wanted to imitate their exploits and set off on the life of a pilgrim. But while he was aware of the two possibilities, knowing them did not help him resolve which to choose. A new stage came when he became aware of a different level: 'One time his eyes were opened a little, and he began to marvel at this difference in kind and to reflect on it, picking it up from experience that from some thoughts he would be left sad and from others happy'.⁹

In such cases, it is not the objective value or content of a project which is decisive in leading me to discover which should carry the day, but rather the feeling I get in each case. A reaction of joy will be interpreted as a sign coming from God, whereas one of sadness will point to the demon. As Ignatius notes, it is when he began 'to marvel' at this difference in kind, and to reflect on it, that he became aware and intelligence began to dawn; however, this was not enough. So far only the foundation had been laid, thanks to which he could be guided in choosing a form of life that sought to serve God alone. Annotation 6 in the *Spiritual Exercises* instructs the one who gives them that it is about these 'motions/movements' that a careful inquiry is needed:

When the giver of the Exercises becomes aware that the exercitant is not being affected by any spiritual movements, such as consolations and desolations, and it is not agitated by various spirits, the exercitant should be questioned closely about the exercises, as to whether they are being made at their appointed times, and in what way, and similarly as to whether the additions are being carefully followed. The giver should inquire in detail about each of these points. (Exx 6)

The letter to Vergara clearly presumes that he will be someone who becomes aware of such movements and that he will reflect on them. And yet something more is needed.

A Direction to Life

The advice that Ignatius is giving relies on the work that God is doing 'by giving a deep contentment and relish, and a spiritual consolation that is all the richer the less we aim at it and the more purely we seek his glory and will'. Such advice gives great importance to 'consolation'. Why should this be so?

⁹ *Autobiography*, n.8.

The account given in the *Autobiography*, which lays such stress on the contrast between sadness and happiness, runs the danger of limiting attention to these psychological effects rather than to the direction in which they are pointing: a better understanding of the sort of life Ignatius should be leading. Here, the definitions given in the *Spiritual Exercises* of the two types of movement provide much light:

Lastly, I give the name 'consolation' to every increase of hope, faith and charity, to all interior happiness which calls and attracts to heavenly things and to the salvation of one's soul, leaving the soul quiet and at peace in her Creator and Lord. (Exx 316)

On spiritual desolation. 'Desolation' is the name I give to everything contrary to what is described in Rule Three; for example, darkness and disturbance in the soul, attraction to what is low and of the earth, disquiet arising from various agitations and temptations. All this leads to a lack of confidence in which one feels oneself to be without hope and without love. One finds oneself thoroughly lazy, lukewarm, sad, and as though cut off from one's Creator and Lord. (Exx 317)

The vocabulary used to describe these interior motions/movements is a dynamic one. An 'increase', on the one hand, 'calls and attracts'; and the effect is one of 'peace and quiet' (a doublet typical of Ignatius' literary style). On the other hand, some 'agitations' cause 'a lack of confidence'. More important than the feeling as such is the movement that is set in motion. It is the direction of that movement, rather than the feeling, that is crucial. In fact, as Ignatius makes quite explicit with regard to consolation, the feeling one receives may be pain and a desire to weep; nevertheless it is consolation that is present,

... when a person sheds tears which lead to the love of our Lord, whether these arise from grief over sins, or over the passion of Christ our Lord, or because of other reasons immediately directed towards his service and praise. (Exx 316)

Thanks to the feeling, the retreatant finds his or her heart open, and does not linger on the feeling itself but looks at the inner polarisation and orientation towards God.

The characteristic of consolation is the love which one has for God and for all that exists simply because it comes from God:

I use the word 'consolation' when any interior movement is produced in the soul which leads her to become inflamed with the love of her

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Creator and Lord, and when as a consequence, there is no creature on the face of the earth that the person can love in itself, but they love it in the Creator and Lord of all things. (Exx 316)

Desolation, on the contrary, separates one from God: as Ignatius describes it: 'One feels oneself to be without hope and without love. One finds oneself thoroughly lazy, lukewarm, sad, and as though cut off from one's Creator and Lord.' (Exx 317) Note how the soul is not really separated, but it is 'as though' that were true. Desolation thrives on a lack of confidence in God and in all that feeds God into our inner lives. The most radical of all temptations is to think that God does not want to have anything to do with us: this runs counter to what God says about Godself and to what God is accomplishing: making a covenant with us.

My life can be polarised in relation to only one direction and that direction is God: either towards or away from God. Once again, Ignatius requires an act of faith. In his writings, God is 'Creator and Lord': God alone creates and call to life. The Contemplation to Attain Love will be even more explicit in its invitation to consider all the good that comes from God. God governs and directs in so far as God is Lord. God alone is the one whose will is always done perfectly.

It is characteristic of God and his angels in the movements prompted by them to give true gladness and spiritual joy, while banishing all the sadness and distress brought on by the enemy, whose characteristic it is to fight against this joy and spiritual consolation by bringing forward specious arguments, subtleties and one fallacy after another. (Exx 329)

Ignatius is well aware of the spiritual combat, but he does not see in it a symmetry between the opposing forces, as if they were equal: God on the one hand and the enemy of human nature on the other.

Ignatius holds that the human being is destined for joy. As first principle of the Exercises he writes that 'the human person is created to praise' (Exx 23). The joy of praise is not that of someone who takes pleasure at others' expense; it is rather the joy of one who rejoices in oneself. In my rejoicing there is a division between myself and the object that gives me joy. Joy in the case of consolation expands so that I become capable of finding joy in all things. It is not that I own whatever gives the joy: it is all a gift. Such joy is possible for the person who lives in freedom, quite independent of anything that alienates one. In virtue of that freedom, I have the capacity to make and to carry out a deliberate decision. This leads us back to the letter of Ignatius to Vergara.

Confirmation Given by the Spirit

So far we have pointed out the ideas with which Ignatius is working in his reply to Vergara. His advice has been only about the way to make a final decision. Vergara was aware, by weighing up the pros and cons, what decision he thought he ought to take. It is worth examining in detail what steps the *Spiritual Exercises* recommend. A retreatant is invited to consider in successive stages the advantages and disadvantages for and against a particular choice. Then, once they have been examined:

The Fifth Point. Having in this way thought and reasoned from every point of view on the thing before me, I shall look to see in which direction reason inclines more. It is thus according to the stronger inclination of the reason, and not according to the inclinations of sensuality that the decision on the matter before me is reached. (Exx 182)

Ignatius thinks that his correspondent has found out in which direction his reason is pointing but, on the other hand, he feels uneasy that Vergara does not seem to have experienced any movement of the will, that complete assent whereby a decision can be put into practice. As the *Spiritual Exercises* specify:

The First Time. When God our Lord so moves and attracts the will that without doubting or being able to doubt, the faithful soul follows what is shown, just as St Paul and St Matthew did when they followed Christ our Lord. (Exx 175)

If the deliberation with the use of reason should not be confused with the identification of what one chooses to do (Exx 182), the decision as such is still not the same as its being put into practice. Ignatius has a further clarification: he points out what he calls the stage of ‘confirmation’:

After such an election or decision has been made, the person who made it should turn with great diligence to prayer, coming before God our Lord, and offering him this election, so that his Divine Majesty may be pleased to accept and confirm it, if it is to his greater service and praise. (Exx 183)

In his letter, Ignatius explains to Vergara about this confirmation: ‘[this] is something that will be taught you by the Holy Spirit better than by anyone else’. In other words, the joy that is felt on being confirmed in some decision where a person desires to give him- or herself entirely, and



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Ignatius and his First Companions rejoice after making their vows, by Carlos Saenz de Tejada, mid-twentieth century

the peace that comes as one takes up such a project, are not gained by oneself. By pointing out that they are the work of the Holy Spirit, Ignatius is showing at the same time that they are not under the control of the person, nor of the adviser. The confirmation that allows the execution to take place is something that brings peace and comfort; it is a grace. It can be recognised by its aura of peace and joy. Such confirmation of a decision enters as consolation. Feeling, reflection, confirmation: these are the three beats in the spiritual rhythm that distinguishes life in the Spirit.¹⁰

Such joy will be all the more a clear and certain sign in so far, writes Ignatius, as we have given up looking for 'our own consolation':

... as God our Lord repays our trust in his providence, our complete self-abandonment, and our giving up of our own consolation by giving us a deep contentment and relish, and spiritual consolation that is all the richer the less we aim at it and the more purely we seek his glory and will.

The search for consolation, and even the close attention given to it as a guide in the spiritual life, could make a person become self-enclosed. In that case, consolation may bolster my self-satisfaction and, through

¹⁰ See Maurice Giuliani, *L'Accueil du temps qui vient. Études sur saint Ignace de Loyola* (Namur: Lessius, 2015).

the delight I find in it, cease to be true to itself. In place of it supporting and nourishing me in my spiritual life, I make of it an object of comfort, in which, as Ignatius says, we 'build our nest' (Exx 322).¹¹

Even the longing for a sign of confirmation can become an obstacle if it takes precedence over the decision that I should be making. Ignatius was all too aware of this, as his *Spiritual Diary* bears witness. Any longed-for sign does not absolve me from facing the risk required and taking the first step, by making the decision that I see needed, even if I feel I am stepping into the dark. Only the unimpeded movement of my freedom can lead me towards joy. God guides me to it provided that the only thing I try to do is what I have identified as the service of God for his greater glory. In other words, I am not trying to serve any other purpose.

The pedagogy of consolation leads straight to the heart of the gospel faith: Jesus declared, 'strive for his kingdom and these things will be given to you as well' (Luke 12:31), to free his disciples from any anxiety about how they were to live. The peace for which all are looking comes with an act of confidence in the goodness of God. This requires that no good thing be wanted for itself; its existence is wanted only because it is seen to be good. Such is the one and only source of joy.¹² In this it has its place in the creative will of God: God 'saw that it was good' and rejoiced over the work thus granted to humanity.

The substance of the advice Ignatius is giving consists of a presentation of the rules by means of which the correspondent who seeks help is enabled to act. Ignatius takes him to be a responsible agent whose sense of freedom needs to be confirmed, and he outlines exactly what the correspondent's position should be thanks to the advice given. Thus the roles of each with regard to what should be done are clearly delineated. The counsellor's tone has to be such that the advice given does not become an impediment to what is needed. However, this way of offering words of advice and envisaging how they are to be received is by no means limited to formulating a method, no matter what precautions are taken to ensure that the one invited to accept the advice is in a proper state of mind.

¹¹ Ignatius points out in this Rule of Discernment that there are three causes of desolation. The third is to warn us that consolation does not depend on us, 'so we are not to build our nest where we do not belong, becoming elated in mind to the point of pride and vainglory, and putting down to our own account devotion or other forms of spiritual consolation'.

¹² See Michel de Certeau, 'L'Espace du désir ou le "fondement" des *Exercices spirituels*', in *Le Lieu de l'autre. Histoire religieuse et mystique* (Paris: Gallimard/Seuil/Hautes Études, 2005), 239 and 247.

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The conviction that the correspondent is able to decide for himself and put that decision into effect is founded on the trust that it is God who will teach the person how to act, not by standing in for the person but in the interaction that is described in the letter. The certainty that God acts in this way is made clear with the first words of the letter; this is a greeting in the form of a prayer. God's help appears as consolation. This is not a final assent to what reason has come to recognise by its deliberation, but rather that internal echoing which Ignatius teaches how to interpret by paying attention to the interior movements. What happens in the process of deliberation and decision-making, and is hoped for as a confirmation, is actually going on all through the course of the work of clarification. The feeling one has—what makes up an interior movement and is not simply an agitation, but has a direction—is shown to be a means of interpreting God's aid. It is quite independent of the process of deliberation as such. It springs from the interplay of thoughts, reasons, wishes and their echoes. In these movements, whatever leads to joy allows a person to understand what Ignatius recognises as coming from God. The image one forms of how best to lead a prudent life is built on a vision of God as an interior help. The area of one's affections is where, not without the effort of prayer and penance, things happen in the lives of human beings.¹³

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translated by Joseph A. Munitiz SJ

¹³ This article is chapter 3 of Patrick Goujon's book, *Les Conseils de l'Ésprit. Lire les lettres d'Ignace de Loyola* (Namur: Lessius, 2017), 43–60.