

A Comparative Study of Ignatius of Loyola and John of the Cross

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Introduction

This research compares some aspects of the spiritual teachings of Ignatius of Loyola and John of the Cross. The motivations are as follows:

Firstly, there are some apparent contradictions in their major teachings. It would be problematic from the perspective of spiritual theology if the two of the greatest spiritual masters who are from the same era with the same cultural background were to contradict each other.

Secondly, the apparent contradictions pose a particular challenge to spiritual directors because different responses to consolation and desolation have different consequences. A wrong response would be detrimental to spiritual growth.

Thirdly, the role of the laity in the life of the Church has been gaining prominence in the twentieth century, and the Church has continuously highlighted the importance of spiritual direction and accompaniment for the laity, especially with regard to discernment.¹

I will provide a comparison of the two spiritual masters as follows. In the first part, I will present the apparent contradictions, and in the second part, I will seek convergences. Finally, in the third part, I will analyze the studies of other authors in reference to our topic. The main source materials are *the Spiritual Exercises*² for Ignatius and *the Ascent of Mount Carmel* and *the Dark Night*³ for John.

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¹ E.g. JOHN PAUL II, «Post-Synodal Apostolic Exhortation *Christifideles Laici*», 31 and 58; FRANCIS, «Apostolic Exhortation *Evangelii Gaudium*», 171.

² IGNATIUS OF LOYOLA, «The Spiritual Exercises»; hereafter referenced as 'SE [paragraph number]'; IGNACIO DE LOYOLA, *Obras de San Ignacio de Loyola*.

³ JOHN OF THE CROSS, «The Ascent of Mount Carmel», hereafter referenced as 'AS [book number], [chapter number], [article number]'; JOHN OF THE CROSS, «The Dark Night», hereafter referenced as 'DN [book number], [chapter number], [article number]'; JUAN DE LA CRUZ, *Obras completas*.

1. The apparent contradictions

The first of the major seeming contradictions is the understanding of God. Ignatius recounts how “he was quite sure ... [he was] always growing in devotion, i.e. in facility in finding God, and now more than ever in his whole life; and every time and hour he wanted to find God, he found Him.”⁴ This experience gave rise to the spiritual maxim of ‘God is to be found in everything,’ which has come to characterize the Ignatian spirituality. This is the perspective of the *via positiva*, which highlights God’s immanence. In contrast, John teaches: “God’s being cannot be grasped by the intellect, appetite, imagination, or any other sense; nor can it be known in this life.”⁵ In other words, God is utterly different from creation. This is the perspective of the *via negativa*, which highlights God’s transcendence.

It is not surprising that Ignatius encourages seeking spiritual consolation⁶ since it comes either from God or the good spirit, while John discourages paying any attention to it, even if it were to come from God.⁷ Ignatius characterizes desolation as something undesirable, as it comes from the bad spirit.⁸ But John seems to show preference for desolation.⁹ Although there is passivity in ‘not making any changes to decisions made during the preceding time of consolation,’ Ignatius wants to fight off desolation by activism.¹⁰ John criticizes such advice and gives exactly the opposite advice.¹¹ Ignatius promotes discernment,¹² and the giver of the Spiritual Exercises must not sway the retreatant one way or another.¹³ In contrast, John discourages making judgments, lest the soul becomes deceived.¹⁴ The directee must trust the director’s command rather than one’s own feelings.¹⁵

For Ignatius, using the faculties of intellect, memory, and will is important. Thus, he encourages discursive meditation, recollection, and imagination in prayer.¹⁶ On the other hand, John emphasizes the need for the purification of the faculties of the soul because otherwise the soul may all too easily be led astray by the devil or by its own weaknesses.¹⁷

⁴ IGNATIUS OF LOYOLA, «Reminiscences (Autobiography)», 99; hereafter referenced as ‘AU [page number].’

⁵ AS II, 4, 4.

⁶ Cf. SE 318 and 330.

⁷ Cf. AS II, 11, 5.

⁸ Cf. SE 318.

⁹ Cf. AS I,13,6; JOHN OF THE CROSS, «The Sayings of Light and Love», 14.

¹⁰ Cf. SE 319.

¹¹ E.g. see DN I, 9, 6-7.

¹² Cf. SE 313.

¹³ Cf. SE 15.

¹⁴ Cf. AS 3,8,5

¹⁵ E.g. AS II, 26, 11.

¹⁶ E.g. SE 50-52.

¹⁷ Cf. AS II, 26, 17.

Discursive meditation may be useful for beginners, but after a certain point it becomes unhelpful.¹⁸ He prefers the way of infused contemplation instead.¹⁹

The last – but perhaps most significant – difference is the fact that Ignatius does not seem to mention anything like the dark nights of purification that John describes at great length. John says one cannot reach the summit of the spiritual life without purgation.²⁰

2. Seeking convergences

The apparent differences may seem considerable. Nonetheless, the theological fact that God's immanence and transcendence are one in Jesus Christ is a ready indication that the Ignatian spirituality and the Johannine spirituality are complementary. The historical fact of John's education at the University of Salamanca is also noteworthy; it is reasonable to speculate that John had been influenced by Ignatius who had passed away only three years before John entered the Jesuit university. Furthermore, the fact that Teresa of Avila received spiritual direction from the Jesuits indicates a certain compatibility or a common ground between the Ignatian and Carmelite schools of spirituality.

2.1 A word analysis

To find areas of convergence in the spiritual teachings of Ignatius and John, it is imperative to analyse some of the keywords that they use in their works. I focus on three keywords: 'consolation,' 'desolation,' and 'devil.'

2.1.1 'Consolation'

For Ignatius, the meaning of consolation is clear, as he gives a definition for it.²¹ One gains further understanding by considering the rules of discernment suitable for the First Week²² and for the Second Week.²³ Ignatius uses the word *consolación* 31 times in SE and does not use the word *consuelo* at all.

John uses both *consuelo* and *consolación* in AS and DN. *Consuelo* is used 22 times in AS and 24 times in DN, while *consolación* is used only twice and once, respectively.²⁴ Also, it is important to recognize that John often uses the word 'consolation' in conjunction with other related words. For example, John's diagram of Mount Carmel lists

¹⁸ Cf. AS II, 7, 8.

¹⁹ Cf. AS II, 24, 8.

²⁰ E.g. DN II, 10, 4.

²¹ Cf. SE 316.

²² Cf. SE 313-327.

²³ Cf. SE 328-336.

²⁴ I will use the format '[word] ([translation]); x[the number of occurrences in AS] x[the number of occurrences in DN]' hereafter.

gloria (glory; x46 x8), *poseer* (possession; x13 x8), *gozo* (joy; x26 x25), *saber* (knowledge; x177 x73), and *descanso* (rest; x12 x0) as closely related concepts. There are more in the general body of the text: *gusto* (pleasure; x132 x120), *sabor* (taste or delight; x43 x56), *paz* (peace; x35 x26), *deleite* (delight; x36 x16), and *suavidad* (sweetness; x18 x8).

It is noteworthy that *consuelo* is not among the most used words in John's vocabulary. It seems that in making his arguments, John prefers to use other words and concepts, such as *gusto*, *sabor*, *paz*, and *gozo*. Coupled with the fact that Ignatius does not use the term *consuelo* at all, it seems that for John the word 'consolation' refers to *one among many* related concepts, unlike how it connotes a *central* idea for Ignatius.

Also, the high usage of the term *gusto* or 'pleasure' may be indicative of where John's concern lies. It is the 'liking' of things²⁵ that John seems to warn against. In the final analysis, it is the pleasurable element in things, which often attracts the soul to commit sin and draws her away from God.

2.1.2 'Desolation'

The difference in the usage of the term 'desolation' between Ignatius and John is even more glaring. Ignatius gives his definition of the term²⁶ along with the Rules regarding it.²⁷ He uses the word *desolación* 19 times in SE.

John does not use *desolación* at all. He uses other words, which are sometimes translated as 'desolation' in English: *desabrigo* (uncovering; x0 x1); *desamparo* (helpless or deserted; x5 x8)²⁸; and *desconsuelo* (grief or distress; x4 x1). It is noteworthy that John contrasts *consuelo* with *desconsuelo*, not with *desolación*.²⁹ The three words related to *desolación* are seldom used, which is indicative of the fact that John does not see desolation as the counter concept of consolation as Ignatius does.

John uses a lot the word *noche* (night; x157 x 199). But the night cannot be the counter concept of *consuelo*, as the night consists of four stages (of sense and of spirit, and each active or passive), clearly much more elaborate than an interior sentiment. Also, John often uses the words *desnudez* (nudity; x89 x26) and *purgación* (purgation; x17 x65) as words related to the night, which convey a different sense than Ignatius' desolation.

It should also be noted that the word 'night' is not a descriptive term like consolation or desolation; rather, it is a metaphor, a poetic metaphor. Correspondingly, the interpretive lens for understanding John's use of night should include that of poetry, not just that of prose. It suffices for the scope of this article to state that night as a poetic metaphor conveys an ampler sense with a greater phenomenological scope than the

²⁵ The right context in which to understand the 'liking' is Hebrews 11:25, i.e. "the fleeting pleasures of sin."

²⁶ Cf. SE 317.

²⁷ Cf. SE 318-329, 331-336.

²⁸ Other forms of this word *desamparo*, such as *desamparado/a*, *desamparó*, and *desamparando* are part of the count.

²⁹ "Procure siempre inclinarse ... no a lo que es consuelo, sino antes al desconsuelo" (AS I, 13, 6).

descriptive term ‘desolation.’ One might say that it conveys more the sense of a *phase* than an interior sentiment.³⁰

2.1.3 ‘Devil’

Both Ignatius and John make numerous references to the devil in the context of discernment of spirits. Ignatius uses the word ‘devil’ (*demonio*; x2) and ‘Lucifer’ (*Lucifer*; x3) but prefers the word ‘enemy’ (*enemigo*; x37). ‘Enemy’ appears mainly in the Rules of Discernment³¹ and in discussing Scruples considered as “insinuation.”³² Furthermore, Ignatius refers to ‘the bad/evil spirit’ (*el mal espíritu*; x2), ‘the bad’ (*el malo*; x5), ‘the bad angel’ (*el ángel malo*; x2), and ‘the evil leader’ (*el mal caudillo*; x5) all in direct contrast with ‘the good angel’ (*el buen espíritu*). Most of these appear in the Rules of Discernment and in the Two Standards.³³ Hence, it is clear that the main context in which Ignatius considers the devil is discernment of spirits.

John seldom refers to *el mal espíritu* or *el ángel malo* (x2 x3) and never uses the word *caudillo*. Instead, John makes frequent use of the word ‘devil’ (*demonio*; x199 x45). In AS, he uses the word ‘enemy’ (*enemigo*; x20) mainly in referring to human enemies (e.g. those of Samson and Solomon). However, in DN, he uses the same word in a spiritual sense (x23), i.e. ‘the three enemies’ of ‘the world, the devil, and the flesh.’³⁴ Among the three enemies, the devil is “the mightiest and most astute enemy.”³⁵ These findings highlight not only the fact that the devil is a major concern for John but also the fact that John took great care in explaining discernment of spirits. His concern is especially prominent in Book II and III of AS, which are about the ‘active night of the spirit.’ The word ‘devil’ appears in almost every page, and John gives just as much emphasis on ways to avoid the devil’s deception as on the need for detachment and purification. This emphasis establishes the context of discernment of spirits in John’s doctrine.

2.2 A content analysis

Although Ignatius and John do not mean the same things when they use the words ‘consolation’ and ‘desolation,’ the existence of the context of discernment of spirits in John’s doctrine strongly suggests the existence of equivalent notions of consolation and desolation in his doctrine. Indeed, a content analysis on the teachings of Ignatius and John reveals that they are in much agreement in this regard. Both men discuss a spiritual movement from God or a good angel and a counter-movement from the devil. They explain the

³⁰ This point corroborates the idea that the dark night is diachronic, unlike spiritual desolation which is synchronic, as discussed in Section 3.4.

³¹ E.g. SE 314-334.

³² E.g. SE 345-350.

³³ E.g. SE 138-139.

³⁴ E.g. DN I, ‘Explanation’, 2.

³⁵ Cf. DN II, 21, 4.

subtle dynamics of these two types of spiritual communication and the ways to distinguish them. There is a remarkable resemblance on consolation (as well as on its sub-notion ‘consolation without cause’), desolation, and discernment of spirits in both authors.

Yet, the ‘dark night’ remains a foreign concept for Ignatius. This fact begs the question of how Ignatius would have been purified, which must have happened given his sanctity. Ignatius’ writings suggest some possibilities, such as ‘purification by obedience’ and ‘purification by discernment,’ which seem to find some resonance in John’s writings.

2.2.1 *Consolation and desolation*

Ignatius describes spiritual consolation as “any interior movement produced in the soul that leads her to become inflamed with love of her Creator and Lord.” As a consequence, “there is no created thing on the face of the earth that we can love in itself, but we love it only in the Creator of all things.” Tears may arise “from grief over one’s sins, or over the Passion of Christ Our Lord, or over other things expressly directed towards His service and praise.” Also, consolation refers to “every increase of hope, faith, and charity, to all interior happiness that calls and attracts a person towards heavenly things and to the soul’s salvation, leaving the soul quiet and at peace in her Creator and Lord.”³⁶

Spiritual desolation is “everything contrary” to spiritual consolation, including “darkness and disturbance in the soul, attraction towards what is low and of the earth, anxiety arising from various agitations and temptations.” It leads one to “a lack of confidence in which the soul is without hope and without love.” In this state, one finds oneself “thoroughly lazy, lukewarm, sad, and as though cut off from one’s Creator and Lord.” Further, “the thoughts born of consolation are contrary to the thoughts born of desolation.”³⁷

Consolation and desolation are spiritual influences of the good spirit and the bad spirit: “For just as in consolation, it is more the good spirit who guides and counsels us, so in desolation it is the bad spirit, and by following his counsels we can never find the right way.”³⁸ The bad spirit, too, can give consolation but for the purpose of “[drawing] the person into his own evil intention and wickedness.”³⁹ For example, the bad spirit “proposes good and holy thoughts well adapted to [the devoted soul], and then little by little succeeds in getting what he wants, drawing the soul into his hidden snares and his perverted purposes.”⁴⁰

These two contrary movements described by Ignatius find corresponding counterparts in John’s treatise on the active night of the spirit. With regard to visions and inner locutions in particular,⁴¹ John describes a spiritual movement that leads the soul towards

³⁶ SE 316.

³⁷ SE 317.

³⁸ SE 318.

³⁹ SE 331.

⁴⁰ SE 332.

⁴¹ Ignatius’ understanding of consolation and desolation certainly include visions and locutions, e.g. AU 19-20.

God and a contrary-movement that leads the soul away from God. John notes that the devil can produce a movement that may seem good to the soul but nevertheless leads to a bad end. Just as Ignatius defines desolation as the contrary movement to consolation, John teaches that these spiritual influences of the devil are of the same type (i.e. species) as those of the good angel but with different effects. “If a person receives true visions from the good angel, God permits the bad angel to represent false ones of the same kind.”⁴²

Regarding visions, John remarks on the good movement: “The effects these visions produce in the soul are: quietude, illumination, happiness resembling that of glory, delight, purity, love, humility, and an elevation and inclination toward God.”⁴³ The devil, too, can produce visions in the soul “through spiritual suggestion and by means of a certain natural light.”⁴⁴ The way to tell the difference is by looking at the produced effects. The devil’s visions “produce spiritual dryness⁴⁵ in one’s communion with God and an inclination to self-esteem.”⁴⁶ In other words, they move the soul away from God.

Regarding locutions, John explains that they can originate from any of the following three causes: “the divine Spirit, who moves and illumines the intellect; the natural light of the intellect; and the devil, who may speak to it by suggestion.”⁴⁷ The ‘divine Spirit’ refers to the Holy Spirit.⁴⁸ Nonetheless, the locutions may come also from the good spirit.⁴⁹ The locutions that come from the devil are sometimes difficult to discern, but they produce false virtues.⁵⁰

It is important to realize that the Ignatian consolation and desolation can be understood primarily in terms of the *effects* produced by the sentiments (i.e. moving the soul either towards or away from God), not of the *affective content* of the sentiments. Jules Toner explains Ignatius’ consolation in terms of three related parts: *content* (feeling such as peace), *source* (cause such as God), and *consequence* (effect such as being moved towards God).⁵¹ Nevertheless, content by itself cannot be a defining characteristic of consolation, as the devil, too, can produce consoling feelings, as both saints note. We

⁴² DN II, 23, 7.

⁴³ AS II, 24, 6.

⁴⁴ AS II, 24, 7.

⁴⁵ Ignatius does not include dryness in his list of experiences of desolation. However, Timothy Gallagher notes that Ignatius’ *Autograph Directory*, Polanco’s directory, Miró’s directory, *the Official Directory*, and *the Short Directory* all include dryness in the description of desolation (cf. T.M. GALLAGHER, *Setting captives free*, 76).

⁴⁶ AS II, 24, 7.

⁴⁷ AS 2, 29, 11.

⁴⁸ “When together with the words and concepts the soul is loving God and simultaneously experiencing this love with humility and reverence, we have an indication that the Holy Spirit is at work within it” (*ibidem*).

⁴⁹ “In the locutions arising from the good spirit this aridity is not felt” (*Ibidem*).

⁵⁰ “They leave the will in dryness as to the love of God, and the intellect inclined toward vanity and self-esteem or complacency; still, they can bring about a false humility and a fervent tendency of the will rooted in self-love” (*Ibidem*).

⁵¹ Cf. J.J. TONER, *A commentary on saint Ignatius’ Rules for the discernment of spirits*, 86.

have seen that a high degree of resemblance is found between Ignatius' understanding of consolation and John's understanding of the good movement in terms of source and consequence. Thus, the comparison between the two understandings primarily in terms of source and consequence (or 'effects' for short, as consequence is determined by source) has a reasonable basis.

2.2.2 *Consolation without cause*

For Ignatius there are two types of consolation: consolation with or without preceding cause. Consolation with cause is mediated and given by the good or the bad angel.⁵² It is spiritual consolation proper when it is from the good angel; it is a counterfeit when it is from the bad angel.⁵³ Consolation without cause is unmediated and comes directly from God. The Creator may enter and leave the soul, arouse movements which draw her entirely into love of His Divine Majesty.⁵⁴ In this there can be no deception.⁵⁵

Similarly, John affirms a divine communication that comes directly from God, which reaches the depth of the soul. Regarding the knowledge about the Creator, i.e. in the active night of the spirit, John describes "the touch of knowledge and delight that penetrates the substance of the soul."⁵⁶ This knowledge "tastes of the divine essence and of eternal life." It is so sublime that "the devil is unable to meddle or produce anything similar."⁵⁷ In the passive night of the spirit, too, there are occasions "when God visits the soul directly ... [and] the soul is in total darkness and concealment as far as the enemy is concerned."⁵⁸

John further elaborates on the 'substantial' dimension of this divine communication in his treatise on interior words. John describes the effects of the substantial locution as follows:

If our Lord should say formally to the soul, 'Be good,' it would immediately be substantially good; or if he should say, 'Love me,' it would at once have and experience within itself the substance of the love of God; or if he should say to a soul in much fear, 'Do not fear,' it would without delay feel great fortitude and tranquility.⁵⁹

As mentioned earlier, this communication is off-limits to the devil. But there is an exception. If the soul "has surrendered itself to [the devil] by a voluntary pact,"⁶⁰ then

⁵² Cf. SE 331.

⁵³ Cf. SE 332.

⁵⁴ Cf. SE 330.

⁵⁵ Cf. SE 336.

⁵⁶ AS II, 26, 5.

⁵⁷ *Ibidem*.

⁵⁸ DN II, 23, 11.

⁵⁹ AS II, 31, 1.

⁶⁰ A 'voluntary pact' with the devil can be either implicit or explicit. John seems to suggest that an implicit pact can be made by having 'inclination or affection' towards spiritual communications from the devil (cf. AS II, 11, 7; II, 29, 10).

the devil “could easily impress in it the evil effects of his locutions and words.”⁶¹ This exception to the rule about the substantial communication has some resemblance to Ignatius’ caution about consolation without cause. Even in the case of consolation without cause, the person “must scrutinize the experience carefully and attentively,” for “we may form various plans and opinions that are not directly given to us by God” in the period following the time of the actual consolation.⁶²

Whether or not the substantial communication can happen only in the very advanced stage of the spiritual life seems to me like an open question. On the one hand, John says the substantial communication is “the highest degree of prayer.”⁶³ Also, he teaches that “two contraries cannot coexist in the same subject.”⁶⁴ On the other hand, the fact that John mentions it also in the active night of the spirit⁶⁵ suggests that at least it may happen as early as that. Also, the fact John maintains that the devil could attack still in the sensory part in the case of a pre-existing, voluntary pact, suggests the soul may not be in such an advanced state.

Yet another possibility might be found in considering a different development model altogether. For instance, rather than being strictly considered as belonging to ‘the unitive stage’ for ‘the perfect,’ perhaps the substantial touch could be understood as a transformative, transcendental experience, which reportedly could occur even before having an explicit conversion to the Christian faith.⁶⁶

Would Ignatius think consolation without cause can happen at any stage during the spiritual journey? He makes no indication either way in the definition he gives. Nevertheless, the fact that his mystical experience in Manresa took place in a relatively early stage of his spiritual journey would suggest an affirmative answer.

2.2.3 *Discernment of spirits*

There are a number of teachings from John that correspond to Ignatius’ rules for discernment of spirits. For instance, John writes, “The diabolical communications can only arouse the first movements without being able to move the will any further if it is unwilling to be moved”; it is “the individual’s lack of courage and caution” that will permit the unrest to continue.⁶⁷ This recalls how Ignatius describes the behavior of the enemy as a woman in a quarrel with a man.⁶⁸ The enemy weakens and loses courage when the soul shows a bold front; the enemy gains strength when the soul begins to be afraid and loses courage.

⁶¹ AS II, 31, 2.

⁶² Cf. SE 336.

⁶³ DN II, 23, 11.

⁶⁴ AS I, 4, 2.

⁶⁵ Cf. AS II, 26, 5.

⁶⁶ Cf. R. ZAS FRIZ DE COL, *La presenza trasformante del mistero*, 24-27.

⁶⁷ AS II, 11, 6.

⁶⁸ Cf. SE 325.

John teaches that the spiritual influences from God and the devil work differently depending on the state of the soul. For example, when the soul becomes attached to the spiritual goods,

God will gradually withdraw them. ... The devil then inserts and increases his communications, since he finds an opening for them. ... When a humble and dispossessed soul renounces and opposes these representations, God will augment his favours and give better ones.⁶⁹

This is similar to how Ignatius teaches that the good spirit and the bad spirit change their tactics depending on the state of the soul. For the soul that moves from bad to worse, “the enemy holds out to them apparent pleasures,” while the good spirit “uses the opposite procedure, causing pricks of conscience.” For the soul that moves from good to better, the bad spirit harasses, saddens and obstructs so as to impede progress, while the good spirit gives courage and strength.⁷⁰ Similarly, John teaches that in a person who has a vain desire to speak of spiritual things in the presence of others, the devil increases the fervor of this desire and encourages the person to perform these works more frequently, so that the person’s pride and vanity may grow greater.⁷¹

John says that the devil can be “disguised as genuine,” as he can “transform himself into an angel of light.”⁷² Just as God teaches the soul much wisdom by giving her images and visions, the devil, too, strives to deceive the soul with his visions, which in appearance are good and are of the same nature (i.e. species) as those that come from God.⁷³ Giving in to the communications from the devil will give him such influence that eventually his representations will leave no room for God’s representations.⁷⁴ Ignatius, too, says that “it is the characteristic of the bad angel to assume the form of ‘an angel of light.’” The devil “proposes good and holy thoughts” (i.e. apparent good) and then “little by little ... [draws] the soul into his hidden snares and his perverted purposes.”⁷⁵

Hence Ignatius says that one must pay close attention to the whole course of one’s thoughts; i.e. the beginning, middle and end must be entirely good.⁷⁶ John holds a more pessimistic view. He says “I consider it impossible for a person who is not striving to reject them to go undeceived.”⁷⁷ When John says one should ‘reject’ spiritual communications, does he mean that one should not do discernment, contrary to Ignatius who encourages discernment by ‘paying close attention’ to them? The answer is ‘no.’ John is not saying one should run away and hide from the devil. Rather, he wants the soul to resist

⁶⁹ AS II, 11, 8.

⁷⁰ Cf. SE 315.

⁷¹ Cf. DN I, 2, 2.

⁷² Cf. AS II, 11, 7.

⁷³ Cf. AS II, 16, 3.

⁷⁴ Cf. AS II, 11, 8.

⁷⁵ SE 332.

⁷⁶ Cf. SE 333.

⁷⁷ AS II, 27, 6.

the deceptions of the devil and prevail against them.⁷⁸ John highlights the essential importance of having humility and detachment from disordered affections, which are crucial in this fight. By being detached from all things that are not God, not only does one protect oneself from the attacks of the devil but also allows oneself to be deeply rooted in faith, which enables one to be united to God in a bond of love and to serve and praise Him for Who He is.⁷⁹ For the same reasons, Ignatius makes “the overcoming of self and the ordering of one’s life”⁸⁰ a main objective of the Spiritual Exercises. Such a preparation allows one to be led by faith, to unite one’s will to God’s will, and to serve and praise Him.⁸¹

In the effort to fight against the deceptions of the devil, John recommends the help of a spiritual director, as the two of them together would be able to fight more effectively.⁸² Ignatius, too, recommends the accompaniment of “a good confessor or other spiritual person who knows [the devil’s] trickery and perversity”⁸³ to whom the soul could disclose the communications from the devil. Also, John notes that the devil tries to “catch us off guard,”⁸⁴ which recalls how Ignatius teaches that the devil attacks the soul where he finds her “weakest and in greatest need as regards eternal salvation.”⁸⁵

2.2.4 *The dark night and purgation*

What John and Ignatius teach about purgation is quite interesting because they are reporting how they themselves were purified in their spiritual journey towards God. And in this they differ, as mentioned earlier. For John, purification is by the dark nights. Ignatius is less clear but offers some clues. This difference deserves a close look.

According to John, there are four dark nights, and he explains them in the following order, presumably representative of the degree of purification: the active night of the senses, the active night of the spirit, the passive night of the senses, the passive night of the spirit.

The active night of the senses (covered in AS I) affects the lower, sensory part of human nature. The soul must purposefully mortify her attachment to the things of the world, so as to bring about the right ordering of the appetites and to acquire virtues. As a result, the soul gets to enjoy the effects of the virtues, such as peace, comfort, light, purity and strength.

The active night of the spirit (in AS II and III) affects the superior, rational part of human nature, i.e. intellect, memory, and will. Through pure faith, the soul must mortify her attachment to the interior pleasures that come from various spiritual exercises.

⁷⁸ Cf. AS II, 22, 12.

⁷⁹ Cf. AS II, 24, 8.

⁸⁰ SE 21.

⁸¹ Cf. SE 23.

⁸² Cf. AS II, 22, 12.

⁸³ SE 326.

⁸⁴ AS III, 37, 1.

⁸⁵ SE 327.

The soul experiences the mortification as dryness, distaste, and trial. The outcome is a union of simplicity, purity and likeness.

In the passive night of the senses (in DN I), the soul allows herself to be passively purged of her attachment to the spiritual delights. God offers an experience of darkness that engulfs the interior sense faculties, making discursive meditation and spiritual exercises no longer possible to do, and leading the soul to infused contemplation. Entering into the contemplative life gives the soul a great joy, and the soul is again at peace in God.

The passive night of the spirit (in DN II) is the final, deepest, longest, and darkest purgation that only some undergo. John describes it thus:

The soul at the sight of its miseries feels that it is melting away and being undone by a cruel spiritual death. It feels as if it were swallowed by a beast and being digested in the dark belly ... It is fitting that the soul be in this sepulcher of dark death in order that it attain the spiritual resurrection for which it hopes.⁸⁶

The soul is convinced that God has rejected her and cast her into darkness with abhorrence. She feels great pain from the remembrance of past prosperity and remains sorrowful in knowing that she is now far from such good. However, coming out of this ordeal completely and totally purified, she arrives at the blessedness of final union with God.

Given the stark difference between John's dark night and Ignatius' spiritual desolation⁸⁷ as well as the general lack of reference to anything like the dark nights of purgation in Ignatius' writings, we must ask the following question: how was Ignatius purified? The pertinence of this question becomes clearer when we consider how John teaches that no one is ready for divine union without purgation.⁸⁸

Ignatius mentions purification in two places in SE. Firstly, the General Examen of Conscience serves "to purify the soul and to make a better confession."⁸⁹ Ignatius discusses purification in the sense of absolution, as in cleansing one from the stain of sin. This is different from John's purgation of creaturely attachments. Secondly, in discussing the issue of scruples,⁹⁰ Ignatius says overcoming a scruple proper, i.e. a thought that comes from outside oneself in the form of temptation, "to a great extent cleanses and purifies such a person."⁹¹ This seems like a case of the purgation of spirit (note its similarity with DN I, 14, 3). But it is far from a general purgation of the soul.

At the general level, the *active* type of purification in Ignatius' spiritual doctrine seems sufficiently clear. He emphasizes the total mortification of disordered affections.⁹² "One must free oneself from other created things in so far as they are obstacles to one's

⁸⁶ DN II, 6, 1.

⁸⁷ As discussed in Section 2.1.2.

⁸⁸ E.g. "One does not receive this touch of so sublime an experience and love of God without having suffered many trials and a great part of the purgation" (DN II, 12, 6).

⁸⁹ SE 32.

⁹⁰ Cf. SE 346-348.

⁹¹ SE 348.

⁹² Cf. SE 21.

end” by becoming “indifferent to all created things.”⁹³ To this end, Ignatius recommends the practice of the General Examen of Conscience and of the Particular Daily Examen⁹⁴ with the additional rules “for getting rid of the particular sin or defect more quickly.”⁹⁵ His ascetic disciplines such as the Additional Practices to Make the Exercises Better⁹⁶ and the Rules for Eating⁹⁷ also belong to active purification.

The Ignatian practice of mortification that bears the greatest resemblance to John’s doctrine of annihilation is probably obedience. It seems that for Ignatius, obedience is fundamentally about the spiritual life. In his letter to the members of the Society in Portugal (March 26, 1553), Ignatius quotes St. Gregory the Great as saying that obedience is the foundational virtue upon which all other virtues flourish.⁹⁸ Practising perfect obedience is about training oneself to recognize Christ our Lord in one’s superiors, thereby offering freely to God the liberty that God has bestowed on him.⁹⁹ “The need in question becomes even more obvious in the sphere of spiritual things and persons. Great danger exists for anyone racing along the spiritual road if the brake of discretion is missing.”¹⁰⁰ It is a remedy against one’s understanding that has been “blinded by self-esteem,” which is a point of attack for the devil to bring one to death.¹⁰¹ Hence, in the letter to Bartolomeo Romano (January 26, 1555), Ignatius explains humble obedience as a practice of the interior mortification of self-love.

You will everywhere be the same, unless you succeed in being humble, obedient, devout, and mortified in your self-love. This is the only change you should seek. I mean that you should try to change the interior man and lead him back like a servant to God.¹⁰²

This ‘purification by obedience’ is active both in the senses and the spirit insofar as it involves a conscious choice to mortify and conform one’s will and intellect.

Yet, there might be a *passive* dimension to it as well. For instance, Ignatius likens obedience to “a holocaust,” in which “we can offer ourselves completely, without excluding any part of ourselves, in the fire of love to our Creator and Lord at the hands of His ministers.”¹⁰³ John may offer some help in understanding what ‘a holocaust offered in the fire of love’ might mean. In AS, John talks about two types of union that exist between God and man: one that is natural and another that is supernatural. He calls the latter “the union of likeness,” which exists when “God’s will and the soul’s are in con-

⁹³ SE 23.

⁹⁴ Cf. SE 24-26.

⁹⁵ SE 27.

⁹⁶ Cf. SE 73-90.

⁹⁷ Cf. SE 210-217.

⁹⁸ Cf. IGNATIUS OF LOYOLA, «Select letters», 252; hereafter referenced as ‘SL [page number].’

⁹⁹ Cf. *ibidem*; 254.

¹⁰⁰ SL 256.

¹⁰¹ Cf. SL 254; 256.

¹⁰² J.N. TYLEND, *Counsels for Jesuits*, 104.

¹⁰³ SL 255.

formity, so that nothing in the one is repugnant to the other.”¹⁰⁴ He compares this union to a log of wood whose complete mortification by burning up signifies a complete transformation into fire.¹⁰⁵ So it is that the soul’s complete mortification of her will signifies her complete transformation into God. If Ignatius’ understanding of obedience finds resemblance with John’s understanding of conforming one’s will to God’s will, then Ignatius’ obedience would be ultimately about mystical life, as is John’s annihilation.

For the passive type of purification in Ignatius’ spiritual doctrine, we find some more clues in particular kinds of desolation and consolation. Ignatius seems to imply that there can be a purifying effect in desolation. He says that “anyone in desolation must consider how Our Lord has placed them in a trial period.”¹⁰⁶ During this trial period, “the Lord has withdrawn [the soul’s] great fervour, deeply-felt love and intense grace.”¹⁰⁷ The presumed purpose is so that the soul may show “how far [she] will go in God’s service and praise” even without consolations and that she may come to a humble recognition of her dependence on God.¹⁰⁸

Would John agree to the idea that something coming from the bad spirit could in fact have a purifying effect on the soul? The answer is ‘yes.’ In discussing a particularly great suffering that the devil causes to the devout soul in the passive night of the spirit, John notes that this “diabolic communication ... takes place passively without one’s doing or undoing anything.”¹⁰⁹ Then he goes on to say the following: “When the good angel allows the devil the advantage of reaching the soul with this spiritual horror, he does so that it may be purified and prepared.”¹¹⁰ He likens it to a ‘spiritual vigil’ for some great feast and spiritual favor from God. This is a clear indication of the potential purifying effect of spiritual desolation.

John seems to indicate that there is a purifying dimension also to consolation without cause. We have established earlier (Section 2.2.2) that what Ignatius calls ‘consolation without cause’ and what John calls ‘substantial touch’ seem to refer to the same phenomenon. John says that “by their means [i.e. substantial touches] the soul is purified, quieted, strengthened, and made stable so she may receive permanently this divine union.”¹¹¹ It would be as if the Lord were to say, ‘Be thou good’, and then the soul would be made substantially good.¹¹²

Finding the purifying dimension of the substantial touch finds supporting evidence in Ignatius’ treatment of the First Time of making a sound and good election. Ignatius considers the moment of consolation without cause as a basis for making a discerned

¹⁰⁴ AS II, 5, 3.

¹⁰⁵ Cf. AS II, 11, 6.

¹⁰⁶ SE 320.

¹⁰⁷ *Ibidem*.

¹⁰⁸ Cf. SE 322.

¹⁰⁹ DN II, 23, 9-10.

¹¹⁰ *Ibidem*.

¹¹¹ DN II, 24, 3.

¹¹² Cf. AS II, 31, 1.

choice. The Lord “so moves and attracts the will that ... such a dedicated soul follows what is shown.”¹¹³ In other words, by cooperating with what the Lord wills, the soul is purified. Hence, one may speak of ‘purification by discernment.’

Whether this is true only in the case of discernment involving consolation without cause or also in the case of discernment involving consolation and desolation in general is an interesting question to explore. In other words, there might be a purifying effect in the act of ‘choosing’ in itself that could be applied at a more general level than the First Time election.

For instance, regarding the General Examen of Conscience, Ignatius highlights the importance of resisting the thought of committing a sin. He mentions some cases in which the action of resisting temptation would be “more meritorious” than in other cases.¹¹⁴ If ‘merit’ could be considered as producing an effect on the soul, then perhaps purification could be collocated there.

Another possibility may be found by turning to moral theology. “Prudence is the knowledge of what to seek and what to avoid.”¹¹⁵ It is the virtue “which perfects the reason [and] surpasses in goodness the other moral virtues which perfect the appetitive power.”¹¹⁶ In other words, exercising the virtue of prudence in choosing the good and rejecting the bad forms what Aquinas calls *habitus*, or inclination or disposition. This ordering of desire and of will is required for a good life.¹¹⁷ Putting disordered affections into the right order is precisely the effect of purification.

We further note how John seems to suggest an alternative path of sanctity besides that of the dark night. He writes:

If individuals are victorious over the devil in the first degree, they will pass on to the second; and if so in the second, they will go to the third; and likewise through all the seven mansions (the seven degrees of love) until the Bridegroom puts them in the wine cellar of perfect charity.¹¹⁸

According to John, the soul’s conquering of the devil by discerning and resisting his attacks in spiritual desolation would advance her all the way to the height of the spiritual life. Then it seems plausible that John would support the notion of ‘purification by discernment.’

¹¹³ SE 175.

¹¹⁴ Cf. SE 33-35.

¹¹⁵ T. AQUINAS, *Summa theologiae*, II-II, q. 47, a. 1, s.c., cited in L.A. MITCHELL, «Integrity and virtue», 163, the former hereafter referenced as ‘ST [Summa citation]’, and the latter as ‘LM [page number].’

¹¹⁶ ST I-II, q. 66, a. 1, cited in *ibidem*.

¹¹⁷ “Morality is therefore that ordering of desire and of will required for a good life: this ordering is not an external regulation of acts because they are in harmony with law or because they produce better results in the world; it is rather that interior harmony that reason introduces into our passions and choices precisely so that man might be himself. It is a harmony, an order that is not only a subjectivistic psychological expression but the reflection of the truth about the Good that fulfills man’s desire” (L. MELINA – W.E. MAY, *Sharing in Christ’s virtues: for a renewal of moral theology in light of Veritatis splendor*, 45, cited in LM 162).

¹¹⁸ AS II, 11, 9.

3. Other authors and studies

There are only a few studies available that compare Ignatius and John. Most provide partial examinations, e.g. on consolation (Section 3.1), on desolation (Section 3.2), or on some particular themes (Section 3.3). There seems to be only one comprehensive study (Section 3.4). Others may shed more light on the dark night (Section 3.5). Many of their insights are valid and valuable, but there is room for criticism.

3.1 Roy according to Bernadicou

Lucien Roy published a study entitled “Should we seek consolation in the spiritual life? Saint Ignatius of Loyola and Saint John of the Cross.”¹¹⁹ According to Paul Bernadicou in 1997, this article is “still the most careful comparison of the place of spiritual consolation in the spirituality of Ignatius of Loyola and ... John of the Cross.”¹²⁰ Roy’s main approach to reconciling the differences is what he calls ‘substantive convergence’; i.e. the overall idea is essentially the same, while the details may be accidentally different.¹²¹ For example, the two saints both teach that consolations are only means and that God alone is the desired goal.¹²² This is the fundamental agreement (essence) within which each allows room for the other’s preferred emphasis (accident). For instance,

God is immanent in his gifts of consolation, yet God radically transcends his gifts. Consolation can bring us closer into the presence of God, so we need to appreciate it; still, if it distracts us in our ascent of Mount Carmel, we must move beyond it.¹²³

I find this approach reasonable, although it lacks certain refinements. For example, Bernadicou makes no indication that Roy made a distinction between mediated and unmediated consolations. Neither is there any discussion on discernment of spirits.

According to Roy, another substantive convergence is spiritual direction. “The great desire of each of them is to remain intimate with the God revealed in their individuated experience, and then to direct others on the basis of this foundational, personal conviction.”¹²⁴ They both understand their experience of God as life in the Spirit based on the three theological virtues. However, their approaches to spiritual instruction differ. For

¹¹⁹ L. ROY, «Faut-il chercher la consolation dans la vie spirituelle? Saint Ignace de Loyola et Saint Jean de la Croix», 109-170. I was not able to find Roy’s original article. However, Bernadicou gives a summary presentation of this article in P.J. BERNADICOU, «What role does consolation play in the spiritual life?», 187-192; hereafter referenced as ‘RB [page number].’

¹²⁰ RB 187.

¹²¹ Roy does not use the expression ‘accidentally different.’ But I am using it to help clarify his point.

¹²² Cf. RB 188.

¹²³ *Ibidem*.

¹²⁴ *Ibidem*. It should be noted that Ignatius and John would have understood the term ‘spiritual direction’ differently. “Giving the Spiritual Exercises is not the same as engaging in ongoing spiritual direction. They are distinct, although by no means totally separate, ministries” (B. O’LEARY, «What is specific to an Ignatian model of spiritual direction?», 10).

example, in general, Ignatius welcomes spiritual consolation, and John does not; John gives a map for the spiritual ascent, while Ignatius does not.¹²⁵

Roy suggests two reasons for the difference in their approaches: different personalities and pastoral preoccupations.¹²⁶ Regarding *personality*, Roy claims that Ignatius is an extrovert, always concerned with the good of others; he is an active apostle whose goal is dynamic service for God's glory; therefore, he considers discernment as a necessary tool in the active apostolate. On the other hand, John is an introvert, happiest when he is alone with the One and Only. He is a contemplative whose journey terminates in blissful union with God. Therefore, John wants to provide a map that describes the path to the summit.

I find this explanation rather superficial and inexact. The two personalities and spiritualities may not be so clear-cut as Roy claims. The Ignatian focus on interior movements does not seem any less of an 'introverted, contemplative activity' than John's approach to prayer. John's desire for the reform of the Carmelite Order, the Church and beyond does not display any less of an 'extroverted, apostolic spirit' than that of Ignatius.

Regarding *pastoral preoccupations*, Roy explains that John wrote AS and DN primarily for "those who are already embarked on a spiritual journey," such as the Carmelite nuns; hence John gives "an orderly analysis" for an audience whose "likely experiences" are well known to him. In contrast, Ignatius did not have a certain audience in mind in writing SE. He does not presume to know "the inner potential" of the retreatant. Hence, he instead gives detailed instructions on "disposing oneself" with regard to the Holy Spirit.¹²⁷

Roy's explanation seems largely accurate, but it needs some clarifications. It must be noted that John's 'orderly analysis' includes discernment of spirits (as discussed in Section 2.2.3). Ignatius' preference for 'accompaniment' in the Exercises does not imply a negation of 'direction.'¹²⁸ In fact, for Ignatius, direction and obedience are very important for spiritual growth.¹²⁹ Furthermore, the reason why John insists on the directee's "assent of reason to the instructions and commands of the spiritual director" is so that the directee could be "led by faith to divine union"¹³⁰ – the same reason why Ignatius extols the virtue of obedience.¹³¹

¹²⁵ Cf. RB 188-189.

¹²⁶ Cf. RB 189-190.

¹²⁷ *Ibidem*.

¹²⁸ For example, Ignatius taught that the one giving the Exercises "should leave the Creator to work directly with the creature, and the creature with the Creator and Lord" (SE 15), without prejudice to necessary interventions (e.g. SE 6).

¹²⁹ For example, he overcame his scruples by obeying the direction of a confessor and bent his resolute will to stay in Jerusalem by obeying the authority of the Holy See that wanted him to leave (cf. AU 25 and 46; see also SE 353 and 354). Furthermore, he often gave an orderly analysis of the spiritual life in his letters. A prime example is the aforementioned letter to the members of the Society in Portugal, in which he explained the foundation and the degrees of obedience, as well as particular means to attain obedience.

¹³⁰ AS II, 26, 11.

¹³¹ Obedience to one's superior "consists of adopting as a presupposition and belief, rather as we do when questions of faith are involved, that whatever orders are issued by the superior are really regula-

In the final analysis, Roy concludes that there is a division between Ignatius' teaching and John's. He writes that "the mission of active apostles is one thing, that of contemplatives is another."¹³² Thus according to Roy, John "has no need to investigate whether a consolation is from God, the flesh, or the devil ... The contemplative person needs only [to] stay completely God-focused"; while the active Ignatian "must have an inner compass because the apostolate always travels through new terrain."¹³³

It seems to me that this view is fundamentally mistaken because the 'mysticism of service' and the 'mysticism of matrimony' are not divided but united. They signify one and the same reality because they share the same anthropological base; love necessarily propels the lover to serve the beloved; the lover serves the beloved because he loves. It seems to me that Ignatius' *Suscipe*¹³⁴ and John's union with the Spouse are not two separate realities but one and the same reality.¹³⁵

Bernadicou makes up for the deficiency in Roy's claims when he presents a more unifying view. Bernadicou notes that there is a "growing body of committed Christians who, though not priests or religious, are dedicated to following Christ in their public as well as their personal lives. And they seek guidance."¹³⁶ Thus he discusses the growing sense of "a profound mysticism in everyday life, as a contemplative in action."¹³⁷ Thomas Green captures this notion of 'contemplative in action' by presenting the image of the Cross as constituted by the 'horizontal arm of apostolic service' and the 'vertical arm of the Cross.'¹³⁸

3.2 Toner

Toner gives a careful comparative analysis of spiritual desolation and the dark night.¹³⁹ He explains that in both the active night and the passive night, spiritual desolation and the dark night are not the same phenomena. In the active night, John's instructions bear "a striking resemblance" to Ignatius' instructions, and "the desolations and consolations which occur during the active night also parallel what Ignatius describes."¹⁴⁰

tions of God Our Lord and expressions of His holy will" (SL 258). To be sure, the context here is different from spiritual direction. Nevertheless, there is a certain similarity, in the sense that for Ignatius, obedience to the superior's directive is a matter of spiritual life, i.e. union of the divine and human wills.

¹³² RB 190.

¹³³ *Ibidem*.

¹³⁴ Cf. SE 234.

¹³⁵ For a more in-depth discussion on the unified vision of the mystical life, see K. RAHNER, «The Ignatian mysticism of joy in the world». He writes, "Such '*indiferença*' becomes a 'seeking of God in all things.' Because God is greater than everything, he can be found if one flees away from the world, but he can come to meet one on the streets in the midst of the world" (p. 10).

¹³⁶ RB 190.

¹³⁷ *Ibidem*.

¹³⁸ T. GREEN, «St. John of the Cross and St. Ignatius Loyola», 130.

¹³⁹ J.J. TONER, «'Spiritual Desolation' in St. Ignatius of Loyola and the 'Dark Night' in St. John of the Cross: Comparison and Contrast», 271-282; hereafter referenced as 'CO [page number].'

¹⁴⁰ Cf. CO 272-273.

Nevertheless, Toner is careful to note that the experiences of desolation and of the dark night differ in content. The active purification for union with God “does not itself bring on that sort of pain which constitutes spiritual desolation,” as the experience of the former may be “full of spiritual consolation, exhilaration, joy.”

In the passive night, the difference between spiritual desolation and the dark night is even more stark. Toner explains it as follows. He identifies five factors that are constitutive of Ignatius’ desolation and tries to identify corresponding parallel factors in John’s dark night.¹⁴¹ The five factors are: 1) *the action of the Holy Spirit*, 2) *living faith*, 3) *the anti-spiritual thoughts and affections* arising from the person’s sinfulness, 4) *the evil spirit*, and 5) *the desolate feelings* in affective sensibility. The ‘spiritual thoughts’ constituted by (1) and (2) cause tension and friction with the ‘anti-spiritual thoughts’ constituted by (3) and (4), producing (5) as a result.¹⁴² The parallel factors in the experience of the dark night are: 1) the infusion of *divine light*, 2) *the effects* of divine light, 3) *similar sentiments as Ignatius’ desolation* but with a different source, 4) *the evil spirit*, and 5) *the affective feelings* that arise from the tension between the first two factors and the next two factors.

This methodology reveals many good insights. Toner notes that although spiritual desolation has apparent similarities with the “affliction and torment”¹⁴³ that come from divine illumination, the two desolations are “radically different.”¹⁴⁴ The difference is due to the fact that divine illumination comes from God, and the recipient may experience it as unspeakably delightful, insofar as his soul has been purified.¹⁴⁵

The divine illumination of the dark night produces three effects: a great increase in faith, hope and charity; an “esteeming love” for God,¹⁴⁶ which incapacitates all human appetites for anything apart from God; and the illumination of the intellect, which is a beginning of the divine union.¹⁴⁷ The feelings of desolation which one experiences in the passive night of the spirit are not due to anti-spiritual disturbances but to infused divine light. The soul perceives her sinfulness with burning clarity and thus feels wretched, utterly unlovable, and abhorrent to God and man.¹⁴⁸ In this state, the devil’s action is not significant for the feelings of desolation. Nevertheless, in this passive night, when active meditation would be a distraction to the soul, the devil intrudes with “good knowledge and satisfaction” and then in later stages causes horrifying suffering.¹⁴⁹

¹⁴¹ Cf. CO 273.

¹⁴² Cf. CO 274.

¹⁴³ DN II, 5, 2.

¹⁴⁴ Cf. CO 275.

¹⁴⁵ Cf. DN II, 13, 10.

¹⁴⁶ DN II, 13, 5.

¹⁴⁷ Cf. DN II, 12, 5-6.

¹⁴⁸ Cf. CO 278.

¹⁴⁹ Cf. JOHN OF THE CROSS, «The Living Flame of Love», 3, 63-64; hereafter referenced as ‘LF [stanza number], [paragraph number].’

Because the sources of these movements are different, how one should respond to these movements should also be different. For example, Ignatius' advice on how to respond to desolation (activism) would be ineffective and may even be harmful in the case of the passive night; hence, John advises exactly the contrary (passivism). It becomes clear that the Ignatian rules of discernment are not exhaustive, and other criteria for discerning are needed.¹⁵⁰ The outcome of the purification and the union according to John is utterly astounding. The natural way of operation in the memory, intellect, and will actually ceases and instead is divinized.¹⁵¹

Toner's analysis of desolation and the dark night is insightful. His methodical approach makes his conclusions clear and convincing. It may serve as an inspiration for a similar comparison on consolation.

3.3 Larrañaga

Victoriano Larrañaga notes a few themes that are common between the works of the two saints.¹⁵² The common themes include: total mortification of the disordered affections, "God, like the sun, stands above souls ready to communicate himself,"¹⁵³ and the imitation of Christ helpless on the Cross.

John heavily emphasizes the importance of total mortification of the disordered affections. Ignatius also offers a similar counsel of full renunciation of all disordered affections, so that nothing that is not God or is impure or is not properly ordained to God remains in the soul. This is a central theme of the Second Week of the Exercises, as reflected in the Second Kind of Humility.¹⁵⁴ Further, Ignatius mentions as "the most perfect kind of humility" that which is present when "[one wants and chooses] poverty with Christ poor rather than wealth, and ignominy with Christ in great ignominy rather than fame."¹⁵⁵ John teaches the same idea.¹⁵⁶

Both saints also teach that God is the source of every gift.¹⁵⁷ In the 1545 letter to Francis Borgia the Duke of Gandia, Ignatius talks about "the fruit of experience and internal contact" that is "usually communicated by God Our Lord in His infinite goodness to those persons who take for their base that goodness."¹⁵⁸ Likewise, John writes:

¹⁵⁰ Cf. CO 282.

¹⁵¹ Cf. CO 280; "Accordingly, the intellect of this soul is God's intellect; its will is God's will; its memory is the memory of God; and its delight is God's delight; and although the substance of this soul is not the substance of God, since it cannot undergo a substantial conversion into him, it has become God through participation in God, being united to and absorbed in him, as it is in this state" (LF 2, 34).

¹⁵² V. LARRAÑAGA, «San Ignacio de Loyola y San Juan de la Cruz: Convergencias y Divergencias», 138-151, 216-276; hereafter referenced as 'SA [page number].'

¹⁵³ This is the chapter heading that Larrañaga chose to describe the theme (cf. SA 142).

¹⁵⁴ Cf. SE 166.

¹⁵⁵ SE 167.

¹⁵⁶ E.g. AS I, 13, 6. Larrañaga does not cite this, but I am supplying it for clarity.

¹⁵⁷ Cf. SA 142.

¹⁵⁸ SL 160.

When the soul frees itself of all things and stains to emptiness and dispossession concerning them ... it is impossible that God fail to do his part by communicating himself to it, at least silently and secretly. It is more impossible than it would be for the sun not to shine on clear and uncluttered ground ... God, like the sun, stands above souls ready to communicate himself ... Every good and perfect gift descends from the Father of lights.¹⁵⁹

According to Larrañaga, this God is precisely whom Ignatius wants to represent when Ignatius talks about “the Commander-in-Chief of all the good” in the Meditation on the Two Standards.¹⁶⁰

Larrañaga further develops his thoughts on the gifts of God. He points out that for Ignatius, it is important to desire the spiritual gifts for the greater glory of God. For example, the exercitant should seek some grace or gift that he wants, e.g. interior contrition for one’s sins, to weep much over one’s sins or Christ’s passion, or to resolve some perplexity in which he finds himself.¹⁶¹

Regarding the desire for gifts, Larrañaga is of the opinion that “the divergence between the two spiritual masters seems definite.”¹⁶² Nevertheless, he finds a commonality between Ignatius and John in the special consolation in which God Himself communicates to the soul.¹⁶³ He explains the commonality in terms of ‘exceptions.’ For example, John admits that meditation and feelings are necessary for beginners.¹⁶⁴ But even for the proficient and the perfect, there are exceptions. Larrañaga points out three: the “substantial touches,”¹⁶⁵ the “substantial words of God,”¹⁶⁶ and the “spiritual feelings.”¹⁶⁷ John permits these exceptions because there can be no deception in these direct communications of God.

Another common theme is the imitation of Christ helpless on the Cross.¹⁶⁸ Jesus is the way, so we must imitate Him, even in His death on the Cross. Thus, John highlights the annihilation of the soul in the nights of the senses and the spirit. In the utmost humility, the soul reaches spiritual union with God, the highest possible state in this life.¹⁶⁹ Ignatius conveys the same line of thought in the Third Kind of Humility and in the Two Standards, where Ignatius exhorts “the highest spiritual poverty”¹⁷⁰ after the manner of Christ Our Lord.

¹⁵⁹ LF 3, 46-47.

¹⁶⁰ Cf. SE 137.

¹⁶¹ Cf. SE 87, cited in SA 262.

¹⁶² “La divergencia entre los dos maestros espirituales parece terminante” (SA 268).

¹⁶³ Cf. SA 144 and 147.

¹⁶⁴ Cf. AS II, 12, cited in SA 268.

¹⁶⁵ “los toques sustanciales” (AS II, 26, 6-9, cited in SA 269-270).

¹⁶⁶ “las palabras sustanciales” (AS II, 28 and II, 31, cited in SA 270-271).

¹⁶⁷ “los sentimientos espirituales” (AS II, 32, cited in SA 271-272). John notes in the description of the chapter that these feelings are even “necessary to avoid hindering the journey towards God.”

¹⁶⁸ Cf. SA 147.

¹⁶⁹ Cf. AS II,7.

¹⁷⁰ SE 146.

In the final analysis, Larrañaga concludes that John nevertheless remains ‘the doctor of *nada*’ and that Ignatius does not follow John’s renunciations to the same extent.¹⁷³ But John grants exceptions, as mentioned above, and Ignatius shows an orientation that reminds us of John.¹⁷²

Larrañaga’s insights are valuable, especially the ones regarding the special consolations. His treatise is enriched by references to some of Ignatius’ letters. Nonetheless, it is not a comprehensive study and thus is of limited use. Also, like Roy, he maintains the view of ‘definite divergence’ between the two saints.

3.4 Gervais

Pierre Gervais’s work¹⁷³ is probably the most comprehensive and insightful study ever done so far on the topic. He compares the two saints in terms of consolation, desolation, discernment of spirits, the dark night, meditation and contemplation. His comparison of the Spiritual Exercises with the Spiritual Canticle and the Living Flame of Love is particularly insightful. Covering the many good insights of Gervais is outside the scope of this article. I focus on his main point, as follows.

For Gervais, the two saints share a common root without which they could not be correlated.¹⁷⁴ It is the conviction that God in His freedom establishes and guides His relationship with the faithful soul. Human freedom lies in being united to God’s will in the order of love.¹⁷⁵ This “spirituality of Christian freedom”¹⁷⁶ arises neither from the Bérullian school of spirituality (more Christological, like Ignatius) nor from the Rhenish-Flemish school (more mystical, like John). Indeed, Ignatius and John “belong to the same spiritual universe, that of the Spanish spiritual renewal of the sixteenth century.”¹⁷⁷

In this common spirituality, the God who enters into the history of men is the person of the Incarnate Word, who gives form to the act of contemplation. According to Gervais, while the two men share the same Christological foundation, Ignatius focuses on the event of the Incarnation, and John on the person of the Word.¹⁷⁸ This difference in focus results in a difference in the style of contemplation (‘evangelical contemplation’ for Ignatius and ‘mystical contemplation’ for John)¹⁷⁹ and in the type of spirituality (an apostolic spirituality for Ignatius and a contemplative one for John).¹⁸⁰

¹⁷¹ Cf. SA 272.

¹⁷² E.g. Larrañaga cites Ignatius’ Spiritual Diary entry dated March 8, 1544, in which Ignatius expresses his desire that visitations and tears may not be given him (cf. SA 273).

¹⁷³ P. GERVAIS, «Jean de la Croix et Ignace de Loyola»; hereafter referenced as ‘PG [page number].’

¹⁷⁴ Cf. PG 887. He refers to it as “le diamant qui brille au cœur de l’une et l’autre spiritualité” (PG 886).

¹⁷⁵ Cf. PG 678.

¹⁷⁶ “spiritualité de la liberté chrétienne” (PG 886).

¹⁷⁷ “appartiennent à un même univers spirituel, celui du renouveau spirituel espagnol du XVI^e siècle” (PG 678).

¹⁷⁸ Cf. PG 888.

¹⁷⁹ Cf. PG 867.

¹⁸⁰ Cf. PG 887.

Nevertheless, Gervais points out that the two types of contemplation are interconnected, as are the corresponding spiritualities. Both men understand contemplation as a gift from God. As such, contemplation does not pertain to merely recalling a historical setting but to a properly spiritual reality. “John and Ignatius therefore share a common perception of what contemplation is in its very nature.”¹⁸¹ Furthermore, evangelical contemplation is an “interior knowledge of the Lord who became human for me,”¹⁸² and mystical contemplation is a “loving and obscure knowledge.”¹⁸³ Hence, for both Ignatius and John, prayer is not a mere intellectual knowledge; rather, they place prayer at the level of affectivity and will, characteristic of *devotio moderna*. Contemplation is “a ‘loving’ acquaintance,” which is “born of love and makes one grow in love.”¹⁸⁴ And therein lies the connection between apostolic spirituality and mystical spirituality. One asks for the interior knowledge of Christ in the Exercises precisely in order to better love and serve Him.¹⁸⁵ Thus, “both spiritualities share a common perception of man’s relationship with God,” one that acknowledges God’s free, immediate action as “the very source of knowledge and love.”¹⁸⁶

Gervais makes a similar point regarding another key theme of the spirituality of Christian freedom: the Cross. The spirituality of Christian freedom explains that Christ’s free, salvific act of laying down His life on the Cross also calls His followers to place themselves freely at the foot of the Cross. Yet, Ignatius’ evangelical focus results in the four stages of the Spiritual Exercises that leads the retreatant to contemplate the death and resurrection of Christ, while John’s mystical focus results in three stages of purification, betrothal and spiritual marriage. The latter is more “vertical” than the former, whose stages are “inscribed in time.”¹⁸⁷

Nevertheless, Gervais points out that there is a profound interconnection between the two contemplations in relation to the Cross. Commenting on the Spiritual Cantic Stanza 36, John explains that “the thicket” means the “splendid works and profound judgments”¹⁸⁸ of the Bridegroom, and “the gate entering into these riches of his wisdom is the cross.”¹⁸⁹ Gervais explains that in this way, the soul desires to be united with the Friend forever, and the “‘being with’ becomes for her at the same time a ‘being for.’”¹⁹⁰ Ignatius,

¹⁸¹ “Jean et Ignace partagent donc une même perception de ce qu’est en sa nature propre la contemplation.” (PG 680).

¹⁸² SE 104.

¹⁸³ AS II, 24, 4.

¹⁸⁴ “une connaissance «amoureuse» ... naît de l’amour et fait grandir dans l’amour” (PG 684).

¹⁸⁵ Cf. SE 23.

¹⁸⁶ “Les deux spiritualités partagent une perception commune du rapport de l’homme avec Dieu. Celui-ci se situe au niveau d’un rapport de libertés, avec ce que ce rapport implique, à la source même de la connaissance et de l’amour, comme immédiateté de Dieu et de son libre agir au regard de sa créature” (PG 684).

¹⁸⁷ “vertical”; “s’inscrivent dans le temps” (PG 888).

¹⁸⁸ JOHN OF THE CROSS, «The Spiritual Cantic», 36, 10.

¹⁸⁹ *Ivi*, 36, 13.

¹⁹⁰ “Voici que cet «être avec» devient pour elle en même temps un «être pour»” (PG 882).

too, expresses the same desire to partake in Jesus' work of salvation, "for such is the scope of the Election in the Exercises, in which the union of the wills is sealed."¹⁹¹ Similar to how John explains 'the thicket' in terms of suffering and joy, Ignatius explains this union in terms of participating in the death and resurrection of Christ.¹⁹² Hence, the two contemplations are "already joined in the sense that the mystical contemplation of John of the Cross itself becomes evangelical contemplation in the proper sense of the word."¹⁹³

In the final analysis, Gervais concludes that Ignatius and John are "irreducible to one another." He acknowledges that they "enlighten each other" and are "not foreign to each other." But "each in his own way accounts for the totality of the Christian mystery, and, in this sense, is self-sufficient."¹⁹⁴

I agree with Gervais that the two spiritualities are 'irreducible to each other.' Clearly, the Ignatian spirituality is not the same as the Johannine spirituality, and vice versa. But Gervais seems to be expressing the same view of division as Roy and Larrañaga do when he writes: "One cannot think of a spirituality capable of embracing both that of John of the Cross and that of Ignatius."¹⁹⁵ By 'spirituality' Gervais could not mean a 'common root' spirituality, such as the spirituality of Christian freedom. Instead, it seems to me that he is referring to a more wholistic, integral one that would encompass the two visions. Despite having articulated a more profound 'substantive convergence' than the other authors, Gervais still seems to perceive the divergence as being irreconcilable.

I find this conclusion disagreeable, for Gervais has demonstrated convincingly that the two saints share a common foundation and that even the seeming differences in emphasis are found at a deeper level to be conjoined. Would the logical conclusion, then, not be that they are substantially in agreement and maybe accidentally in disagreement, rather than that they are substantially in disagreement and accidentally in agreement?

But perhaps there is a logical explanation for Gervais' seemingly inconsistent conclusion. It seems to me that his explanation (i.e. "one cannot think of a spirituality ...") is based on the long-held division between *via positiva* and *via negativa*, meditation and contemplation, asceticism and mysticism. In that case, it would indeed have been problematic for Gervais – as well as for Roy and Larrañaga, for that matter – to make any other conclusion in the past when the long-held division was commonly accepted.

¹⁹¹ "Car telle est bien dans les Exercices la portée de l'élection en laquelle se scelle l'union des volontés" (PG 883).

¹⁹² Cf. SE 203; 221.

¹⁹³ "Elles se rejoignent déjà en ce sens que la contemplation mystique de Jean de la Croix devient elle-même contemplation évangélique au sens propre du terme" (PG 882-883).

¹⁹⁴ "Elles sont irréductibles l'une à l'autre"; "Toutes deux ne sont pas étrangères l'une à l'autre et qu'elles s'éclairent mutuellement"; "chacune rend compte à sa façon de la totalité du mystère chrétien et, en ce sens, se suffit à elle-même" (PG 889).

¹⁹⁵ "On ne saurait penser une spiritualité capable d'embrasser à la fois celle de Jean de la Croix et celle d'Ignace" (*ibidem*).

If this analysis is correct, then it must be noted that the conventional view of division has been superseded by the post-conciliar development in spiritual theology.¹⁹⁶ Spiritual theology gradually came to recognize its object of study as lived experience of the Mystery revealed in the life of a Christian. This recognition suggests a unified theological vision that overcomes the Greek body-psyche dualism as well as the distinction-contradiction between asceticism and mysticism. For instance, in ‘Theology of the Christian Life,’¹⁹⁷ Rossano Zas Friz De Col identifies faith as the unifying principle. Both *via positiva* and *via negativa* are experiences of faith that happen in the life of the believer. Thus, it is possible to understand the ascetical-mystical divide in terms of consciousness that consists of two levels – the a-categorical, phenomenal, *a priori* level and the categorical, psychological, *a posteriori* level. God’s initiative is first experienced in the former and then recognized and discerned in the latter. Consciousness becomes moral conscience when the believer responds to God’s initiative to enter into a relationship. The believer’s decision to respond with reciprocal love to God’s love expresses the union of the human will and the divine will. This union results in transformation of the believer, or spiritual growth in the life of the believer. Such an integral understanding of the Christian life allows an articulation of the experiences of Ignatius and John as the diverse flowering of the same baptismal grace.

3.5 Zas Friz and Waaijman

It seems to me that there is a further clarification to make about desolation and the dark night. Seen from the perspective of ‘Theology of the Christian Life,’ it becomes apparent that not only are desolation and the dark night different spiritual experiences in terms of source, content, and consequences, but also *categorically*. Looking up desolation in dictionaries of spirituality reveals that scholars consider desolation to be a *particular experience*. For instance, it is compared to the experience of depression or is described as an experience of prayer in the context of discernment.¹⁹⁸ On the other hand, the dark night is considered as a phenomenon that involves a *process of transition* – either from meditation to contemplation, or from the purgative stage to the unitive stage, or from the cataphatic dimension of the spiritual life to the apophatic dimension.¹⁹⁹ Thus, it seems reasonable to consider desolation as a *synchronic* phenomenon – i.e. a particular experience – and the dark night as a *diachronic* phenomenon – i.e. a progressive development of an experience.

¹⁹⁶ Cf. R. ZAS FRIZ DE COL, *The transforming presence of mystery: a perspective of spiritual theology*, 27-45; hereafter referenced as ‘TPM [page number].’

¹⁹⁷ It is “una teologia diversa, erede della teologia mistica di Dionigi l’Areopagita, di San Giovanni della Croce e di Karl Rahner” (R. ZAS FRIZ DE COL, *La presenza trasformante del mistero*, 86). Zas Friz explains the life of Ignatius of Loyola in this framework in R. ZAS FRIZ DE COL, «Radicarsi in Dio. La trasformazione mistica di Sant’Ignazio di Loyola», 162-302.

¹⁹⁸ Cf. H. GRAY, «Desolation», 233-234.

¹⁹⁹ Cf. K.J. EGAN, «Dark Night», 226-227.

Indeed, Federico Ruiz considers the dark night as a stage of development in his six stages of the development of the Christian life.²⁰⁰ The fourth stage called ‘crisis’ consists of “an unexpected turn that might seem to be paralysis or even a step backward.”²⁰¹ Thus, Zs Friz writes:

Just as normal psychological development involves going through various stages of crisis, generally during the transition from one stage to the next, normal development in the spiritual life makes certain steps necessary. Following the Carmelite school, we call these moments ‘nights.’²⁰²

Applying this framework to the life of Ignatius, Zs Friz notes as an example of such a crisis or dark night the time when the first Jesuits had to give up their initial plan of going to the Holy Land and instead went to Rome.²⁰³

Kees Waaijman, too, considers the dark night as part of a stage of the development of the Christian life in his five-stage scheme of ‘Transformation.’²⁰⁴ In explaining the second stage of ‘Reformation,’ he highlights the need for the control and moderation of the senses and quotes John of the Cross: “Hence the night of the senses we explained should be called a certain reformation and bridling of the appetite rather than a purgation.”²⁰⁵

When desolation and the dark night are understood as such, one could see that there can be many moments of desolation during a period of the dark night. Also, one could understand how desolation and the dark night are categorically different phenomena, even though some of the sentiments involved may seem similar.

Conclusion

The two spiritual masters from sixteenth century Spain have some apparent differences in their spiritual teachings. It is an important task of spiritual theology to resolve them, especially since the two saints give contrary advice on similar situations, which would have different ramifications.

My research examines some of these aspects, based on some of the works of the two saints. A word analysis reveals that Ignatius and John significantly differ in their usage of the words ‘consolation’ and ‘desolation.’ But Ignatius and John show a common concern with regard to the ‘devil’ in the context of discernment of spirits.

A content analysis reveals, as this article argues, that the two saints offer essentially the same insights on spiritual consolation and desolation as well as on the dynamics of the spiritual life involving the two phenomena. Ignatius’ consolation and desolation find their

²⁰⁰ F. RUIZ, «L’uomo adulto in Cristo», 509-560, cited in TPM 90-96.

²⁰¹ TPM 95.

²⁰² *Ibidem*.

²⁰³ *Ivi*, 101.

²⁰⁴ K. WAAIJMAN, «Il processo di trasformazione».

²⁰⁵ DN II, 3, 1 as quoted in *ivi*, 538.

corresponding parts especially in John's active night of the spirit. If Ignatius' consolation and desolation could be understood mainly in terms of the effects instead of the affective content, then the following would be true: firstly, Ignatius' consolation without cause finds its counterpart in John's substantive touch that may occur as early as the active night of the spirit; secondly, desolation and the dark night are different phenomena.

One actual difference between Ignatius and John lies in the fact that Ignatius does not seem to have gone through the dark night proper and yet has arrived at the same summit of the spiritual life as John has. Ignatius must have been purified in some other way, and this article offers some speculations on the paths of 'purification by obedience' and 'purification by discernment.'

Surprisingly, little effort has been made historically on comparing the two saints. A few authors have made partial comparisons, and I could find only one comprehensive analysis that covers multiple aspects of the spiritual teachings of the two saints. Roy finds some convergences in the area of consolation, and Bernadicou elaborates on Roy's study. Toner compares desolation and the dark night and explains how they are different. Larrañaga focuses on a few select themes that are common to both saints. Gervais finds a common, foundational spirituality between the two. Zas Friz and Waaijman offer an understanding of the dark night in the context of the development of the Christian life, in which I find evidence of the categorical difference between desolation and the dark night.

Roy, Larrañaga and Gervais make similar arguments – that the two saints share a deep commonality but differ in their emphasis or approaches in such a way that their spiritualities are, in the final analysis, deemed irreconcilably divided. I argue that their conclusion betrays their own findings and that the reason for their inconsistent conclusion is the conventional view of the two separate paths to holiness. If my analysis is correct, then the recent development in spiritual theology that overcomes the limitation of the conventional view would rectify their conclusion.

My study could be improved by analysing some other aspects, such as Trinitarian theology²⁰⁶ and the role of virtues, based on a larger body of writings. Furthermore, a phenomenological comparison,²⁰⁷ a psychological comparison,²⁰⁸ or a literary comparison (poetry and prose *versus* manual and autobiography) might offer new insights.

²⁰⁶ Trinitarian theology is the context in which García Mateo compares Ignatius and Teresa of Avila and John of Avila in R. GARCÍA MATEO, *Mística trinitaria*. Perhaps a similar comparison could be made with John.

²⁰⁷ For example, it could help deepen the understanding of what the purification of the soul is as a phenomenon. It might also bring greater clarity to what the soul's attachment is as a phenomenon.

²⁰⁸ Psychological studies have been useful in distinguishing desolation and the dark night from clinical depression. Such studies could also clarify more questions, such as: How is detachment from memory by a complete removal of thoughts (cf. AS III, 6, 2) different from a repression of thoughts? How do we distinguish communications from the spirits from the manifestations of our subconscious?

Acronyms and Abbreviations

- AS JOHN OF THE CROSS, «The Ascent of Mount Carmel»
- AU IGNATIUS OF LOYOLA, «Reminiscences (Autobiography)»
- CO TONER, J.J., «‘Spiritual Desolation’ in St. Ignatius of Loyola and the ‘Dark Night’ in St. John of the Cross: Comparison and Contrast»
- DN JOHN OF THE CROSS, «The Dark Night»
- LF JOHN OF THE CROSS, «The Living Flame of Love»
- LM MITCHELL, L.A., «Integrity and virtue: The forming of good character»
- RB BERNADICOU, P.J., «What role does consolation play in the spiritual life?»
- SA LARRAÑAGA, V., «San Ignacio de Loyola y San Juan de la Cruz: Convergencias y Divergencias»
- SE IGNATIUS OF LOYOLA, «The Spiritual Exercises»
- SL IGNATIUS OF LOYOLA, «Select letters»
- ST AQUINAS, T., *Summa theologiae*
- TPM ZAS FRIZ DE COL, R., *The transforming presence of mystery: a perspective of spiritual theology*

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