

# Spiritual Consolation and its Role in the Second Time of Election

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## Spiritual Consolation and its Role in the Second Time of Election

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*Considerable disagreement exists among commentators on Ignatius about the nature of spiritual consolations and their role in his second time of election. The author proposes several consensus statements for consideration and deliberation, in the hope of developing a common conceptual vocabulary grounded in Ignatius's own thought.*

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A review of articles and books on Ignatian discernment published in English since the Second Vatican Council reveals a great deal of disagreement about Ignatius's understanding of two fundamental topics: the nature of spiritual consolation and the role that spiritual consolation plays in the second time of election.<sup>1</sup> I will explore Ignatius's writings on these themes and review how authors writing in English since the Second Vatican Council have understood his teaching. I will then offer reasons for affirming the interpretation presented, in each case, by a minority of writers as the correct understanding of Ignatius's thinking.

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<sup>1</sup> The second time of election is mentioned very briefly in the *Spiritual Exercises* in a section titled "Three Times, Each of Them Suitable for Making and Sound and Good Election" (*The Spiritual Exercises of Saint Ignatius: A Translation and Commentary*, trans. and ed. George E. Ganss, SJ [Chicago: Loyola Press, 1992], 176, henceforth: *SpEx*, cited by paragraph number and, for quotations, by page number of this edition. For various meanings of *time* in Ignatius's writings, see Jules J. Toner, SJ, *Discerning God's Will: Ignatius of Loyola's Teaching on Christian Decision Making* (St. Louis: Institute of Jesuit Sources [IJS], 1991), 104f. In this essay, the third meaning is most relevant: "the expression can mean the time when God has given the spiritual experience or experiences on the basis of which one can now discern God's will" (Toner, *Discerning God's Will*, 105).

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At the outset, it might be helpful to present, in a summary way, my position on Ignatius's teaching about Spirit-given spiritual consolation and its role in discerning God's will. This summary will take the form of two cases—two fictional discernment situations—in which the spiritual directors are operating out of the understandings that I advocate, with some brief commentary about their views on these topics.

### Case Study 1

Stephen is a Jesuit who recently completed a term as rector of a university community. The provincial gave him a semester sabbatical before his next assignment. During the months prior to the sabbatical, Stephen gave much thought to how he might spend that time. On several occasions, he imagined himself going off to a quiet place and catching up on reading in his field. He had a stack of books next to his armchair in his bedroom that were ripe for reading. Twice, right after he had imagined this way of spending his sabbatical, he received peaceful feelings encouraging him to trust in God's guidance.

He went to Susan, his spiritual director, and recounted his experience, pleased that he had received these signs from God. After listening well to him, Susan first asked Stephen whether he had experienced the peaceful feelings as encouraging trust in God in the beginning, middle, and end of the actual experience. If so, she said, then it was an instance of what Ignatius meant by spiritual consolation that could be trusted. She then surprised him by cautioning that these experiences of spiritual consolation were not indicators that what he was imagining was God's will. She explained to him that spiritual consolation functions as evidence in the second time only when a "being drawn" to a course of action arises out of the consolation and the "being drawn" and the spiritual consolation are tightly connected. She encouraged him to continue to ask for God's guidance about his upcoming sabbatical.

A while later he started feeling spontaneously drawn to something quite different: to make friends with some of God's poor people. He also noticed that indeed the "being drawn" was emerging out of what he discerned to be spiritual consolation. He realized that what he was being drawn to still needed more specification, but he felt that

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he was being given an important initial orientation by God about how he could spend his sabbatical time.

During his next appointment with Susan, he shared his experience with her. He described the interior factors he had been given: the being drawn to this course of action, and the spiritual consolation from which the first factor seemed to spring. Susan reassured him that, unlike his previous experience, this seemed like genuine second-time election evidence as Ignatius understood it. She invited him to ask God to confirm whether this is what God wanted for him. After the meeting, he sought that confirmation from God, and the experience he earlier shared with Susan was given to him several more times: the being drawn to make friends with God's poor people along with spiritual consolation acting as the root or source of the first factor.<sup>2</sup>

In this discernment situation, Susan was assisting Stephen by making use of her understanding of Ignatius of Loyola's teaching about spiritual consolation and the second time of election. The present writer believes that her understanding is correct, and later in this essay I will provide support for my judgment. For now, the reader might consider some of the elements of her understanding of Ignatius's teaching regarding spiritual consolation.

Susan is convinced by her research about Ignatius's teaching that, when Ignatius refers to consolation, he consistently means a pleasant, delightful, or peaceful feeling.<sup>3</sup> In the saint's vocabulary, consolation

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<sup>2</sup> One member of the Seminar helpfully observed that Stephen's decision was based on God-given evidence at that particular time in Stephen's life. At another time, some serious reading might have been God's will for him.

<sup>3</sup> In this essay, these three kinds of feeling will stand for the many forms of consolation that can occur in individuals' experiences—for instance, comfort, joy, contentment, refreshment, gladness, and elation. Dictionaries do not define *consolation* but rather offer a synonym for it—sometimes *comfort*—or describe it as relief of sadness or grief. On this point, see, for example, *The American Heritage Dictionary of the English Language*, 3rd ed. (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1992), s.v., accessed December 3, 2018 <https://dictionary.cambridge.org/us/dictionary/english/consolation>.

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never refers to bitter, distressful, or hard feelings.<sup>4</sup> Her study of Ignatius has also taught her that Ignatius is only interested in spiritual consolation.<sup>5</sup> While non-spiritual consolation occurs very often in people's awareness, Ignatius does not seem to be concerned about it.<sup>6</sup>

Moreover, Ignatius writes about two kinds of spiritual consolation. The first is caused, from the beginning to the end of the experience, by God: Susan calls this "authentic spiritual consolation." The second is initially caused by God but over time is tainted by the evil spirit, who deceptively sows thoughts in the consolation for the purpose of leading the individual away from God and the things of God: she calls this "deceptive spiritual consolation."<sup>7</sup>

Now let the reader consider Susan's operative understanding of Ignatius's teaching about the second time of election. She knows that in the Autograph Directory, which is believed to be a copy of an original directory in Ignatius's own handwriting, Ignatius explains very briefly the second time of election. He writes:

Then, as he continues with his meditations on Christ our Lord, he should examine, when he finds himself in consolation, in which direction God is moving him; similarly in desolation.<sup>8</sup>

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<sup>4</sup> This topic will be treated in part I.

<sup>5</sup> I define spiritual consolation as a pleasant, delightful, or peaceful feeling, insofar as it is caused, wholly or partially, by the Holy Spirit. When the spiritual consolation is wholly caused by the Holy Spirit, I call it authentic spiritual consolation. When it is partially caused by the Holy Spirit and partially shaped by the infiltration of misleading thoughts by the evil spirit, I call it deceptive spiritual consolation. This definition of spiritual consolation, which does not appear in Ignatius, who always only gives examples, agrees generally with the understandings of Frs. Jules Toner, Timothy Gallagher, and Michael Ivens, as discussed below.

<sup>6</sup> An example of non-spiritual consolation: Joyce experiences a beautiful sunset and rejoices in it, without any sense at the time that she is being encouraged to praise, trust, or love God more.

<sup>7</sup> The third, fourth, fifth, and sixth rules in Ignatius's second set of rules for discerning spirits deal with this type of spiritual consolation (*SpEx* 333, 334, 335, and 336). Note, however, that Ignatius does not use the term *authentic* when describing this kind of spiritual consolation. Susan and I use it as a synonym for *trustworthy* and as shorthand for *caused wholly by the Holy Spirit*.

<sup>8</sup> "Autograph Directory of St. Ignatius," no. 18, in *On Giving the Spiritual Exercises*:

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Here, Ignatius offers two factors that are present in the second-time experience: an experience of authentic spiritual consolation and a being drawn to a course of action arising out of that consolation. Given what Ignatius writes in the *Autograph Directory*, it seems that authentic spiritual consolation arising in a person after he or she has imagined, or otherwise proposed to himself or herself, a course of action, does not constitute God-given evidence that this course of action is God's will. The principal reason for excluding this "evidence" is that there is no apparent linkage between the "being drawn" and the spiritual affect, so that knowledge of the origin of the consolation cannot provide knowledge about the origin of the "being drawn."

Now, let the reader turn to the second discernment situation.

### Case Study Two

Agnes is a lay minister in a large urban parish. She regularly meets with a spiritual director. Recently, she informed her director that she had received a series of second-time election experiences. One day she sensed that she was being drawn to apply to a nearby retreat house to make an eight-day retreat. Several times she noticed that this being drawn was emerging out of what seemed to her to be authentic spiritual consolation. But a few days later she was given a different set of experiences. She found herself drawn to visit her father in a neighboring state. She hadn't seen him for a while. The being drawn flowed out of authentic spiritual consolation several times. She became confused and laid all this out to Jim, her Jesuit director.

After listening to her, Jim asked her to reflect carefully on the strength and duration of the spiritual consolation in each case. Agnes paused and thought for a while, and then said that, now that she recalled the experiences, the spiritual consolation associated with her being drawn to visit her father was more intense and lasted longer than the consolation when she was being drawn to apply for the retreat. Jim indicated that this could indicate that visiting her father was God's will. He reminded

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*The Early Jesuit Manuscript Directories and the Official Directory of 1599*, trans. and ed. Martin E. Palmer, SJ (St. Louis: The Institute of Jesuit Sources, 1996), 9; hereafter cited as *Autograph Directory*, followed by paragraph number and by page of the Palmer edition.

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her that God always wants us to choose, among several courses of action, the course that contributes more to God's glory. And in the second time of election, when a person is given evidence for two different courses of action, God's will is discerned by comparing the quality and duration of one authentic spiritual consolation to the other. He also suggested that, given the subtlety of the discernment process, she would do well to seek confirmation of this tentative decision from God.

In this discernment situation, Jim is helping Agnes discern between two occasions, on different days, when she has received experience of being drawn toward different courses of action and when the being drawn flowed out of authentic spiritual consolation.<sup>9</sup> Furthermore, Jim is making two additional points that cannot be found in Stephen and Susan's discernment situation.

First, what Jim is saying to Agnes can help us appreciate why spiritual consolation must always refer to sweet, delightful, peaceful feelings, because at times the discerning person needs to compare the quality of affect given in two or more experiences of authentic spiritual consolation in order to determine which instance offers evidence that that course of action is more for God's glory. An unpleasant, disagreeable, or agitated consolation—if such existed in Ignatius's thinking—would not compare with a pleasant, delightful, or peaceful consolation.

The second point is that Jim's directing of Agnes is informed by Ignatius's conviction that, if the evil spirit cannot tempt us to choose an evil course of action, the spirit will settle for luring us into choosing what contributes *less* to God's glory.<sup>10</sup> On Tuesday, Agnes might have reasonably believed that applying for the retreat was God's will for her;

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<sup>9</sup> Those discerning God's will are asking God for light about how God wants them to use their freedom here and now. While we are to discern God's will based on evidence received in the discernment process, it is very possible that the evidence God gives on one day differs from the evidence given on another day. Furthermore, we are to change our decision only if new external circumstances invite us to reframe our discernment, or if fresh evidence from God enters the picture. On this point, see Toner, *Discerning God's Will*, 62–99.

<sup>10</sup> *SpEx* 333.

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but, on Thursday, the new, qualitatively superior evidence indicates to her that visiting her father is *more* for God's glory.

Having considered these two discernment situations in an effort to reconnoiter the terrain, I move to the lion's share of this essay, where I will consider six topics bearing on spiritual consolation:

1. the meaning of spiritual consolation in the Western tradition preceding Ignatius and contemporaneous with him;
2. a mapping of interior movements to show where authentic spiritual consolation fits;
3. the texts that offer Ignatius's understanding of spiritual consolation;
4. a review of the main understandings of spiritual consolation by authors writing in English since the Second Vatican Council;
5. reasons for what I consider the correct understanding of Ignatius on the nature of spiritual consolation—an understanding that concurs with a minority of the authors considered; and
6. five proposed consensus statements regarding authentic spiritual consolation.

Following that, with regard to the second time of election, I will also consider six topics:

1. the meaning of the phrase *the greater glory of God*;
2. Ignatius's texts about the role of spiritual consolation in the first and third times of election;
3. Ignatius's texts about the role of spiritual consolation in the second time of election;
4. major English-language post-conciliar understandings of the role of authentic spiritual consolation in the second time of election;



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5. the reason for what I consider to be the accurate understanding of Ignatius's teaching—an understanding that, again, coincides with a minority of the authors cited; and
6. four proposed consensus statements concerning Ignatius's understanding of the role of authentic spiritual consolation in the second time of election.

## I. Ignatius's Teaching about Spiritual Consolation

### A. Spiritual Consolation in the Western Tradition

**A**s stated earlier, I contend that Ignatius always understood spiritual consolation as a pleasant, delightful, peaceful feeling. In this regard, he was consistent with the tradition that preceded and was contemporaneous with him. An essay by Fr. Louis Poullier (d. 1940) on spiritual consolation makes clear the consistency of that tradition as well as Ignatius's place in it, when Fr. Poullier reviews how spiritual consolation was understood from Evagrius of Pontus (d. 399) to St. Francis de Sales (d. 1622).<sup>11</sup> His review shows that this spiritual affect always involves pleasant, delightful or peaceful feelings.

Besides reading Fr. Poullier, it is helpful to examine the text of *The Imitation of Christ*, composed in the early fifteenth century, because it greatly influenced Ignatius. It becomes apparent that the author, Thomas à Kempis (d. 1471), distinguishes between consolation that is from God and consolation that is "human." In both cases, the feeling is one of "comfort," but the former is to be trusted, and the latter treated with suspicion.

If you were given the choice you ought to prefer to suffer adversity for Christ's sake rather than to be comforted by many consolations.

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<sup>11</sup> Louis Poullier, SJ, "Consolation Spirituelle," in *Dictionnaire de spiritualité, ascétique et mystique*, vol. 2, ed. Charles Baumgartner et al. (Paris: Beauchesne, 1953), col. 1618–1621. See also Toner, *A Commentary*, 79–93.

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All human consolation is short-lived and empty; but true and blessed is that consolation that is interiorly received from Truth itself.<sup>12</sup>

Spiritual consolation does not receive systematic attention in the two saints of the sixteenth-century Carmelite reform, but whenever St. Teresa of Avila (d. 1582) and St. John of the Cross (d. 1591) mention it, they mean an affective experience that is pleasant or delightful. Teresa writes in *The Book of Her Life*:

Sometimes it seems we draw forth the tears through our own effort, at other times it seems the Lord grants them to us, since we are unable to resist them. Apparently, His Majesty repays us for that bit of care with a gift as great as the consolation He gives a soul when it sees that it weeps for so great a Lord. And I am not surprised, for he surpasses reason in bestowing consolation: He comforts here; He gladdens there.<sup>13</sup>

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Likewise, John writes about spiritual consolation in *The Ascent of Mount Carmel*:

A genuine spirit seeks the distasteful in God rather than the delectable, leans more toward suffering than toward consolation, more toward going without everything for God rather than possession. It prefers dryness and affliction to sweet consolation.<sup>14</sup>

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<sup>12</sup> Thomas à Kempis, *The Imitation of Christ*, trans. Joseph N. Tylenda (Wilmington, DE: Michael Glazier, 1984), p. 105; p. 138.

<sup>13</sup> Teresa of Ávila, *The Book of Her Life*, in *The Collected Works of St. Teresa of Avila*, vol. 1, 2nd rev. ed., trans. Kieran Kavanaugh, OCD and Otilio Rodriguez, OCD (Washington, DC: ICS Publications, 1987), 105 ff.

<sup>14</sup> John of the Cross, *The Ascent of Mount Carmel*, in *The Collected Works of St. John of the Cross*, trans. Kieran Kavanaugh, OCD and Otilio Rodriguez, OCD (Washington, DC: ICS Publications, 1979), 123.

### B. Mapping the Interior Affective Terrain<sup>15</sup>

Spiritual consolation is one interior movement among many that take place in one's awareness. Explicitly locating the spiritual feeling in that context can help one to appreciate its true meaning. In developing this map, I am using terminology that at times is present explicitly in Ignatius's writings but at other times is not.<sup>16</sup> Additional terms are needed in order to fill out the map.

First, just as Ignatius contrasts physical and spiritual exercises, one can distinguish exterior movements (individual and collective) from interior movements (individual and collective).<sup>17</sup>

- An example of *individual exterior* movement: my cousin is running in the marathon.
- An example of *collective exterior* movement: the Georgetown cheerleaders are forming a human pyramid.
- Examples of *individual interior* movements: Einstein thinks about a problem; the president feels successful; Proust imagines an event in the past; the young lawyer desires something more; the police officer decides to retire; the teenager resists a temptation.
- Examples of *collective interior* movements: these particular Democrats all share the same basic assumptions; all members of the home team want to please their supporters; Deirdre and Jack desire this goal as a couple.

From now on, I am concerned only with *individual interior* movements. Since I am concerned with consolations and desolations, I must restrict

<sup>15</sup> The appendix (p. 50) diagrams the main portions of this map.

<sup>16</sup> The following terms in the map are Ignatius's: movements, feelings, consolation and desolation, spiritual consolation and spiritual desolation, spiritual consolation with and without preceding cause, remorse, courage and strength.

<sup>17</sup> *SpEx* 1.

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my focus to those individual interior movements that are *affective* in nature, in other words, those movements that have a feeling component.<sup>18</sup>

The broadest two categories falling under *individual interior affective* movements are *interior affective acts* and *feelings*, which some call, more technically, *passive affective states*.<sup>19</sup>

- *Interior affective acts* involve an individual doing something interiorly that has a feeling component to it. For example: Jill loves Jack; Isaac longs for some peace; Paul craves more ice cream.
- *Feelings (interior passive affective states)*, unlike affective acts, arise within the individual spontaneously (and thus are called *passive*). They can be prompted either by internal realities (e.g., by what I just ate or by an evil spirit) or by external realities (e.g., by a beautiful sunset), but they are not elicited by the person as an agent. Examples of *feelings* are: the supporter of the home team is feeling joy; the captain of the visiting team is feeling sad; the politician is feeling confused.

From now on I am interested in *feelings*. Given the concerns in this essay, the two most general relevant categories for *feelings* are:

### 1. Feelings that are spiritually neutral with regard to one's journey to God

This writer joins authors such as Fr. Jules Toner (d. 1999) and Fr. Timothy Gallagher, OMV, in calling them *non-spiritual feelings*.<sup>20</sup> This is a particular understanding of *non-spiritual*. From another point of view, all events, persons, or situations in life are, or can become, relevant to our discipleship relationship with Christ. These feelings are called non-spiritual because they are not caused by good or evil spirits, and they do not en-

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<sup>18</sup> For this usage, see *Merriam-Webster*, s.v. "affective," accessed December 3, 2018, <https://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/affective>. Note that the first two rules of the first set of rules for discerning spirits refer to many kinds of interior movements, including acts and feelings (*SpEx* 313–15).

<sup>19</sup> For example, Toner, *A Commentary*, 84.

<sup>20</sup> Toner, *A Commentary*, 115–21; Gallagher, *Discernment of Spirits*, 48.

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courage or discourage, in an explicitly conscious way, trust in God, love for God, or love for the things of God.

Some *spiritually neutral affective* movements do not involve consoling or desolating feelings:

- Example: Tony experiences a feeling of shyness as he enters the room.

Only some of the *spiritually neutral affective* movements involve consolation and desolation.

- Example: Susan experiences joy while viewing the sunset.
- Example: Paul is working so hard that he neglects his family and his friends for a long stretch of time. As a result of this lack of intimacy in his life, he begins to experience burnout.

**2. Feelings that encourage or discourage a person on her journey to God and thus give evidence that they are caused by the good or evil spirit (spiritual feelings)<sup>21</sup>**

Examples of *spiritual feelings*:

- The next day Susan beholds another beautiful sunset and part of the experience this time is an urge to praise God and open up to God more.
- Jackie is feeling down and begins to feel tempted to stop praying.
- After a while Paul begins to feel the painful sting of remorse for neglecting his relationships with God and with people about whom he cares the most.

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<sup>21</sup> Clinical depression, of itself, is an example of non-spiritual desolation. It has been my experience in spiritual direction with people suffering from depression that not all of them are tempted to turn away from God or to trust God less as a result of their distress. Those who experience such temptation while in depression are experiencing spiritual desolation in addition to that painful psychological condition.

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- With the help of his spiritual director, Tom has come to recognize several things about himself: it has become impossible for him to pray discursively anymore; he is becoming increasingly dissatisfied with all that used to please him in both the things of God and the things of this world; he is feeling pain about this sense of dissatisfaction with the things of God; and his core desire now is to rest simply with God in quiet presence. All these interior realities, in combination, are signs of his entering into the dark night of the senses.<sup>22</sup>

Ignatius's first two rules for the First Week deal with all manner of interior spiritual movements, that is, movements that are caused by good or evil spirits. But beginning with rule 3 of the first set, he is concerned only with spiritual feelings that are consoling or desolating.

### C. Spiritual Consolation in Ignatius's *Spiritual Exercises*

I have come to the place in the mapping where I focus on Ignatius's teaching about spiritual feelings. Because of its importance, I give it its own section, and I offer more commentary than I did when considering earlier portions of the map.

The spiritual feelings to which Ignatius devotes much attention are *spiritual consolation* and *spiritual desolation*.<sup>23</sup> In the *Spiritual Exercises*,

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<sup>22</sup> These are the four signs of the dark night of the senses offered by St. John of the Cross (*The Ascent of Mount Carmel*, 2.13.2–4 and *The Dark Night*, 1.9.3, in *The Collected Works*, 140 ff. and 313 ff.). The first three usually involve disturbing and uncomfortable feelings, since God's infinite light and love engage the individual's inordinate attachments as well as his or her finitude, seeking to stretch the latter. While all the signs are trustworthy and invite the individual to surrender more deeply to God, these experiences do not represent instances of authentic spiritual consolation or desolation as Ignatius understood these terms. On this point, see Constance FitzGerald, OCD, "Desolation as Dark Night, The Transformative Influence of Wisdom in John of the Cross," *The Way Supplement*, no. 82 (Spring 1995): 96–108. The editors changed the title of that article, much to the chagrin of the author, who is aware of the confusion that can ensue when applying Ignatian terminology to experiences in the context of Carmelite spirituality (personal communication, February 6, 2018).

<sup>23</sup> Spiritual consolation looms large in the *Spiritual Exercises*, but it appears only once in the *Constitutions*. There, the significant term is *devotion*, used forty-eight times (*Concordancia Ignaciana*, ed. Ignacio Echarte, SJ [Bilbao & Santander: Mensajero & Sal

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Ignatius offers examples of *spiritual consolation*:

By [this kind of] consolation I mean that which occurs when some interior motion is caused within the soul through which it comes to be inflamed with love of its Creator and Lord. As a result it can love no created thing on the face of the earth in itself, but only in the Creator of them all.<sup>24</sup>

Similarly, this consolation is experienced when the soul sheds tears which move it to love for its Lord—whether they are tears of grief for its own sins, or about the Passion of Christ our Lord, or about other matters directly ordered to his service and praise.

Finally, under the word consolation I include every increase of faith, hope, and charity, and every interior joy which calls and attracts one toward heavenly things and to the salvation of one's soul, by bringing it tranquility and peace in its Creator and Lord.<sup>25</sup>

Regarding *spiritual desolation*, he writes:

By [this kind of] desolation I mean everything which is contrary to what was described in the Third Rule; for example, obtuseness of soul, turmoil within it, an impulsive

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Terrae, 1996], s.v.). Richard Baumann, SJ, has suggested that Ignatius might not have mentioned spiritual consolation frequently in the *Constitutions* because he expected Jesuits reading it to be already familiar with the meaning and significance of this interior movement (personal communication, June 6, 2018). In his study of devotion in Ignatius's writings, Alfonso de la Mora, SJ, explains that Ignatius's understanding of devotion can include spiritual feelings such as spiritual consolation but has a more comprehensive meaning: "Devotion, we can conclude, is for St. Ignatius the actuation of the virtue of religion by means of an affection for God that is prompt, compliant, warmly loving, and impelled by charity. Its goal is the worship of God which is accomplished in all things and actions, of oneself and one's fellow men, since it gives worship to Him by finding and serving Him in all things" (*La devocion en el espiritu de san ignacio* [Rome: Centrum Ignatianum Spiritualitatis, 1982], 159, cited in *The Constitutions of the Society of Jesus*, trans. and ed. George E. Ganss, SJ [St. Louis: IJS, 1970], 156). A detailed study in English of devotion in Ignatius's spirituality remains to be written.

<sup>24</sup> Fr. Ganss adds "this kind of" to the text in two places to indicate that what follows are examples of spiritual consolation and spiritual desolation, and not of non-spiritual consolation or non-spiritual desolation.

<sup>25</sup> *SpEx* 316; ed. Ganss, 122.

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motion toward low and earthly things, or disquiet from various agitations and temptations. These move one toward lack of faith and leave one without hope and without love. One is completely listless, tepid, and unhappy, and feels separated from our Creator and Lord.

For just as consolation is contrary to desolation, so the thoughts which arise from consolation are likewise contrary to those which spring from desolation.<sup>26</sup>

While Ignatius offers both sets of rules of discernment of spirits to people who are making the *Spiritual Exercises*, he also hopes that Christians will find assistance from these guidelines in their daily lives outside of the Exercises. For him, the people who are likely to experience spiritual consolation and spiritual desolation are individuals who are seriously invested in nurturing their relationship with God and collaborating with God's project in the world.<sup>27</sup>

This next point might be obvious, but it still needs underscoring. Ignatius is writing about *spiritual* consolation and *spiritual* desolation. *Spiritual*, when attributed to a feeling, does not mean *pertaining to the spiritual life*. As mentioned earlier, everything that arises in a person pertains, actually or potentially, to his or her relationship to Christ. Nor does it mean holy, trustworthy, or virtuous, because spiritual desolation is none of these things. *Spiritual* means two things when said of consolation or desolation: something experiential and something theological. A feeling is *spiritual* when (1) it is experienced as encouraging, or initially seeming to encourage, greater trust in and love for God and the things of God, or when it is experienced as discouraging trust in, and love for, God and the things of God; and (2) it is caused, at least in part, by the Holy Spirit.<sup>28</sup>

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<sup>26</sup> *SpEx* 317; ed. Ganss, 122.

<sup>27</sup> The evil spirit targets both regressing and progressing Christians, but spiritual consolations and desolations normally happen to progressing Christians, such as those who make the Spiritual Exercises.

<sup>28</sup> Later in this essay, I will consider the one specific element in every instance of spiritual desolation that stems from the Holy Spirit.



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- Example: Martha experiences joy as her friend Andrea shares some intimate things about herself and, as part of the actual experience, she feels drawn to love God more.
- Example: After Peter experiences a feeling of depression for a few days, he notices that the feeling starts to include the temptation to believe that God does not care about him and, if that is the case, he should slacken his spiritual practices. (The evil spirit takes advantage of his pre-existing depression to try to convince him that God does care about him: his non-spiritual desolation morphs into spiritual desolation.)

Next, there are spiritual consolations that are authentic and those that are deceptive. *Authentic spiritual consolations* are those that, from the beginning to the end of the feeling, and not including any decisions or conclusions that are subsequently drawn from that affective state once the state is over, encourage deeper love for and trust in God. *Deceptive spiritual consolations* are those spiritual consolations that appear at the beginning to encourage deeper love for and trust in God but which, at some point during the occurrence of the feeling, start to include thoughts that encourage the person to turn away from God. For example, the individual shifts into a disordered enthusiasm coupled with thoughts that encourage an inflated ego. None of these movements is of God.<sup>29</sup>

Finally, there is the distinction between spiritual consolation *with preceding cause* and spiritual consolation *without preceding cause*. Spiritual consolation with preceding cause is prompted by one's interior acts of thinking or imagining or by one's experiencing an external reality. This kind of spiritual consolation can be authentic or deceptive.

- Example: When Susan at work remembers the face of her little baby, she sometimes feels, in her delight, that she wants to

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<sup>29</sup> *SpEx* 332–34. It is possible for the evil spirit to cause the spiritual consolation from the very beginning of the experience, but the entire experience also involves the Holy Spirit because the evil spirit is “piggy-backing” on the person's union with Christ, seeming to encourage that union but inevitably and necessarily showing its true colors at some point lest it become “a house divided against itself” (Matt. 12:22–28).

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spend time thanking God for the gift of this child. This is spiritual consolation with preceding cause.

Spiritual consolation without preceding cause arises in the person without any prompting from within the person's explicit awareness or from awareness of an external object. For Ignatius, this spiritual consolation and the inclinations and thoughts which arise out of it while the spiritual consolation is actually occurring, are to be trusted as coming from God.<sup>30</sup>

- Example: One day, Philip was sitting at his computer quietly looking at the screen and there arose in him, seemingly "out of the blue," a sense of sweet groundedness that opened his heart to God.<sup>31</sup>

The reader might look at the early portion of the first set of rules, which are meant to help those in the First Week. In the first two of these rules, Ignatius writes about several significant spiritual movements.<sup>32</sup> Notably, he addresses these movements *prior to* his treatment of spiritual consolation and spiritual desolation in Rule Three. In other words, Ignatius is naming important interventions of the Holy Spirit, but he does not include them under *spiritual consolations* and *spiritual desolations*.

Specifically, Ignatius mentions the sting of remorse (*punzán-doles y remordiéndoles las consciencias*), with which the good spirit can afflict those who are going from good to bad or from bad to worse in some area of their lives. It is a Spirit-given painful spiritual feeling that encourages a person to change one's ways and return to a life of virtue and fidelity.

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<sup>30</sup> *SpEx* 330. Commentators differ in their understandings of spiritual consolation without preceding cause. In support of the above definition, see Michael Ivens, SJ, *Understanding the Spiritual Exercises: Text and Commentary: A Handbook for Retreat Directors* (Leominster: Gracewing, 1998), 228–31; George E. Ganss, SJ, *The Spiritual Exercises of Saint Ignatius*, 194; and Timothy M. Gallagher, OMV, *Spiritual Consolation: An Ignatian Guide for the Greater Discernment of Spirits* (New York: Crossroad, 2007), 47–56.

<sup>31</sup> On the affective quality of spiritual consolation (e.g., sweet, etc.), see below, section D (p. 19).

<sup>32</sup> *SpEx* 314, 315.

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And again, Ignatius also writes of courage and strength (*animo y fuerzas*) with which the good spirit offers encouragement, if one is in spiritual desolation. Courage and strength are gifts of the Holy Spirit, offered to bolster the person's determination to remain faithful to God during spiritual desolation. Courage here is not the feeling of fearlessness, but the readiness of the will to act despite feelings of fear.

In all of the rules, Ignatius is concerned only with spiritual feelings. He believes that their origin is the good spirit or the evil spirit, and thus they need discernment as to their source.

Having considered the details of this map of a person's interior life, one should call to mind the fundamental truths that indicate why one should be concerned about feelings. God is creating the universe

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*Fr. Buckley believes that the affective content is not an essential constituent of spiritual consolation. The only thing that counts is its directionality—that is, that it invites the person to greater faith, hope, and love.*

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and intelligent human beings so that God can lavish God's life and love on them. Human beings are born into a world that is radically affected by God's self-offer, but for that self-offer to make any difference, it is essential that they respond freely to that love, and cooperate with it, when they mature sufficiently to do so. Authentic

spiritual consolation is part of the divine self-offer of grace. In its proper and strict meaning, it is not saving or transforming or justifying. It is grace in the mode of offer. Only if human beings freely and with the aid of grace act on the encouragement that it offers, can it help human beings grow in intimacy with God, and in the attainment of God's way of loving the world by means of an ever-deepening assimilation to Christ and his relational identity.<sup>33</sup>

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<sup>33</sup> Fr. Toner helpfully prioritizes interior divine gifts in terms of how, in his view, Ignatius values them. First, there are the supernatural habits and acts of faith, hope, and love, which unite us to God. Second, he names courage, strength, clarity, and truth, which are gifts of the Holy Spirit that come when we are experiencing spiritual desolation. And he puts in third place authentic spiritual consolations, which are transient affective helps that God gives at times to us to make easier our believing in, hoping in, and loving God, and our doing God's will (Toner, *A Commentary*, 70–80).

### D. The Understanding of Spiritual Consolation in Recent English-Language Publications

A review of the recent literature in English reveals a good bit of disagreement about the meaning of spiritual consolation. The main views fall into three groups.

**Group 1: Those who affirm that spiritual consolation is essentially any feeling that encourages deeper trust in and love for God and the things of God**

This first group involves authors who interpret spiritual consolation as being characterized not by a specific kind of feeling plus the encouragement of deeper trust in and love for God, but only by the latter. For these writers, the character of the actual feeling involved in the experience of spiritual consolation can vary; what matters is that the feeling encourages individuals to grow in their relationship with God and thereby gives evidence of being caused by the good spirit.

In his influential article in *The Way Supplement*, published in 1973, Fr. Michael Buckley (UWE) devotes a good deal of attention to consolation, by which he means spiritual consolation.<sup>34</sup> He insists that (spiritual) consolation does not exist on the pleasure-pain axis but transcends it. He maintains that, at times, spiritual consolation can be uncomfortable or disturbing for individuals, such as the experience of the sting of remorse caused by one's conscience and the Holy Spirit.<sup>35</sup>

Fr. Buckley believes that the affective content is not an essential constituent of spiritual consolation. The only thing that counts is its directionality—that is, that it invites the person to greater faith, hope, and love. He writes, "Consolation is any interior movement of emotionality, feeling or sensibility, whose term is God—a man is drawn or driven to God."<sup>36</sup> By severing the affective content from the notion of spiritual consolation, Fr. Buckley can identify some spir-

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<sup>34</sup> Michael J. Buckley, SJ, "The Structure of the Rules for Discernment of Spirits," *The Way Supplement* 20 (Autumn, 1973), 19–37.

<sup>35</sup> *Ibid.*, 29.

<sup>36</sup> *Ibid.*, 28 ff.

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itually uncomfortable feelings as (spiritual) consolations and some consoling experiences as (spiritual) desolations.<sup>37</sup>

Perhaps influenced by Fr. Buckley, a number of writers assert that a positive affect such as delight, joy, or peace, is not an essential element in spiritual consolation.<sup>38</sup> This assertion seems to stem from two convictions that they generally seem to hold about the spiritual life: first, that the spiritual journey is not always a pleasant one; and, secondly, that God does not stir in individuals only pleasant interior experiences. Both affirmations, while certainly true, do not by themselves settle the question of the essential nature of spiritual consolation as understood by Ignatius in the *Spiritual Exercises*. Only careful attention to his texts will provide that answer.

One reason that some writers provide for asserting that spiritual consolation need not be a pleasant or peaceful feeling is that, in several places in the *Spiritual Exercises*, Ignatius writes of tears as

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<sup>37</sup> Fr. Buckley famously asserts that “men with their arms locked, singing bawdy songs, on their way to” a house of ill repute, are experiencing spiritual desolation as Ignatius understood that term (*ibid.*, p. 29). Others would counter that these men are more likely experiencing non- or anti-spiritual consolation. As Ignatius understands the terms, spiritual consolation and spiritual desolation generally arise in individuals who are invested in their journey to God (i.e., progressing Christians), which is not exactly what is going on in these men.

<sup>38</sup> See, for example David Lonsdale, *Listening to the Voice of the Spirit: The Art of Discernment* (Notre Dame: Ave Maria Press, 1992), 81 ff; George E. Ganss, SJ, *The Spiritual Exercises*, 192 ff.; Maureen Conroy, RSM, *The Discerning Heart: Discovering a Personal God* (Chicago: Loyola University Press, 1993), 40 ff.; Gerard W. Hughes, SJ, *God of Surprises*, 3rd ed. (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2008), 97; Elizabeth Liebert, SNJM, *The Way of Discernment: Spiritual Practices for Decision Making* (Louisville: Westminster-John Knox Press, 2008), 127 ff.; J. Michael Sparough, SJ, Jim Manney, and Tim Hipskind, SJ, *What’s Your Decision?: How to Make Choices with Confidence and Clarity: An Ignatian Approach to Decision Making* (Chicago: Loyola Press, 2010), 61, 118; Mark Thibodeaux, SJ, *God’s Voice Within: The Ignatian Way to Discover God’s Will* (Chicago: Loyola Press, 2010), 44. For Thibodeaux, deceptive or false spiritual consolation is an advanced form of spiritual desolation (36 ff.). See also Paul DeCelles and M. F. Sparrow, *Burning with Love for God: A Guide to The Spiritual Exercises of St. Ignatius* (South Bend, IN: Greenlawn Press, 2016), which describes spiritual consolation in one place as “warm sentiments of affection for God” (138), while in another place distinguishes it from spiritual joy: “[Often] joy and tranquility of heart accompany consolations” (141).

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being spiritual consolation.<sup>39</sup> The difficulty with this argument, however, is that Ignatius describes these tears as “tears of grief for [one’s] own sins, or about the Passion of Christ our Lord, or about other matters directly ordered to his service and praise.”<sup>40</sup>

In other words, in its context, Ignatius seems to have in mind *sweet* tears that accompany either a deep recognition that the person is a loved sinner, or a rich appreciation that Jesus’s sufferings are a revelation of God’s love for the sinner. In this sense, the tears are experienced as spiritually consoling, as distinct from bitter tears when one is focused, for example, on oneself, and on how one is a miserable sinner who has not measured up.<sup>41</sup> Given that every other example that Ignatius gives of spiritual consolation in this section of the *Spiritual Exercises* clearly involves pleasant, delightful, peaceful feelings, one would expect him to state that the tears to which he referred here involve a different kind of affect, if that is what he intended.<sup>42</sup>

**Group 2: Those who maintain that spiritual consolation is always a pleasant, delightful, or peaceful feeling**

For authors in this second group, spiritual consolation is always a pleasant, delightful, or peaceful experience, although they acknowledge that there is more involved in spiritual consolation than feeling—namely, encouragement to trust and love God more, and the understanding that the good spirit causes spiritual consolation.<sup>43</sup>

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<sup>39</sup> Ignatius mentions tears at *SpEx* 4, 48, 55, 69, 78, 89, 195, 203, 282, 315, 316, and 322. For an interpretation of tears at *SpEx* 316 as bitter or sweet, see Conroy, *The Discerning Heart*, 40 ff.

<sup>40</sup> *SpEx* 316; Ganss 122. In the Autograph Directory, Ignatius mentions “inner peace, spiritual joy, hope, faith, love, tears, and elevation of mind, all of which are gifts of the Holy Spirit,” (Autograph Directory, no. 11; ed. Palmer, 8).

<sup>41</sup> *SpEx* 193, 203.

<sup>42</sup> On the importance of spiritual tears in the Middle Ages, see Jesse Gutzsell, “The Gift of Tears: Weeping in the Religious Imagination of Western Medieval Christianity,” *The Anglican Theological Review* 97, no. 2 (2015), 239–53. In 1548, Ignatius advised St. Francis Borgia (d. 1572) to pray for God’s “most holy gifts, such as the gift of tears” (*Letters of St. Ignatius Loyola*, trans. William J. Young (Chicago: Loyola University Press, 1959), 181).

<sup>43</sup> Again, the “to some degree” will be explained below.

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A prominent representative of this group is Fr. Toner.<sup>44</sup> In *A Commentary on the Rules for the Discernment of Spirits*, he dedicates his fifth chapter to the topic of spiritual consolation. His examination of Ignatius's writings leads him to conclude that spiritual consolation, when authentic, always has, as its primary meaning, a delightful or peaceful or joyful feeling that originates in faith, hope, and love and that facilitates the increase of those theological (i.e., God-oriented) virtues and acts. As the reader will see below, the term *spiritual consolation* can extend to the deepening of faith, hope, and love when the consolation is acted upon, but this is an analogous use of the word. What the person actually experiences explicitly is both the delight or peace and the encouragement of deeper faith and trust as the person moves into the future. However, the good spirit, operating as the cause of the authentic spiritual consolation, is not part of the person's explicit awareness.

As the fruit of his reflecting on Ignatius's usage, Fr. Toner affirms that a consolation can be called *spiritual* for one of two reasons. In the first case, the consolation is caused by the Holy Spirit, and the thoughts arising in the consolation are from the beginning to the end of the consolation. Here, the person is encouraged toward God and the things of God: such spiritual consolation is true, authentic, and genuine.

In the second case, the consolation is caused by the Holy Spirit, and at its beginning the thoughts arising in it encourage the person toward God and the things of God, but at some point the evil spirit introduces thoughts that seek to lead the person away from God and the things of God. Such spiritual consolation, to the degree that the evil spirit intro-

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<sup>44</sup> Toner, *A Commentary*, 109–21; 284–90. At least four other authors hold this position: Piet Penning de Vries, SJ, *Discernment of Spirits, According to the Life and Teachings of St. Ignatius of Loyola*, trans. W. Dudok van Heel (New York: Exposition Press, 1973), 14 ff; William A. Barry, SJ, *Spiritual Exercises and the Encounter with God* (Mahwah, NJ: Paulist, 1992), 81; John English, SJ, *Spiritual Freedom: From an Experience of the Ignatian Exercises to the Art of Spiritual Guidance*, 2nd ed. (Chicago: Loyola University Press, 1995), 127; Timothy M. Gallagher, OMV, *The Discernment of Spirits: An Ignatian Guide for Everyday Living* (New York: Crossroad, 2005), 49. Fr. English writes that *consolation* and *desolation* are “very technical terms” in Ignatius, for which reason Fr. English seldom uses them (127). Is it not rather the case that these terms possess their ordinary meanings when Ignatius uses them and that *spiritual* is the technical term, meaning “caused wholly or partially by the Holy Spirit”?

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duced those misleading thoughts, is ostensibly spiritual, inauthentically spiritual, and deceptively spiritual consolation.<sup>45</sup>

As Fr. Toner points out in his commentary, his understanding of *spiritual* is also applicable to some forms of desolation. Considered in its total reality, spiritual desolation is not solely the work of the evil spirit. He helpfully writes that this spiritual feeling “has a twofold subjective cause: (1) the anti-spiritual motions and (2) also the spiritual motions of living faith, by reason of which the subject has desolate feelings over the anti-spiritual motions.”<sup>46</sup> In other words, the desolation arises in progressing Christians because they are experiencing movements encouraging them to move away from the God to whom they are deeply bound by faith, hope, and love. If there were no significant belonging to God present in the individual, then he or she would not feel desolate about the contrary movements coming from the evil spirit. Because the dissolute sailors of Fr. Buckley’s famous example (see: note 37, above) were not connected, in a significant degree, to faith, hope, and love, they would not experience the temptations of the evil one as desolating, unhappy, experiences. Rather, they enjoyed the temptations!

**Group 3: Those who maintain that spiritual consolation properly so-called contains a volitional element—for example, an act of faith, hope, or love.**

The third group of commentators sees more than feeling and directionality present in the experience of spiritual consolation. They affirm that graced human freedom is also part of the consolation, often in the form of acts of faith, hope, and love, which involve cooperation with the Holy Spirit.

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<sup>45</sup> Toner, *ibid.*, 227–29. Rules 3 to 6 in the second set of rules for discerning spirits deal with these deceptive spiritual consolations (*SpEx* 331–34). While the current practice, following Ignatius’s usage, of using *spiritual consolation* without further qualification to refer to authentic spiritual consolation is legitimate, writers must use an adjective like *deceptive* or *inauthentic* to qualify spiritual consolations into which the evil spirit has insinuated misleading thoughts.

<sup>46</sup> Toner, *A Commentary*, 141. Even in the phrase “a spiritual person” the adjective means “wholly or partially caused (influenced) by the Holy Spirit.” (*ibid.*)



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For example, Fr. John English (d. 2004) maintains that increases of faith, hope, and love are (spiritual) consolations even when the person does not feel consoled:

Often, those who are praying become downcast because they do not feel that God is giving them consolation. They begin to suspect that by doing something wrong they have failed to earn consolation: “Perhaps Jesus does not love me.” But when [spiritual directors] question them, they find that their faith, hope, or love has been increased. They have discovered a new meaning to life. Yet, these people do not think that they have been consoled, simply because they did not have tears or some other intense experience that might be described as an interior movement “by which [the soul] is inflamed with love of its Creator and Lord” (SE 316). Their notion of consolation is incomplete.<sup>47</sup>

This passage suggests that Fr. English wants to broaden the understanding of spiritual consolation to include the actual deepening of union with God, which involves the graced freedom of the individual, even when no (authentic) spiritual consolation showed up in the person’s awareness.

At first glance, Ignatius seems to offer a warrant for this view in the *Spiritual Exercises*: first, where he describes spiritual consolation as “that which occurs when some interior motion is caused within the soul through which it comes to be inflamed with love of its Creator and Lord. As a result, it can love no created thing on the face of the earth in itself, but only in the Creator of them all”; and second, where he names spiritual consolation as “every increase in hope, faith, and charity.”<sup>48</sup>

But Fr. Toner correctly rejected the opinion that spiritual consolation necessarily includes a volitional element.<sup>49</sup> He noted that Ignatius calls the love described in *SpEx* 316 a “consolation” not because of the love itself but because of the “being inflamed” — that

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<sup>47</sup> English, *Spiritual Freedom*, 116 ff.

<sup>48</sup> *SpEx* 316; ed. Ganss, 122.

<sup>49</sup> Toner, *Commentary*, 95–99.

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is, the spiritual feeling which that love causes. One might say that Ignatius chooses for his first example of spiritual consolation an instance of “efficacious” spiritual consolation—that is, spiritual consolation upon which Christians have acted, such that they love God above all things and love all other things only in God. What is most important in his example is the actual loving, which could exist without the presence of the spiritual consolation.<sup>50</sup>

Fr. Toner and Fr. Michael Ivens (d. 2005) also note, regarding “every increase of faith, hope, and charity,” that Ignatius unfortunately omitted an important modifier—namely, *experienced*.<sup>51</sup> They point out that increases of faith, hope, and charity do not show up in our explicit awareness except at those times when spiritual consolation arises from the increase of the theological virtues.<sup>52</sup>

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<sup>50</sup> It is very important in retreat direction and on-going spiritual direction that individuals learn to distinguish feelings of love for God from actual choices to love God, and feelings of distance from God from choices that cause one to become distant from God. It is a matter not of trusting one’s feelings, but of always learning from them and using one’s head to interpret them and to decide how to choose.

<sup>51</sup> Toner, *Commentary*, 103–07 and Ivens, *Understanding the Spiritual Exercises*, 216.

<sup>52</sup> As Don E. Saliers points out, a committed Christian walks the path of discipleship shaped by an ongoing spiritual affective attunement to God, Christ, and the Spirit, and the values of God’s reign. At times, there arises in this person feelings of spiritual consolation, which, as Ignatius asserts, have a beginning, middle, and end, although the deeper spiritual attunement perdures. It is a rich combination of the individual’s evaluative knowledge, motives, desires, inclinations, and choices, and the individual’s being affected by divine and worldly realities. This affective attunement can deepen through engagement with Scripture, liturgy, personal prayer, and other spiritual exercises, as well as by doing deeds of loving service. However, it can become shallow through neglect or by making choices that spring from the false self. On these points, see Don E. Saliers, *The Soul in Paraphrase: Prayer and the Religious Affections* (New York: The Seabury Press, 1980). Note that when Ignatius writes about authentic spiritual consolation, he is referring to Spirit-caused feelings that emerge from that ongoing affective attunement or resonance with the things of God in progressing Christians. Ignatius sees these emergent feelings as requiring discernment, because they are not experienced as products of the individual’s deliberate agency but proceed from a source other than the *I*. Here, see Fr. Toner on essential authentic spiritual consolation, as contrasting with transient, contingent authentic spiritual consolation, which requires discernment (Toner, *A Commentary*, 90–92).

### E. Reasons for Understanding Spiritual Consolation as Always Involving Pleasant, Delightful, or Peaceful Feelings

The reasons for affirming that spiritual consolation always involves pleasant, delightful feelings are three.

First, the tradition in which Ignatius stood speaks of spiritual consolation consistently as being pleasant, delightful, or peaceful feeling. Therefore, if Ignatius were using an important term differently from the previous tradition, one would expect him to indicate so.

Second, in all of the texts in which Ignatius speaks of consolation, the feelings are of this kind, although he at times mentions a wider range of affect—for example, joy, love, and hope.<sup>53</sup>

The third reason is that his mention of tears in his examples of spiritual consolation in the *Exercises* has to be referring to sweet tears, given the context, where all other examples involve sweet or pleasant feelings.<sup>54</sup> Bitter tears arising out of guilt, regret, or remorse can be the work of the Holy Spirit, but they are not consoling in the way Ignatius uniformly employs this term. Authors who hold up Ignatius's mention of tears in *SpEx* 318 as a reason for maintaining that spiritual consolation can be discomfiting are mistaken.

### F. Proposed Consensus Statements regarding Ignatius's Understanding of Spiritual Consolation

With these considerations in mind, I propose the following five statements regarding Ignatius's understanding of spiritual consolation:

1. Spiritual consolation is an interior movement best described as a feeling or passive affective state that is always pleasant, delightful, or peaceful, and that, when authentic, encourages, from the beginning to the end of the actual consolation, deeper trust in and love of God.

<sup>53</sup> Autograph Directory, no. 18; ed. Palmer, 9.

<sup>54</sup> *SpEx*, 318.

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2. The three constituent features of authentic spiritual consolation are (a) its character as pleasant, delightful, or peaceful; (b) its fostering—but not compelling—deepening acts of faith, hope, and love and greater trust in God; and (c) its being caused fully by the Holy Spirit.
3. The pleasant feeling and the sense that one is being encouraged to trust God more are part of an individual's explicit awareness. The third feature is not part of a person's explicit awareness and so needs to be inferred by discernment of the direction into which he or she would be led if the feeling's directionality was followed: would it be toward or away from God and the things of God?
 

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*For Ignatius, the sole norm for Christian decision making is God's will. . . . God desires that we decide in favor of that course of action which contributes to God's greater (majorem) glory . . . which contributes more (magis) to God's glory.*

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4. There are painful or uncomfortable Spirit-caused feelings, such as the bite of remorse or the dark nights of the senses and spirit, which encourage conversion or deeper trust in and union with God, and which are caused by God, and are therefore trustworthy: but they are not spiritual consolations as Ignatius understands that term.
5. Authentic spiritual consolation, properly so-called, is to be distinguished from the graced acts of faith, hope, and love from which it flows and from deepening acts of faith, hope, and love consequent to the person's freely acting on the encouragement coming from the authentic spiritual consolation. The causes and consequences are correctly called spiritual consolation only by way of analogy—specifically, the analogy of attribution.<sup>55</sup>

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<sup>55</sup> For example, while we say that carrots are healthy food, and that some human beings are healthy, the term *healthy* means something quite distinct in each case: carrots on a plate, though no longer alive, cause or promote good health in a human being; but a person experiences or possesses good health. For this reason, the healthiness of the

## II. The Role of Spiritual Consolation in the Second Time of Election

I now proceed to the second major topic of this essay: the way in which authentic spiritual consolation serves as evidence in the second time of election while making the Spiritual Exercises or in other moments of Christian discipleship.

### A. “For the Greater Glory of God”: The Meaning of a Phrase

For Ignatius, the sole norm for Christian decision making is God’s will. In every situation of decision making, God desires that we decide in favor of that course of action which contributes to God’s greater (*majorem*) glory; or, to express it a bit differently, which contributes more (*magis*) to God’s glory.<sup>56</sup>

What, then, is the greater glory of God? For our purposes, it will be helpful if we consider this phrase as Ignatius understands it, especially in the *Constitutions*, and what it meant theologically in his time. The phrase “the greater glory of God” appears in slightly different forms dozens of times in the *Constitutions*.

Ignatius does not offer a general theological understanding of God’s greater glory; rather, he tells us what he considers to be the proper way of understanding and implementing it in the apostolic body which is the Society of Jesus.

The founder of the Order interprets the phrase in terms of the consistent criterion for Jesuits in their choice of ministries or of the way to proceed in a specific ministry – namely, whether that choice will be for the greater service of God and the more universal good. For Ignatius, all other things being equal, superiors are to choose ministries that have a wider impact either because they engage people who, because of their

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carrots does not make sense apart from the healthiness of persons, whereas the latter still makes sense without the former.

<sup>56</sup> On the centrality of God’s will see *SpEx* 1, 5, 15, 91, 180; on the greater glory of God see *SpEx* 152, 179, 180, 185, 189, 240, 339.

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station in the Church or society, can influence many others, or because the ministry itself will have a beneficial impact on more people.

For Ignatius, this criterion is grounded in his understanding of God's fundamental will for creation and the human race—namely, that all of creation and all of the human race come to fulfillment in the Kingdom of God and that, in one's choice-making, one always chooses that course of action which contributes more to the achievement of that fundamental will than other courses of action.

Regarding Ignatius's theological understanding of "God's glory," Fr. George Ganss (d. 2000) points out that the *Sentences* of Peter Lombard (d. 1160) figured prominently in the theological curriculum at the University of Paris when Ignatius studied there. We do not know what portions of the *Sentences* Ignatius studied, but the beginning of the first chapter of book 2 of that very influential work begins with three theological propositions that Ignatius may well have learned in the lecture hall:

4. Therefore God made the rational creature which could know the supreme good, and by knowing it love it, and by loving it possess it, and by possessing it, enjoy it.
5. Consequently, if asked why man or angel was created, the brief reply can be given: because of God's goodness.
6. And if asked for what destiny the rational creature was created, the answer is: to praise God, to serve God, and to enjoy Him; and in all these activities the rational creature, not God, gains profit. For God, being perfect and full of all goodness, can be neither increased nor diminished.<sup>57</sup>

Ignatius's emphasis on always seeking the greater glory of God adds an important nuance to Lombard's understanding. He is saying that in every situation of decision making where there are two or more intrinsically good options available, God's will is that we always

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<sup>57</sup> *Petri Lombardi sententiae libri quattuor* (Paris: Migne, 1863), col 143; trans. Ganss, *Constitutions*, 18–19).

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choose that option which offers more glory to God than the other options. In other words: to choose that option which contributes more to the flourishing—“profit” in Lombard’s terminology—of creatures in union with God and in their mutual relationships in God.

### B. The First and Third Times of Election

In the *Spiritual Exercises*, Ignatius offers three times when an individual can discern God’s will regarding one or several possible courses of action. Each time is a situation in a person’s life when God is giving a specific kind of evidence to lead the individual to what God desires for that person.<sup>58</sup> We will begin by considering the first and third times, and then give more detailed attention to the second time.

Ignatius says this about the first time of election:

*The First Time* is an occasion when God our Lord moves and attracts the will in such a way that a devout person, without doubting or being able to doubt, carries out what was proposed. This is what St. Paul and St. Matthew did when they followed Christ our Lord.<sup>59</sup>

The evidence that God gives to us in the first time of election contains three elements. The first element is the experience of being drawn to a morally good course of action. The second is a sense that this course of action—“what was proposed” by God—is indeed God’s will. The third element is the experience of being unable to doubt, at the time when God is giving this evidence, that this is the course of action that God wants the person to take.<sup>60</sup>

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<sup>58</sup> These times of election involve (1) whatever process of discernment in which one engages, given the kind of evidence that God offers to one about various courses of action; (2) deciding which of the alternatives is God’s will; (3) actually choosing the alternative; and (4) enacting it. See Toner, *Discerning God’s Will*, 103 ff.

<sup>59</sup> *SpEx*, 175; ed. Ganss, 76.

<sup>60</sup> Going beyond Ignatius’s language, one could say that one finds oneself existentially unable to doubt what is being given, such that doubting would amount to doing violence to oneself.

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Turning to the third time of election, one sees that it does not involve the certitude of the first time or the spiritual feelings proper to the second time, which I will address in more detail below.

Ignatius offers two methods, or ways, of engaging in the third time of election. He explains the first method as follows:

*The First Point* is to put before myself the matter about which I wish to make an election, for example, an office or a benefice to be taken up or relinquished, or any other thing which falls under the heading of a changeable election.

*The Second Point.* It is necessary to keep as my objective the end for which I am created, to praise God our Lord and save my soul. Furthermore, I ought to find myself indifferent, that is, without any disordered affection, to such an extent that I am not more inclined or emotionally disposed toward taking the matter proposed rather than relinquishing it, nor more toward relinquishing it rather than taking it.

Instead, I should find myself in the middle like the pointer of a balance, in order to be ready to follow that which I shall perceive to be more to the glory and praise of God our Lord and the salvation of my soul.

*The Third Point.* I should beg God our Lord to be pleased to move my will and to put into my mind what I ought to do in regard to the matter proposed, so that it will be more to his praise and glory. I should beg to accomplish this by reasoning well and faithfully with my intellect, and by choosing in conformity with his most holy will and good pleasure.

*The Fourth Point.* I should consider and reason how many advantages or benefits accrue to myself from having the office or benefice proposed, all of them solely for the praise of God our Lord and the salvation of my soul; and on the contrary I should similarly consider the disadvantages and dangers in having it. Then, acting in the same manner in the second part, I should consider the advantages and benefits of not having it, and contrarily the disadvantages and dangers in not having it.

*The Fifth Point.* After I have thus considered and reasoned out all the aspects of the proposed matter, I should see to which



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side reason more inclines. It is this way, namely, according to the greater motion arising from reason, and not according to some motion arising from the sensitive human nature, that I ought to come to my decision about the matter proposed.

*The Sixth Point.* When that election or decision has been made, the person who has made it ought with great diligence to go to prayer before God our Lord and to offer him that election, that the Divine Majesty may be pleased to receive and confirm it, if it is conducive to his greater service and praise.<sup>61</sup>

In this third time, while being in a state of tranquility and interior freedom, the individual asks for the Holy Spirit's guidance from the beginning to the end of the discernment process, and tries to frame the alternatives as richly as possible, including drawing on the wisdom of others.

Regarding each alternative, the person asks four questions in order to determine which course of action will contribute more to God's glory:

1. What are the positive consequences for God's glory anticipated as a result of deciding on this course of action?
2. What are the negative consequences anticipated as a result of deciding on this action?
3. What are the positive consequences anticipated for God's glory as a result of deciding not to choose this action?
4. What are the anticipated negative consequences as a result of deciding not to choose this course of action?

These four questions are to be asked of each alternative. Specifically, the individual asks help from the Spirit in the process of projecting the possible outcomes regarding God's greater glory if each of the alternatives is enacted or not. The evidence that

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<sup>61</sup> *SpEx* 178–83; ed. Ganss, 77–78.

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God gives to the person in this time of election will take the form of the stronger reasons favoring one alternative over others.<sup>62</sup>

The second method in the third time involves four rules:<sup>63</sup>

*The First Rule.* That love which moves me and brings me to choose the matter in question should descend from above, from the love of God; in such a way that the person making the election should perceive beforehand that the love, whether greater or less, which he or she has for the matter being chosen is solely for the sake of our Creator and Lord.

*The Second Rule.* I will imagine a person whom I have never seen or known. Desiring all perfection for him or her, I will consider what I would say in order to bring such a one to act and elect for the greater glory of God our Lord and the greater perfection of his or her soul. Then, doing the same for myself, I will keep the rule which I set up for another.

*The Third Rule.* I will consider, as if I were at the point of death, what procedure and norm I will at that time wish I had used in the manner of making the present election. Then, guiding myself by that norm, I should make my decision on the whole matter.

*The Fourth Rule.* Imagining and considering how I will find myself on judgment day, I will think how at that time I will wish I had decided in regard to the present matter. And the rule which I will then wish I had followed is what I shall apply now, in order that then I may be in complete contentment and joy.<sup>64</sup>

By using this second method, discerners seek to gain some distance from themselves and to acquire additional perspectives that might help them to choose what is for God's greater glory. In more contemporary

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<sup>62</sup> The only consideration that counts in this third time of election is to what degree deciding to choose or not to choose the alternative contributes to the greater glory of God. No other advantages or disadvantages are relevant to this spiritual discernment process. See Toner, *Discerning God's Will*, 173–77.

<sup>63</sup> They can also be viewed as criteria or norms.

<sup>64</sup> *SpirEx* 184–187; ed. Ganss, 78–79.

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language, we might say that the three perspectives involve (1) love for one's neighbor; (2) the limit-situation of death; and (3) the light that comes from encountering God as our Absolute Future.<sup>65</sup> Some spiritual directors interpret the moment of judgment as being that moment when, at one's death, God's love for one during one's lifetime is fully revealed: with this new awareness, how will the person wish he or she had decided and chosen in this present situation of election?<sup>66</sup>

### C. Ignatius's Texts Dealing with the Second Time of Election

Having reviewed briefly the first and third times of election, it is time to consider the second time in some detail. We begin by reviewing what Ignatius himself wrote about the role of spiritual consolation as evidence in the second time. Nowhere did he explain with any fullness this experience of graced decision making. But viewing these texts together, we see that Ignatius mentions two components to the second-time evidence.

There are two texts to consider. First, I will examine a text in the *Spiritual Exercises* that provides the first element of second time evidence. Then we will treat paragraphs 18 in the Autograph Directory, which offers the second element in the evidence proper to this time. In the *Exercises*, Ignatius says this about the second time:

*The Second Time* is present when sufficient clarity and knowledge are received from the experience of consolations and desolations, and from experience in the discernment of various spirits.<sup>67</sup>

Here, Ignatius offers us one of the components of the second time: the experience of (spiritual) consolations and desolations,

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<sup>65</sup> Paraphrasing the three norms in this way might suggest to some readers elements of Fr. Karl Rahner's theology.

<sup>66</sup> Fr. Toner does not think that Ignatius meant this second method to stand alone, but rather to help the discernor grow in Ignatian indifference—that is, in that interior spiritual freedom requisite for all sound Christian discerning of God's will. See Toner, *Discerning God's Will*, 184–89.

<sup>67</sup> *SpEx* 176; ed. Ganss, 76.

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which need to be discerned to determine the origins—the “spirits”—of these spiritual movements.

The saint offers the second element in the evidence proper to the second time in paragraph 18 in the Autograph Directory.

Among the three modes [times] of making an election, if God does not move him in the first he should dwell on the second, that of recognizing his vocation by the experience of consolations and desolations. Then, as he continues with meditations on Christ our Lord, he should examine, when he finds himself in consolation [*cuando se hallara en consolación*] in which direction God is moving him [*a cuál parte Dios le mueva*]; similarly in desolation. A full explanation should be given of what consolation is: i.e., spiritual joy, love, hope for things above, tears, and every interior movement which leaves the soul consoled in our Lord. The contrary of this is desolation: sadness, lack of confidence, lack of love, dryness, and so on.<sup>68</sup>

This paragraph concerns persons who are making the Spiritual Exercises and who are contemplating Christ, while their faith, hope, and love are deepening, and they are experiencing various interior movements.

Here Ignatius offers, besides discernment of various spirits, an additional component of the second time, one that writers explaining Ignatian discernment of God’s often overlook. Part of the second time process consists in the person noticing in which direction God is moving the individual while he or she is in spiritual consolation, or noticing in which direction the evil spirit is moving the individual while in spiritual desolation. The person finds himself or herself being spontaneously drawn to a course of action caused by God but experienced as arising within the person. And the impulse is accompanied by spiritual consolation, without Ignatius spelling out how the being drawn (i.e., the impulse) and the spiritual consolation are related. Finally, the spiritual consolation needs to be discerned as to whether it is fully of the good spirit, and thus authentic and trustworthy; or whether it has been infiltrated by the evil spirit, and thus deceptive.

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<sup>68</sup> Autograph Directory, no. 18; ed. Palmer, 9.

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Paragraph 21 in the Autograph Directory offers what seems to be another way of proceeding in making the election:

The person may proceed by presenting one side to God on one day and the other on the next, v.g., the counsels on one day and the commandments on the next; and noting in which direction God our Lord gives a greater indication of his will—like someone presenting various foods to a prince and noting which of them is to his liking.<sup>69</sup>

This brief paragraph follows the Autograph Directory's brief mention of the first time and treatment of the second time in paragraph 18 and treatment of the third time in paragraphs 19 and 20. The paragraph is very succinct and offers a metaphor for the discernment process as a whole, rather than adding an additional method of discernment.

In general, Ignatius is telling us that, in the course of one's discernment process, one may choose to offer to God in prayer the various alternatives for decision making and ask God for a "greater indication" of the divine will. The *Directory* says nothing about what this "greater indication" would be. It seems reasonable to assume that the "indication" one would expect God to provide would take the form of one of the three types of God-given evidence presented in the *Spiritual Exercises*: the three elements of the first time, the two elements of the second time, or the stronger reasons to which the Holy Spirit leads the interiorly free person, as the result of Spirit-guided reasoning about alternatives, which is the evidence proper to the third time.<sup>70</sup>

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*Ignatius never suggests that one ought to choose a course of action because it will give one (authentic) spiritual consolation.*

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<sup>69</sup> Autograph Directory, no. 21; ed. Palmer, 9. Here, "counsels" refers, of course, to the evangelical counsels, and not the cognitive guidance of the good or evil spirit.

<sup>70</sup> Ignatius believes that if someone has the gifts for religious life and yet the initial evidence suggests that God is drawing the person to the lay life, then the individual ought to ask God for a greater indication that such is indeed God's will. Ignatius shared the view of his time and of long afterward that being a religious gives God greater glory than being a layperson, all other factors being equal. For a brief treatment of how other early directories interpret this metaphor as adding a second way of employing the sec-

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To summarize what Ignatius has been teaching about the way in which spiritual consolation serves as evidence in the second time:

1. The individual finds herself drawn spontaneously to one or more courses of action.
2. Because the being drawn to a course of action is not accompanied with a sense of certitude about the divine origin of the “being drawn,” God offers, in addition to the being drawn, spiritual consolation, which itself needs to be discerned as to its authenticity. The “being drawn” arises in the person *while* the person is experiencing this spiritual consolation.
3. Because the degree of clarity of the evidence—that is, the authentic spiritual consolation—in its relation to the being drawn can vary, and because the evil spirit can insinuate himself into the process, it is important that (a) there be repeated experiences of the second-time interior movements, and (b) the person seek from God confirmation of the (tentative) decision, if the individual has questions about the process, if the person wants to do all that lies within him or her as a cooperator with God’s grace, and if the individual has the energy and time to seek the confirmation.<sup>71</sup> Note that confirmation can take the form of God giving the three elements of first-time evidence, or of God offering additional second-time evidence with its two components, or of God giving evidence in the form of reasons arrived at by Spirit-guided deliberation when in a time of tranquility—all this in a spirit of interior freedom (“indifference”) and a deep desire to find God’s will.<sup>72</sup>

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ond time of election, see Toner, *Discerning God’s Will*, 152–54.

<sup>71</sup> “*The Sixth Point*. When that election or decision has been made, the person who has made it ought with great diligence to go to prayer before God our Lord and to offer him that election, that the Divine Majesty may be pleased to receive and confirm it, if it is conducive to his greater service and praise” (*SpEx* 183; ed. Ganss, 78).

<sup>72</sup> In this essay, I do not propose an account of the second time of election in all its aspects; rather, I suggest an explanation of the role of authentic spiritual consolation. That said, it is important to acknowledge that God does not always offer the desired confirmation. At that point, the individual needs to allow the already-given evidence to guide him or her, and to proceed in a spirit of trust in the Lord.

In light of the above, and bearing in mind what some other commentators have written (see below), some cautions are in order:

1. Ignatius never suggests that one ought to choose a course of action *because* it will give one (authentic) spiritual consolation. The latter functions as evidence of God's will when it serves, in the person's awareness, as the root or source whence emerges the experience of "being drawn"; the "being drawn" to a course of action is *not* the root or source of the authentic spiritual consolation.
2. But if one chooses a course of action because appropriate and adequate evidence gives assurance that the action is God's will, then one may be confident that one is growing in union with God and in participation in God's project in the world.
3. The only reason to choose a course of action, according to Ignatius, is because the evidence seems to indicate that this course of action is God's will, no matter what feelings the actual making of the choice might generate. The presence of spiritual desolation in one after proposing in oneself, or actually beginning to implement, a course of action does not of itself indicate that that choice is not of God. The presence of spiritual desolation can simply mean that the bad spirit has provoked an unconverted aspect of the person during the process of discernment. If there are legitimate grounds for affirming the choice as God's will, then one simply needs to act contrary (*agere contra*) to the spiritual desolation, following Ignatius's rules.
4. If one proposes to oneself, or imagines, or deliberates about, a course of action, and if one wishes to come to a reliable decision about God's will regarding what one is proposing, imagining, or deliberating, then that person has three options.
  - The first option is to enter into the third time of election, provided that one is in a basic state of tranquility (*SpEx* 177) and has the requisite indifference and desire to seek that course

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of action which is God's will.<sup>73</sup> The evidence will consist of the *reasons* at which one arrives by Spirit-guided deliberation. These reasons bear on which course of action more (*magis*) contributes to God's glory — that is, to the flourishing of one's self and other creatures in relationship with God and to the flourishing of creatures' mutual relationships in God.

- The second route is for the person imagining or deliberating to pause and ask God to give all three elements in the evidence proper to the first time of election and then to wait for God's interior action.
- The third route is to ask God to offer the person the two elements present in the second time, and then, similarly with the second route, to wait on God's action in one's interiority.

#### D. Recent Understandings of the Role of Spiritual Consolation in the Second Time of Election

It is now time to consider some of the ways in which English-language authors in recent years have understood the role of spiritual consolation when making decisions in the second time.

**Group 1: Those who affirm that (1) being spontaneously drawn to a course of action, as distinct from actively considering it or proposing it to oneself, and (2) experiencing that movement of being drawn as proceeding out of authentic spiritual consolation, give sufficient evidence about what God desires**

Fr. Toner defends this view with his typically extensive analysis. He devotes some thirty pages to the second time of election, which makes this the most extensive treatment in English of this point.<sup>74</sup> He makes great

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<sup>73</sup> One should attend to any spiritual feelings that arise during a third-time election, since the presence of such feelings provides data about how the various options are affecting one spiritually. Still, such feelings do not form part of the evidence for the decision to be made the way they do in the second time. Rather, this evidence takes the form of reasons that weigh more-or-less heavily in favor of one or another alternative.

<sup>74</sup> Toner, *Discerning God's Will*, 130–60. For brief mentions in English of the two



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efforts to understand what Ignatius thinks about this kind of decision making, recognizing that the saint does not provide an extended treatment of it either in the *Spiritual Exercises* or in his other writings.

Fr. Toner affirms that the second time of election, according to Ignatius, has two elements in the evidence:

1. the second time begins when an individual experiences himself or herself being spontaneously drawn toward a course of action that is morally good, and
2. God gives evidence in the person's interiority that the "being drawn" is of God, and gives this evidence by offering authentic spiritual consolation, out of which the "being drawn" emerges.

Because Ignatius's treatment of the second time is so brief, Fr. Toner seeks to interpret Ignatius, going beyond what the saint explicitly writes. He asks himself a question: what must the linkage be between the volitional "being drawn" and the authentic spiritual consolation so that the latter factor—the authentic spiritual consolation—can serve as evidence of the origin of the former factor—the "being drawn"?

Fr. Toner's answer is that the volitional "being drawn" (spontaneous impulse) to a course of action must be experienced by the person as arising out of the authentic spiritual consolation as from a source or matrix. Only if there is such a tight connection between the impulse and the authentic spiritual consolation can the origin of the spiritual affect—which is the Holy Spirit, source of all authentic spiritual consolation—be recognized, with some degree of assurance, as the origin as well of the spontaneous impulse.<sup>75</sup>

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elements of evidence in the second time—namely, (1) the presence of spiritual consolations and desolations; and (2) attending to that to which one is being drawn while in spiritual consolation or spiritual desolation, see Timothy Gallagher, OMV, *Discerning the Will of God: An Ignatian Guide to Christian Decision Making* (New York: Crossroad, 2009), 88; Dean Brackley, SJ, *The Call to Discernment in Troubled Times: New Perspectives on the Transformative Wisdom of Ignatius of Loyola* (New York: Crossroad, 2004), 147; and Michael Ivens, SJ, *Understanding the Spiritual Exercises*, 137.

<sup>75</sup> Toner, *Discerning God's Will*, 147–52.

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Moreover, because of the subtlety and complexity of this time of election, and because the evil spirit can get involved in the process, the experience of these three factors cannot be a “one-off” interior event; rather, it must be repeated several times if one is to have the desired assurance that the impulse—the being drawn—is of God and thus is to be acted upon.

Additionally, Fr. Toner contends that, if one is being drawn to more than one course of action, and each impulse is proceeding from authentic spiritual consolation, then an additional discerning step is required. The person needs to compare the spontaneous impulses and the authentic spiritual consolations associated with each possible course of action, in order to determine which set of them is superior in clarity, strength, and duration compared to the other set.<sup>76</sup> This is the evidence that God gives to indicate which of the courses of action is more (*magis*) to God’s glory.

Note here that Fr. Toner goes beyond the two elements in the evidence as found in Ignatius, adding an additional element that is unique to him among those writing in English. Drawing on the saint’s understanding of spiritual consolation and spiritual desolation, Fr. Toner reminds us that these spiritual feelings frequently involve thoughts and suggestions—Ignatius often calls them “counsels” (*consejos*)—that proceed from the good and evil spirits.<sup>77</sup>

Fr. Toner cites two sources for this. First, in the Rules for the Discernment of Spirits intended for those in the First Week, Ignatius writes:

For just as the good spirit is chiefly the one who guides and counsels us [*nos guía y aconseja*] in time of [spiritual] consolation, so it is the evil spirit who does this in time of [spiritual]

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<sup>76</sup> For Fr. Toner, this situation offers another reason, already mentioned above, as to why spiritual consolation needs always to have the constituent factor of pleasantness, delight, or peace. Note that, when a comparison between spiritual consolations is called for in the second time of election, the affective quality of the two or more consolations needs to be comparable.

<sup>77</sup> Ignatius uses this term in the *Spiritual Exercises* only at nos. 54 and 318, but much more frequently in the *Constitutions*.

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desolation. By following his counsels we can never find the way to a right decision.<sup>78</sup>

This text indicates that while one is experiencing spiritual consolation or spiritual desolation, the good spirit and the evil spirit will offer counsels—that is, thoughts or suggestions—to support what the spiritual feeling is either encouraging or discouraging one to do.

Fr. Toner's second source spells out a bit more what Ignatius wrote in rule 5. This text consists of a portion of a letter that Ignatius wrote to Sr. Teresa Rejadell:

It remains for me to speak of how we ought to understand what we think is from our Lord, and understanding it, how we ought to use it for our advantage. For it frequently happens that our Lord moves and urges the soul [*mueve y fuerza a nuestra ánima*] to this or that activity. He begins by enlightening the soul, that is to say, by speaking interiorly to it without the din of words, lifting it up wholly to His divine love and ourselves to His meaning without any possibility of resistance on our part, even should we wish to resist. This thought of His which we take is of necessity in conformity with the commandments, the precepts of the Church, and obedience to our superiors. It will be full of humility because the same divine Spirit is present in all. But we can frequently be deceived, however, because after such consolation or inspiration, when the soul is still abiding in its joy, the enemy tries under the impetus of this joy to make us innocently add to what we have received from God our Lord. His only purpose is to disturb and confuse us in everything.

At other times he makes us lessen the import of the message we have received and confronts us with obstacles and difficulties, so as to prevent us from carrying out completely what had been made known to us.<sup>79</sup>

This passage indicates, once again, that in addition to spiritual consolation and spiritual desolation, God offers a counsel, or sense ("enlight-

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<sup>78</sup> *SpEx* 318; ed. Ganss, 122–23.

<sup>79</sup> *Letters of St. Ignatius of Loyola*, trans. Young, 22 ff.

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ening the soul," "this thought of His,") regarding God's will. At times, in order to confuse people so that they might not do God's will, the evil spirit will sow other "counsels" about where God is drawing them.

Unlike any other commentator writing in English, Fr. Toner makes use of Ignatius's teaching on counsels proceeding from spiritual consolation and spiritual desolation. In addition, he offers a third component to the evidence proper to the second time: a "counsel" indicating to the person that the thing to which the person is being drawn is God's will; this counsel needs to flow out of authentic spiritual consolation, just as the "being drawn" emerges from that consolation.<sup>80</sup>

Fr. Toner makes things more complicated for students of Ignatius by offering, in the volume of case studies that he published four years after *Discerning God's Will*, a different understanding of the evidence proper to the second time. He presents this differing interpretation in his brief summary of the three times of election at the beginning of the volume:

Any second-time experience has two essential and related factors. First, there is a conative movement of will, a volitional attraction, toward one of the alternatives for choice. Discerners do not experience attraction to this alternative because in itself it appeals more to them, because they like it; rather, they are drawn to it as to what God wills them to choose. Whether for any other reason or motive they like it or dislike it is irrelevant in this mode of discernment. The motivation for the attraction, in other words, is pure or, as Ignatius would say, "from above." The movement is similar to the movement of the will in the first-time experience, but not as powerful as the latter and without the certainty about the divine source of it that accompanies the latter.

Second, such a volitional movement, then, needs some further factor as a sign that the movement arises at the prompting of the Holy Spirit and not from some antispiritual or nonspiritual source. Ignatius looks for this sign in spiritual consolation. So also, movements of spiritual desolation are

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<sup>80</sup> Toner, *Discerning God's Will*, 130–41.

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signs of the influence of the evil spirit. What characterizes spiritual consolation and desolation and why these are signs of the influence of the Holy Spirit or of the evil spirit are questions taken up in Ignatius's rules for discernment of spirits.<sup>81</sup>

This second explanation contains the two factors in the second-time evidence he mentions in his book on discerning God's will—

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*A number of authors assert that a particular course of action can be trusted to be from God if there arises within us authentic spiritual consolation after we have begun actively to imagine or to propose the action to ourselves.*

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namely, the experience of being drawn to a course of action and the presence of (authentic) spiritual consolation. But this second explanation differs from what Fr. Toner writes in his discernment book in two respects. First, he says nothing about the relationship between the being drawn and the spiritual consolation;

and second, he does not mention the presence of a counsel from the Holy Spirit indicating to the person that this course of action is of God.

In the explanation provided in his case studies volume, he seems to view the second element as a matter of having a pure motive, wanting to decide on a course of action only because it is God's will. But this is the motive required in every good Christian discernment of God's will. Fr. Toner has shifted here from speaking about a counsel arising out of authentic spiritual consolation as part of the evidence that God gives of his will in the second time, to making a condition of all discernment of God's will part of the evidence in the second time election. For my part, I have no account as to why in his later book, written just four years after his major work on discerning God's will, Fr. Toner, who is usually a very careful commentator, changed, without explanation, his understanding of the second time.

**Group 2: Authors who either (1) maintain that the occurrence of authentic spiritual consolation after a person begins to discern a possible course of action offers the needed evi-**

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<sup>81</sup> Jules J. Toner, SJ, *What Is Your Will, O God? A Casebook for Studying Discernment of God's Will* (St. Louis: IJS, 1995), 14.

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**dence, or (2) are imprecise about the role of spiritual consolation as evidence in the second time**

A number of authors assert that a particular course of action can be trusted to be from God if there arises within us authentic spiritual consolation after we have begun actively to imagine or to propose the action to ourselves. The spiritual consolation then becomes the sufficient indicator that the decision is of God. Contrariwise, if spiritual desolation arises in us after we are imagining or considering a possible choice, this is a sign either that the decision is not of God, or that it requires further discernment.

Fr. Gerard Hughes (d. 2014) represents these authors, none of whom refers to paragraph 18 of the Autograph Directory. He writes:

No amount of prayer can excuse us from doing our homework on the question [of finding what is God's will] but, assuming the homework has been done as efficiently as possible, we should then take the decision into prayer, asking God that whatever we choose may be for his greater praise, reverence and service. We may be able to discover the choice we should make by noting over a period of time the effect a provisional decision has both on prayer and on our moods outside of prayer. If consistently in prayer and after it, I experience desolation with this provisional decision, for example to accept a particular job, but find consolation in the alternative, then I should choose the alternative which brings the consolation.<sup>82</sup>

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<sup>82</sup> Hughes, *God of Surprises*, 142. For spiritual consolation following as evidence upon considering a course of action, see Herbert F. Smith, SJ, "Discernment of Spirits," in *Notes on the Spiritual Exercises of St. Ignatius of Loyola: The Best of the Review - 1*, ed. David L. Fleming, SJ (St. Louis: Review for Religious, 1985), 241 f.; Philip L. Boroughs, SJ, "Using Ignatian Discernment," *Ignatian Exercises: Contemporary Annotations, The Best of the Review - 4*, ed. David L. Fleming, SJ (St. Louis: Review for Religious, 1996); Michael Sparrough, SJ, Jim Manney, and Tim Hipkind, SJ, *What's Your Decision?*, 105, 116 ff; Mark Thibodeaux, SJ, *God's Voice Within*, 171 ff. The following are imprecise in their treatment of the role of spiritual consolation as evidence: De Celles and Sparrow, *Burning with Love for God*, 285; David Lonsdale, *Listening to the Music of the Spirit*, 146; Pierre Wolff, *Discernment: The Art of Choosing Well, Based on Ignatian Spirituality* (Liguori, MO: Liguori/Triumph, 1993), 43-48; Carol Ann Smith, SHCJ, and Eugene F. Merz, SJ, *Finding God in Each Moment: The Practice of Discernment in Everyday Life* (Notre Dame, IN: Ave Maria Press, 2006), 113 ff; Eliza-

### E. The Reason for Affirming Two Elements in the Evidence Proper to the Second Time

This section can be blessedly short. The one and decisive reason for affirming two elements in the second-time evidence is that Ignatius provides these two elements in two documents that he himself wrote, considered together: the *Spiritual Exercises* and the Autograph Directory. As we have seen, in the former work he mentions the presence of spiritual consolations and spiritual desolations in the second time, as well as their discernment; and in the latter one—in a single sentence—he explains that, in the second time, the discerner is to notice to what course of action he or she is being drawn while in spiritual consolation.

Even if he tried, Ignatius could not have been briefer in his naming these two elements! But he did give us these two precious morsels for our instruction.

### F. Proposed Consensus Statements Regarding Ignatius's Understanding of the Role of Spiritual Consolation as Evidence in the Second Time of Election

With these considerations in mind, I propose the following five statements regarding Ignatius's understanding of the role of spiritual consolation as evidence in the second time of election:

1. The second time of election as found in the *Spiritual Exercises* and the Autograph Directory of Ignatius is like the first time in one respect: they both involve a being drawn to one or more cours-

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both Liebert, SNJM, *The Way of Discernment*, 130f. In an earlier and influential article, Karl Rahner, SJ, views the second time of election through the lens of his theological anthropology, considering spiritual consolation without preceding cause to be the first principle of all discernment of spirits, identifying it with the graced transcendence of the human spirit. Thus, for Rahner, the second time of election involves seeking "congruence between the divine consolation and the prospective putting of oneself in the situation of having chosen a certain object, or between the fundamental attitude and the particular decision." See Karl Rahner, *The Dynamic Element in the Church*, *Quaestiones Disputatae* 12, trans. W. J. O'Hara (New York: Herder and Herder, 1964), 163. For a good summary and critique of Rahner's position, see Toner, *Discerning God's Will*, 316–22.

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es of action. In the first time, there is also present a God-given counsel, accompanied by the existential inability, at the moment, to doubt that the being drawn is from God. In the second time, the evidence is the presence of authentic spiritual consolation, which sheds light on the God-given character of the spontaneously-arising being drawn to a course of action. The being drawn requires the definitive evidence coming from the (authentic) spiritual consolation because, unlike in the first time, it is not experienced as indubitable at the time of the experience.

2. For the authentic spiritual consolation in the second time to provide evidence that the being drawn is from God, these interior movements need to be ordered to one another as follows: the first (the “being drawn”) needs to be experienced as flowing out of the second (the authentic spiritual consolation). Simple juxtaposition of the movements in the person’s awareness, without a close experienced linkage between them, does not offer evidence that the “being drawn” is from God.
3. The second time of election is rather subtle and complex. In order to have confidence in the evidence so as to be able to come to a firm decision, the individual needs to experience several times the close association of the being drawn with the spiritual feeling. If one still has questions and time allows, or if one wishes to be sure to have done everything internally possible in the discernment process, it would also be important to ask God to confirm the tentative decision by God’s either repeating the same second-time evidence yet again or offering evidence appropriate to the first time, or by the individual engaging in the Spirit-guided deliberative thinking in an attitude of tranquility and Ignatian indifference proper to the third time.<sup>83</sup>
4. All authentic Christian decision making involves (a) asking God for divine assistance during the entire process, (b) asking for and developing a deepening interior freedom from

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<sup>83</sup> Regarding the confirmation of second-time elections and the question of the autonomy of the three times of election, two important topics that space precludes treating here, see *Discerning God’s Will*, chapters 12 and 13.



bias (Ignatian indifference), and (c) cooperating with divine grace by engaging in all the acts of attention, understanding, and judgment needed to assess the evidence and to draw the warranted conclusions. In addition, the decision needs to be framed properly—for example, do I have the right and the authority to make this decision as framed this way? At the end of the day the discerner needs to ask, and honestly answer, the question: have I done all that lies in me by way of cooperating with the Holy Spirit in this process of discerning what is God's will for me here and now?

### III. Conclusion

A review of some of the recent English-language literature on Ignatian themes reveals that the state of writing about the nature of spiritual consolation and the second time of election is, at present—forgive me—not very consoling. There is considerable disagreement among writers. Some support their positions with reference to specific writings of Ignatius, while others do not. Yet all insist that they are explicating Ignatius's understanding of discernment.

Of course, there is no such thing as interpretation-free reporting or explaining of someone else's thought. But even this ancient insight, which the postmodern age emphasizes, does not weaken the need for writers on Ignatian discernment to be more careful about what they write. To this end, I have proposed some consensus statements on fundamental points for the reader's consideration. I hope that those interested in Ignatian spirituality will read and reflect upon them, and perhaps reconsider what they take to be the basic elements of an accurate understanding of Ignatius's thought on these matters.

Because Ignatius wrote concisely, he needs specialists to interpret his writings to a broader public. But for us to take their claims as legitimate interpretations of his thought, the specialists have to argue for them with support drawn from the writings themselves. On which note, it is quite possible that kinds of evidence apart from the three times come into play; but if so, then those promoting that position must argue for and not merely assert it.

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One final thought. All of the above reflections are rooted in one fundamental conviction that stems from the heart of Ignatian—and indeed any authentic Christian—spirituality. The conviction can be expressed this way: the fundamental criterion for a Christian disciple's decision-making is always God's will. Acting according to God's will assures people that they are growing in union with God and contributing to God's project in the world. On the other hand, making decisions that are rooted in deceptive spiritual consolation, or deliberately choosing what is for the lesser glory of God, when a person knows what makes for God's greater glory, can do one or another degree of harm to the Church and to the world.<sup>84</sup>

A person can be sure that he or she is doing God's will, growing in union with God, and contributing to God's project, if he or she fulfills the conditions of good discernment—to wit, if (1) one proceeds in discernment and choice-making with the deep desire to find God's will, and finding it, to do it because it is God's will; (2) one does one's best to carry out the discernment process using the evidence that God gives to one; (3) one relies on God's grace to find that divine will; and (4) one deliberates in that spirit of significant, if not perfect, interior freedom called *indifference*. The certitude, understood as firmness of assent, that one is doing God's will ultimately derives not from the quality of one's efforts, which are finite and fallible. Instead, they stem from one's reliance on God's infinite and passionate desire that human beings find and do God's will, which is beatitude for every human being. This divine desire exceeds infinitely the intensity of human desires, and intends completely to bring human history and the whole cosmos to beatific fullness.<sup>85</sup>

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<sup>84</sup> One can be confident that one is serving God well and truly contributing to the well-being of humanity and the earth only when one is doing God's will, for God is totally and infinitely bent on the full coming of God's reign, which is the full flourishing of all creation.

<sup>85</sup> On this point, see "What Kind of Assent Can Be Given to the Conclusion of a Sound Discernment?", chapter 15 of Toner, *Discerning God's Will*.

### Appendix: Map of Interior Movements

