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**The Notion of Spiritual Discernment Found in the Writings of
Origen, Antony of Egypt and Ignatius of Loyola -
A Comparative Study**

Pamela Gebauer

A Thesis

in

The Department

of

Theological Studies

**Presented in Partial Fulfilment of the Requirements
for the Degree of Master of Arts at
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ABSTRACT

**The Notion of Spiritual Discernment Found in the Writings of Origen, Antony of Egypt
and Ignatius of Loyola - A Comparative Study**

Pamela Gebauer

This study compares the notion of spiritual discernment found in Origen's *Peri Archôn*, in Antony of Egypt's Seven Letters and in Ignatius of Loyola's *Spiritual Exercises*. The goal of the study is to examine some of the foundations and important contributions that each of these writers has made to the Christian Church's understanding of spiritual discernment. Some of the concepts discussed include: free will, self-knowledge, inner movements of the soul, the Holy Spirit, grace and spiritual battle. The conclusion briefly discusses the implications of these writers' contributions to our current understanding of spiritual discernment.

The Notion of Spiritual Discernment found in the writings of Origen, Antony of Egypt and Ignatius of Loyola - A Comparative Study

TABLE OF CONTENTS

I.	Introduction	1
II.	The Battle for the Will: Origen's Notion of Spiritual Discernment	5
	A. Background of Origen's Life and Times	5
	B. Context of <i>Peri Archôn</i>	7
	C. Foundations in Origen's Understanding of Free Will and Spiritual Discernment	8
	1. Free Will and Origen's Cosmology	8
	2. The Relationship between Free Will and Spiritual Discernment	10
	3. Origen's Notion of Spiritual Discernment	12
III.	Antony of Egypt: Discernment of Spirits as Necessary for Holiness	17
	A. Background of Antony of Egypt's Life and Times	17
	B. Historicity of the The Seven Letters	21
	C. Key Concepts in The Seven Letters	24
	1. Knowledge, Salvation and the Return to the Original Nature	24
	2. Evil and Free Will	28
	3. Self-Knowledge and Discernment	32
	D. Antony's Notion of Spiritual Discernment	35
IV.	Antony and Origen: Complementary Notions of Discernment	40
	A. Spiritual Discernment and Free Will in the Battle against Evil	40
	B. Spiritual Discernment as a Gift of God	47
	C. Spiritual Discernment as a Function of Self-Knowledge	51
V.	Ignatius of Loyola: Discernment as Finding the Will of God so as to Obey it	56
	A. Background of Ignatius of Loyola's Life	56
	B. Background and content of the <i>Spiritual Exercises</i>	59
	C. The notion of spiritual discernment in the <i>Spiritual Exercises</i>	72

VI.	Common Elements surrounding the Notion of Spiritual Discernment in Origen's <i>Peri Archon</i> and Ignatius of Loyola's Spiritual Exercises	87
	A. Evil, Free Will and Grace	87
	B. Discerning Movements of Good and Evil in the Soul	90
	C. The Spiritual Battle	94
	D. The Role of Scripture	99
VII.	Common Elements surrounding the Notion of Spiritual Discernment in Antony of Egypt's Seven Letters and Ignatius of Loyola's <i>Spiritual Exercises</i>	103
	A. Salvation, Self-Knowledge and Spiritual Discernment	103
	B. The Role of the Holy Spirit and the Community of Christ	105
	C. The Spiritual Battle	108
	D. The Role of Scripture	111
VIII.	Summary of Origen, Antony of Egypt and Ignatius of Loyola's Contribution to the Christian Notion of Spiritual Discernment	114
IX.	Implications and Conclusions	123
	Bibliography	132

I. Introduction

My original inquiry in the realm of Christian spirituality centred around the question of the relationship between contemplation and action. To put it another way I wanted to know more about the link of inner spirituality or holiness to mission and action in the visible world. My query, I think, is a typically modern one: How is Christian spirituality worked out in real life? Urban Holmes in his book quotes Dag Hammarskjöld's words to describe the pervading tendency of the spirituality of our century: "In our era, the road to holiness necessarily passes through the world of action."¹

That there has been a general increase in interest in the topic of Christian spirituality can be seen by the number of new publications on the subject, as well as the editing and re-publication of older classic works on the topic available in bookstores and libraries. There seems to be a growing thirst for deeper spirituality. Dallas Willard sets forth a groundbreaking case for this thirst in his book, citing the failure of modern Protestant churches to help the faithful to be transformed steadily into Christ-likeness.² He invites a re-thinking of what it means to imitate Christ:

A successful performance at a moment of crisis rests largely and essentially upon the depths of a self wisely and rigorously prepared in the totality of its being - mind and body....Following "in his steps" cannot be equated with behaving as he did when he was "on the spot." To live as Christ lived is to live as he did all his life....The secret of the easy yoke, then, is to learn from Christ how to live our total lives....We must learn how to follow his preparations....We have to discover how to enter into his disciplines from where we stand today - and no doubt how to extend and amplify them to suit our needy cases.

¹ Urban Holmes, *A History of Spirituality*, New York: Seabury Press, 1980, p. 150.

² Dallas Willard, *The Spirit of the Disciplines: Understanding How God Changes Lives*, San Francisco: Harper and Row, 1988.

What Willard proposes, then, is a return, a renewal of the classical spiritual disciplines that Christians have practiced from the beginning.

As I examined my question more closely, I began to see that I was really interested in how the informed spirit, will and mind is moved to decision and then, into action for God. This is the subject of the classical notion of spiritual discernment or discernment of spirits. When we think of discerning the will of God or making an important decision that will affect our action in the outside world, what spiritual master or writing comes first to mind? For many people, even today, it is Ignatius of Loyola and his *Spiritual Exercises*.

As I began to probe this topic, spiritual discernment, I wondered about the origins of the Church's thinking on this subject. In the New Testament, the use of the words *dokimazo* (test, approve, examine, prove) and *diakrisis* (distinguish) carries with it the importance of testing prophetic messages, distinguishing good from evil and error from truth. It also has to do in a general way with the idea of being able to determine what is God's will and also, to determine what is best so as to act upon the discernment received.³

³ In the New Testament the precise expression, *discernment of spirits (diakriseis pneumatōn)*, is found but once in 1 Cor. 12:10 where it is included in a list of various gifts of the Holy Spirit. Paul never actually goes into detail to describe what this gift is. Many have felt it was also linked to prophecy or the prophetic message spoken in the early Church and the necessity to discern how God was speaking and acting through the message. Just as in the Old Testament, the early Church seemed to have had its share of false prophets. Hence, there is also the admonition in 1 Jn. 4:1 ["Beloved, do not believe every spirit but test (dokimazo) the spirits to see whether they are from God; for many false prophets have gone out into the world."]. Paul makes a similar admonition in 1 Thess. 5: 19-21 ["Do not quench the Spirit. Do not despise the words of prophets, but test (dokimazo) everything; hold fast to what is good"]. Paul also talks about discernment in general in the Christian life in such passages as the following:

Rom 12:2 ["Do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your minds, so that you may discern (dokimazo) what is the will of God - what is good and acceptable and perfect"];

Eph. 5:10 ["Try to find out (dokimazo) what is pleasing to the Lord"];

Phil. 1: 9, 10a ["that your love may overflow more and more with knowledge and full insight to help you determine (dokimazo) what is best"];

Heb. 5:14 ["But solid food is for the mature, for those whose faculties have been trained by practice to distinguish (diakrisis) good from evil"].

I also discovered in my reading that Origen was one of the first Christians to write down some basic notions of spiritual discernment, especially with regard to the free will and how it chooses and distinguishes between the presence of good and evil spirits. Viller ⁴ is often quoted as saying that it would be fairly easy to write a condensation of all of Scripture's teaching on discernment of spirits using Origen's work *On First Principles* (*Peri Archôn* or *De Principiis*). This signalled to me the importance of studying Origen's ideas since they were so early and most likely influenced future Christian thinking on the subject.

I knew that discernment of spirits was also an important theme for the Egyptian desert fathers. Antony of Egypt and his teaching on discernment was made known to many in the fourth century by Athanasius' *Life of Antony* (*Vita Antonii*) written in 357 CE just after Antony's death. Antony of Egypt was the first of many who fled to the Egyptian deserts during the fourth and fifth centuries to seek holiness, the love of God and spiritual discernment and wisdom. Seven letters, now considered to be authentically written by Antony to various desert communities, have been recovered during the 1950's. The Georgian collection has proved especially helpful in comparing previously found fragments in Coptic, Syrian, Latin and Arabic. Derwas Chitty has translated the Georgian collection into English. These seven letters are included in my foundational study of spiritual discernment since the desert fathers' tradition is particularly remembered for their contribution to this subject. The letters, also treat a number of themes related to discernment including redemption, being taught by the Holy Spirit, the importance of knowing oneself, loving God and others, and the dangers inherent in pursuing holiness without discernment.

⁴ M. Viller and K. Rahner, *aszese und Mystik in der Väterzeit: Ein Abriss* (Freiburg: Herder, 1939) p. 75.

Thirdly, my attention turned to Ignatius of Loyola's *Spiritual Exercises*. The goal of the Exercises is to help the one doing them to begin to discern between the different movements of good or evil that move in the soul so as to be able to know the will of God and then to put it into action. The Exercises allow the soul to enter into the dynamic of discernment in the midst of fluctuations of spiritual consolations and desolations. The "Rules for Discernment" which come at the end of the exercises are in themselves a treasure of information on the notion of spiritual discernment.

In the study which follows I propose to examine the notion of spiritual discernment found in Origen's *Peri Archôn*, in Antony of Egypt's Seven Letters and in Ignatius of Loyola's *Spiritual Exercises*. I hope then to compare their notions to one another and arrive at some of the foundations and important contributions that each of them has made to the Church's understanding of spiritual discernment. Finally, I would like to consider some of the implications of their contributions on our current understanding of spiritual discernment.

II. The Battle for the Will: Origen's Notion of Spiritual Discernment

Background of Origen's Life and Times

Origen was born around 185 AD in Alexandria, a city which had been founded by Alexander the Great in 331 BC. This Egyptian city had been thoroughly inculcated with Greek culture and had one of the finest libraries in the world. Ethnic Greeks were still a minority, but exerted a strong cultural force, while descendants of rural Egyptian Copts made up the majority. Origen's father, Leonides, was a Christian and an educated man. From an early age Origen learned the Scriptures and was exposed to Greek learning. He may have received training from the Christian apologist Clement (*Titus Flavius Clemens*), the catechist of the Alexandrian church before 202 AD. During the tenth reign of the Roman emperor Septimus Severus (202 AD), Origen's father was arrested and imprisoned as persecution arose against the Christian Church. He was martyred in 203 AD. Origen, living in the house of a noble lady of Alexandria who had converted to Christianity, was able to continue his studies in grammar, philology and Greek literature. He gradually gained reputation as a teacher, and non-Christians often came to him asking for instruction in Christianity. Demetrius, bishop of Alexandria, asked Origen to take over the position of teaching in the catechetical school, which had been vacated by Clement during the persecution.

Pagan and Christian schools in Alexandria existed side by side and drew from each other. There reigned at that time in Alexandria a remarkable spirit both of toleration and syncretism - Jews, Christians, Gnostics, philosophers and adherents of pagan mystery cults, were all interested in opportunities to share their ideas. The prevalence of pagan thinking

existing side by side with Christian teaching, stimulated Christians to try to meet the pagan philosophers on their own ground. So, there were some attempts to provide the gospel with philosophy and to mould it into a system that would appeal to the philosophers. In spite of his criticism of Greek philosophy and learning, what struck Origen was their similarity to Christianity. He saw Platonism agreeing with Christianity on the essential goodness of the world and its Creator. On this point, both Christians and Platonists rejected the Gnostics fundamental negativity to the created, material world. The philosophic system of Platonism supplied Origen with something that Christianity lacked - a rational framework to give coherence to seemingly separate and contradictory doctrines. This seemed to Christian minds at that time the only way to do battle with the Gnostics who seemed to be infiltrating both paganism and Christianity.

Sometime after 211 AD Origen became friends with Ambrosius, a rich and intelligent Alexandrian who had formerly been a gnostic. Ambrosius helped Origen in his writing by purchasing manuscripts and providing skilled scribes to whom he could dictate. In this way Origen was able to advance at great speed, but the quality of the writings sometimes suffered as a result. Origen eventually lost favour with bishop Demetrius as a result of being invited to preach in some churches in Palestine although he was not an ordained presbyter. Even after he was ordained by Theoktistus, bishop of Caesarea, Demetrius eventually forbid him to teach in Alexandrian churches. Hence, Origen left Alexandria for good after 231 AD and returned to the churches in Palestine where he continued preaching, teaching and writing. Having escaped the persecution under Maximin the Tracian in 235 AD, he was imprisoned and tortured during the reign of Decius (249-251). He was released upon the death of Decius and died three years later around 254 AD in Tyre, his health broken after his imprisonment. His remaining years

were devoted to writing consolatory letters to Christians who were suffering.

Context of *Peri Archôn*

Origen most likely wrote *On First Principles*, originally *Peri Archôn* while he was still in Alexandria prior to 231 AD. The original text has been lost. It can only be re-constructed albeit imperfectly from the *Philocalia* (an anthology of Origen's works compiled after his death by Basil the Great and Gregory of Nazianzus) and from Rufinus' Latin translation (*De Principiis*) written in 398. Jerome and Justinian I also quote Origen but those passages quoted from his writings are being used to prove their heretical content and so are suspect. Rufinus took some liberty with the original text to try to adapt it to Latin readers. He may have shortened passages he deemed too long or added explanations when he thought they were warranted. Since Origen was often in the habit of raising questions and leaving them up in the air, Rufinus may have tried to provide some missing links. Fortunately, the first chapter of Book III of *Peri Archôn*, containing over half of the entire book in length, and containing a good portion of the texts that I will be exploring in Origen's writings on free will and discernment, survives in its original Greek text.

Recent studies that have been done to determine why Origen would have written *Peri Archôn*, seem to indicate that Origen probably did not intend to write a systematic introduction to Christian theology, but to treat the key questions that intrigued learned people of his times, i.e., the matter of the relationship between God and the world. His work falls into a familiar philosophical category of writing treating the question of *physics*. *On First Principles* is an English translation of the Greek *Peri Archôn* where *archôn* is the plural of a noun *archê* which

means “beginning.” The idea of beginning principles enters the realm both of a philosophical treatise on the relation between God and the world, and also, the beginnings of an intelligible frame for Christian doctrine.

Foundations in Origen’s Understanding of Free Will and Spiritual Discernment

Origen’s Cosmology and Free Will

To the Greek mind, God was not understood so much as a religious entity but was understood metaphysically as an abstract Being. Origen’s goal in the *Peri Archôn* is to present the God of Christianity and his relationship with the world within a rational philosophical framework that explains how diversity came to be, given the essential unity of God. The terminology that Origen uses to describe the nature of God can also be found within Middle Platonic thought. God is envisioned as intellect (*nous, noêsis, to noumenon*) and defined as a Unity (*henas*), a One (*monas*) above all other created intellect and being. Origen writes, “God, therefore, is not to be thought of as being...or existing in a body, but as an uncompounded intellectual nature...so that He cannot be believed to have within him a greater and a less, but is such that He is in all parts *Monas*, and, so to speak, *Enas*.”⁵

Origen presents the Unity of the Christian Godhead by proposing several “Ones” or *First Principles*. The first “One” is the ruler of the noetic realm which he refers to as God the Father. The second “One” is the intelligence and creator of the material realm. Origen refers to this second “One” as Son, Logos, Wisdom and Christ.⁶ The Holy Spirit is an agent of

⁵ Origen, *De Principiis* from “Fathers of the Church”; website: <http://www.newadvent.org/fathers/04121.htm>, (Latin translation of *Peri Archôn* of Rufinus), Book I, chapter 1, #6.

⁶ Origen, *De Principiis*, Book I, Chapter II, #3).

salvation, for those who are regenerated by God - "he who is regenerated by God unto salvation has to do both with the Father and Son and Holy Spirit, and does not obtain salvation unless with the cooperation of the entire Trinity; and...it is impossible to become partaker of the Father or the Son without the Holy Spirit."⁷ Each member of the triad of "Ones" exists separately and distinct from the other, but they all share the same substance which distinguishes them from all other beings.

Next Origen must approach the serious philosophical (and theological) problem, especially for the Greek mind, that conceived of the essential unity of God; if this same God, a triad of Ones, created all that exists and if all the spiritual beings were created equal, how can one explain the diversity that exists in human experience? Here Origen introduces his teaching that all rational creatures were given the capacity of free will. Since the creature may respond to circumstances according to free will, this freedom necessarily opens the door to diversity, to mutability. His conclusion is that the diversity found in the natures of rational beings stems from their diversity of choice: "He created all whom He made equal and alike, because there was in Himself no reason for producing variety and diversity. But since those rational creatures themselves...were endowed with the power of free-will, this freedom of will incited each one either to progress by imitation of God, or reduced him to failure through negligence. And this...is the cause of the diversity among rational creatures, deriving its origin not from the will or judgment of the Creator, but from the freedom of the individual will."⁸

⁷ *Ibid.*, Book I, Chapter III, #5.

⁸ *Ibid.*, Book II, Chapter IX, #6.

Origen groups the rational or spiritual beings that have been created into three categories. The first are the celestial beings which include angels, stars and planets. They have the task of governing and helping their inferiors. The second class are human beings who are helped by the first group. They are caught in the middle between the angels which help them in their progress toward good and the wicked angels which are the third category of rational beings. As rational beings, this third group has chosen to follow evil rather than good. The malignant powers try to impede the progress of humans toward God. Thus, Origen presents humans as caught between good and evil spirits, engaged in a spiritual battle between good and evil. This human plight, however, in no way takes away from a person's free will. From here, Origen takes us into the realm of discernment of spirits, through the door of free-will.

The Relationship between Free Will and Spiritual Discernment

Origen refers to a reasoning power within each human that is capable of discerning between good and evil and then choosing between the two: "since the nature of this reason which is in man has within itself the power of distinguishing between good and evil, and while distinguishing possesses the faculty of selecting what it has approved, it may justly be deemed worthy of praise in choosing what is good, and deserving of censure in following that which is base or wicked."⁹ Although humans can be incited to evil by malignant powers, this in no way limits the freedom of the will, according to Origen. This is because there is a reasoning power within us that is able to distinguish, to discern and then we are still free to choose.

Here is an example of how Origen argued with those who denied freedom of will:

"is it not superfluous to throw back the causes of our actions on those things which happen to us from without and thus transfer the blame from ourselves, on whom it wholly lies?....No, such an assertion is neither true nor becoming and is invented only

⁹ *Ibid.*, Book III, Chapter I, #3.

that the freedom of the will may be denied;....The result of our reasoning, therefore, is to show that those things which happen to us from without are not in our power; but that to make a good or bad use of those things which do so happen, by help of that reason which is within us, and which distinguishes and determines how these things ought to be used, is within our power.”¹⁰

What is interesting in his defense of free will is that it is tightly linked with the notion of spiritual discernment. The struggle of the soul against the powers of evil is not an exercise simply of the strength of the will, but it is a spiritual struggle and “the human will is not sufficient to obtain salvation.”¹¹ Origen believes that humans are in need of divine assistance to overcome evil powers, but that persons are always free to respond to divine assistance either by diligently appropriating it or, on the contrary, by being slothful and making room for the evil powers to rush in like robbers and to incite the soul to some evil course. Here Origen’s analogy seems similar to that used by Antony of Egypt in his Sixth Letter:

“For occasionally the mind, when watchful, and casting away from it what is evil, calls to itself the aid of the good; or if it be, on the contrary, negligent and slothful, it makes room through insufficient caution for these spirits, which, lying in wait secretly like robbers, contrive to rush into the minds of men when they see a lodgment made for them by sloth;....On which account our heart must be kept with all carefulness both by day and night and no place be given to the devil.”¹²

Antony says: “I want you to know, my children, that I cease not to pray God for you night and day, that He may open for you the eyes of your hearts, to see the many hidden malignities which the evil spirits pour upon us daily in this present time. I want God to give you a heart of knowledge and a spirit of discernment,....when we are bitter against each other with our hard words, grieving at every hour, accusing each other and not ourselves, thinking that our toil is from our fellows, sitting in judgment on what appears outwardly, while the robber is all within our house.”¹³

¹⁰ *Ibid.*, Book III, Chapter I, #5.

¹¹ *Ibid.*, Book III, Chapter I, #8.

¹² *Ibid.*, Book III, Chapter II, #4.

¹³ Derwas J. Chitty, (trans.); *The Letters of St. Antony the Great*. Fairacres Publication 50; Oxford: SLG, 1975, Letter VI. 5.

Origen's Notion of Spiritual Discernment

For Origen spiritual discernment is both a function of free-will and of the reasoning power with which rational beings have been created. In his cosmology there are three categories of rational beings. Humans are caught up in the middle between the angels and good spirits who help them and the wicked angels and spirits who try to impede their progress towards good¹⁴. Caught up in this spiritual battle where humans are free to choose between good and evil, they have also been given another capacity: the ability to distinguish between good and evil¹⁵.

There is this reasoning power within each human which enables him or her to distinguish between good and evil and then, to either disapprove what is suggested and refuse it or to accept the suggestion and adopt it. This is similar to the reasoning power which allows persons to observe and judge things which happen in the natural course of things and either to accept or reject them.¹⁶ Origen next counters the objection raised that there are certain things outside of ourselves that might incite and even press us into a certain course of

¹⁴ "every rational soul is possessed of free-will and volition; that it has a struggle to maintain with the devil and his angels, and opposing influences, because they strive to burden it with sins" and "we offer a few remarks upon the subject of rational natures,...on the offices as well of holy as of malignant powers, and also on those which occupy an intermediate position between these good and evil powers, and as yet are placed in a state of struggle and trial" (Origen, *D P.*, Preface #5 and Book I, Chap. V, # 1).

¹⁵ "the nature of this reason which is in man has within itself the power of distinguishing between good and evil, and while distinguishing possesses the faculty of selecting what it has approved" (Origen, *De Principiis*, Book III, Chap. I, # 3).

¹⁶ "But since a rational animal not only has within itself these natural movements, but has moreover, to a greater extent than other animals, the power of reason, by which it can judge and determine regarding natural movements, and disapprove and reject some, while approving and adopting others, so by the judgment of this reason may the movements of men be governed....since the nature of this reason which is in man has within itself the power of distinguishing between good and evil, and while distinguishing possesses the faculty of selecting what it has approved" (Origen, *De Principiis*, Book III, Chap. I, # 3).

action, overriding our free will and hence, absolving us of moral responsibility. Origen asserts that, although the things that happen to us are beyond our control, our ability to discern and distinguish how to make a good or bad use of what has happened, is always within our power¹⁷. Hence, our spiritual discernment is actually an aid to our free-will, helping it to make an enlightened decision.

Even though humans have the faculty of free-will and of spiritual discernment, this does not mean that they are sufficient in themselves to attain to the good that God wants. They are in need of divine assistance. Origen says, “the human will alone is not sufficient to obtain salvation and we are not to suppose either that those things which are in our own power can be done without the help of God, or that those which are in God’s hand can be brought to completion without the intervention of our acts, and desires, and intention.”¹⁸ Origen is also of the opinion that when it comes to facing struggles with malignant powers that “a man perhaps would never be able of himself to vanquish an opposing power, unless he had the benefit of divine assistance.”¹⁹ However, the divine assistance that we receive may be exercised according to our free-will, i.e., we may appropriate it eagerly by choosing good and experiencing victory or, on the other hand, we may refuse the help and then be overpowered

¹⁷ “Is it not superfluous to throw back the causes of our actions on those things which happen to us from without,....For this is to say that we are like pieces of wood, or stones, which have no motion in themselves, but receive the causes of their motion from without.. No such an assertion...is invented only that the freedom of the will may be denied;....The result of our reasoning, therefore, is to show that those things which happen to us from without are not in our own power; but that to make a good or bad use of those things which do so happen, by help of that reason which is within us, and which distinguishes and determines how these things ought to be used, is within our power” (Origen, *De Principiis*, Book III, Chap. 1, # 5).

¹⁸ Origen, *De Principiis*, Book III, Chap. I, # 18, # 21.

¹⁹ *Ibid.*, Book III, Chap. II, # 5.

and succumb to evil.²⁰ We may be induced to evil by being provoked by evil powers, but there are other times when we may simply choose evil without any incitement by evil spirits.²¹ As humans are caught up in this spiritual battle, they must remember that they are to do battle empowered by the Spirit.²²

In this process of discernment, humans have to contend not only with wisdom which comes from the “princes” of this world which may be false, but also with the effects of opposing powers whose wisdom, if followed by the free will, may lead to a certain entrapment of the spiritual faculties and an enslavement to those evil powers.²³ This servitude may take two forms. It may take complete and entire possession of the mind so that the person is incapable of understanding or feeling, as in the case of those considered demon-possessed. Or else, the entanglement in evil, begins by evil suggestions which tempt and eventually persuades an otherwise rational soul to do some evil.²⁴

²⁰ “But this power which is given us to enable us to conquer may be used, according to our faculty of free-will, either in a diligent manner, and then we prove victorious, or in a slothful manner, and then we are defeated” (Origen, *De Principiis*, Book III, Chap. II, # 3).

²¹ “it is, I think, clearly evident that there are certain transgressions which we by no means commit under the pressure of malignant powers; while there are others, again, to which we are incited by instigation on their part to excessive and immoderate indulgence” (Origen, *De Principiis*, Book III, Chap. II, # 3).

²² “Nor are we, indeed, to suppose that struggles of this kind are carried on by the exercise of bodily strength, and of the arts of the wrestling school; but spirit contends with spirit, according to the declaration of Paul, that our struggle is against principalities, and powers, and the rulers of the darkness of this world” (Origen, *De Principiis*, Book III, Chap. II, # 6).

²³ “so also are we to suppose that those who place themselves in the way of the opposing powers, i.e., who purposely admire and adopt their manner of life and habits, receive their inspiration, and become partakers of their wisdom and doctrine. And the result of this is, that they are filled with the working of those spirits to whose service they have subjected themselves” (Origen, *De Principiis*, Book III, Chap. III, # 3).

²⁴ “Now, of wicked spirits there is a twofold mode of operation: i.e., when they either take complete and entire possession of the mind, so as to allow their captives the power neither of understanding nor feeling; as, for instance, is the case with those commonly called possessed, whom we see to be deprived of reason, and insane...or when by their wicked suggestions they deprave a sentient and intelligent soul with thoughts of various kinds,

Origen's conclusion is that the soul of man is constantly exposed to a diversity of good and evil spirits, resulting in different operations taking place and different results. Origen then explains how to observe which energy or spirit's operation is at work, that of the good spirit or that of the bad. When the good spirit is at work, the soul is aroused toward the good, is attracted to divine things and to a holy life. Yet, the will of the person is perfectly free to embark on the suggestions of the good spirit or not. Indeed, it is this freedom of the will and peaceful mind with regard to the proposals of the good spirit that give the indication that it is the good spirit that is at work.²⁵ It can be inferred from what Origen is saying here that the action of the evil spirit, then, would become evident by the following. First, the soul would be moved toward evil and excited to act upon it. At which point, the source of the spirit reveals itself by what it is suggesting: an evil course of action. Secondly, in the soul that has not been unduly mastered by serving evil spirits over a period of time (as was mentioned above), that soul should experience not a freedom, but an agitation in the use of his or her will and decision-making faculty in the face of the prompting of the evil spirit. Of course, the discernment process may be sharpened by the soul when it is observant and calls for divine help at the first sign of struggle or confusion. On the other hand, the soul that is not cautious, but lethargic is setting itself up for a "hold-up" by spiritual bandits who may

persuading it to evil, of which Judas is an illustration, who was induced at the suggestion of the devil to commit the crime of treason" (Origen, *De Principiis*, Book III, Chap. III, #4).

²⁵ "But a man receives the energy, i.e. the working, of a good spirit, when he is stirred and incited to good, and is inspired to heavenly or divine things; as the holy angels and God Himself wrought in the prophets, arousing and exhorting them by their holy suggestions to a better course of life, yet so, indeed, that it remained within the will and judgment of the individual, either to be willing or unwilling to follow the call to divine and heavenly things. And from this manifest distinction, it is seen how the soul is moved by the presence of a better spirit, i.e., if it encounter no perturbation of alienation of mind whatever from the impending inspiration, nor lose the free control of its will" (Origen, *De Principiis*, Book III, Chap. III, # 4).

seize the unguarded opportunity to rush in and overpower the soul.²⁶ Origen's advise, then, is that the soul should be watchful and do everything not to attract the evil spirits, but to draw the spirits who are ministers of God, because our adversary, the devil, is always prowling around looking for prey.²⁷

²⁶ "For occasionally the mind, when watchful, and casting away from it what is evil, calls to itself the aid of the good; or if it be, on the contrary, negligent and slothful, it makes room through insufficient caution for these spirits, which, lying in wait secretly like robbers, contrive to rush into the minds of men when they see a lodgment made for them by sloth" (Origen, *De Principiis*, Book III, Chap. III, # 4).

²⁷ "as the Apostle Peter says, 'that our adversary the devil goes about like a roaring lion, seeking whom he may devour.' On which account our heart must be kept with all carefulness both by day and night, and no place be given to the devil; but every effort must be used that the ministers of God - those spirits, viz., who were sent to minister to them who are called to be heirs of salvation - may find a place within us, and be delighted to enter into the guest-chamber of our soul, and dwelling within us may guide us by their counsels" (Origen, *De Principiis*, Book III, Chap. III, # 4).

III. Antony of Egypt: Discernment of Spirits as Necessary for Holiness

Background of Antony of Egypt's Life and Times

Antony is thought to have been born in Egypt in Coma, a village near the Thebaid in 251 CE. Much of the sparse information that we have about Antony's life comes from the *Vita Antonii* written originally in Greek between 356 and 362 CE by Athanasius and translated into Latin about 375 by Evagrius, bishop of Antioch. It is thought that his parents were fairly well-off because when they died Antony, who was about 18 or 20 years of age, inherited about 300 acres of land, a considerable fortune. He was left in the care of his parents' affairs and responsible for the care of his younger sister. His parents were Christians and brought Antony to a local church as he was growing up. About six months after the death of his parents, he heard the words of the Gospel being read in church, "If you wish to be perfect, go and sell what you own and give the proceeds to the poor, and you will have treasure in heaven", spoken to the rich young ruler in Matt. 19: 21. It is said that he went out and sold the 300 fertile acres of land, gave much of the money to the poor, but saved some of it to care for his sister. Not long afterwards while he was in church, hearing the Lord's Word in the Gospel, "Be anxious for nothing," he decided he must sell the few things that remained of his parents' estate and he put his sister into the care of faithful virgins. This left him free to begin to pursue a life of rigorous spiritual discipline. He consulted other hermits who lived in solitude near their village and sought to learn from them various disciplines in holiness, working with his hands to earn a little money for food and the rest being given to the needy.

When an older hermit refused to retreat with him into the desert, he is said to have gone to an abandoned mountain fort in Pispir (the Outer Mountain) located about 50 miles

south of Memphis on the east bank of the Nile. He continued in his spiritual disciplines alone. Later he went to Upper Egypt and stayed in another mountain refuge (the Inner Mountain) near the Red Sea where he stayed until his death at 105. Sometimes, people came to consult him there, asking for prayer and healing. Occasionally, Antony left his refuge to go to Alexandria to minister to those who were undergoing persecution and martyrdom as he did during the reign of Maximin. He probably also visited communities of monks living in the desert to teach and exhort them from time to time. He composed *seven letters* to various communities of monks, probably during the latter part of the 330's. These letters are considered authentic as I will demonstrate a little later.

One of the important debates surrounding the life of Antony is the question of whether he was illiterate or not. For many years, it was taken for granted that Antony could not read or write as is written in the *Vita Antonii*²⁸. However, in a number of other sections of the *Vita* he is said to have received and wrote letters and he exhorts some monks in holiness urging them to write down all their thoughts to avoid sinning²⁹. According to Naphtali Lewis'

²⁸ "But when he was grown and arrived at boyhood, and was advancing in years, he could not endure to learn letters"...."For he had given such heed to what was read...he remembered all, and afterwards his memory served him for books"...."And Antony also was exceeding prudent, and the wonder was that although he had not learned letters, he was a ready-witted and sagacious man."...."And again others such as these met him in the outer mountain and thought to mock, him because he had not learned letters."...."For not from writings, nor from worldly wisdom, nor through any art, was Antony renowned, but solely from his piety towards God" (Athanasius; Robert Meyer (trans.), *The Life of St. Antony*. Westminster, MD: Newman Press, 1950, 1, 3, 72, 73, 93).

²⁹ "For Constantine Augustus, and his sons Constantius and Constans the Augusti wrote letters to him..., and begged an answer from him...being urged by the monks...he consented that they should be read, and wrote an answer approving them because they worshipped Christ"...."And a certain general, Balacius by name, persecuted us Christians bitterly...Antony at this time wrote a letter...and sent it to him."...."so if we record our thoughts as though about to tell them to one another, we shall the more easily keep ourselves free from vile thoughts through shame lest they should be known. Wherefore let that which is written be to us in place of the eyes of our fellow hermits, that blushing as much to write as if we had been caught, we may never think of what is unseemly" (Athanasius, *The Life of Antony*, # 81, 86, 55).

research³⁰, the towns of the Egyptian countryside had residing in them scholars, poets and philosophers. Texts in Latin and Greek were being procured from Alexandria to build up local libraries. There seems to have been quite a bit of cultural and religious exchange between Alexandria and small towns in rural Egypt. Griggs³¹ says that the Christian texts that have been discovered along the Nile Valley provide strong evidence that Christianity and its Biblical texts had reached Upper Egypt by the end of the first century. Greek cultural and political dominance of Egypt under the system of Ptolemies meant that legal matters were still required to be written in Greek. Samuel Rubenson³² points out that, although many people in small towns may have had a passable understanding of Greek, they would have had to rely on scribes for reading and writing important documents. Persons who were able to read and write in Coptic, but not in Greek were called *agrammatos*, i.e., illiterate. It seems likely that Antony would have fallen into this category. The fact that he managed the affairs of his parents, and the extensive knowledge of the Scriptures he demonstrates in the Seven Letters seems another argument that Antony could read and write, at least, in Coptic. As we will see a little later, not only are there allusions to Scripture in The Seven Letters, there are also allusions to a rudimentary Origenist understanding of the world implying that the author had exposure, at least in a general way to some of Origen's teaching. Is this possible in light of the history of this period in Egypt?

³⁰ Naphtali Lewis, *Life in Egypt under Roman Rule*, Oxford, 1983, p. 61.

³¹ C. Wilfred Griggs, *Early Egyptian Christianity from its Origins to 451 C.E. (Coptic Studies 2)*, Leiden, 1990, p. 80, 81.

³² Samuel Rubenson, *The Letters of St. Antony: Origenist Theology, Monastic Tradition and the Making of a Saint*. Lund: University Press, 1990, p. 97, 98.

During the third century Christian, Gnostic and Manichean ideas flourished, vying for popularity with some of the traditional Egyptian cults. These new ideas also brought a growing interest in written texts, since this is from where they originated. From the beginning of the third century until the mid-fourth century, there was a tendency toward inclusiveness in exploring spiritual truth which resulted in Christian concepts' being somewhat fluid and less clearly defined until the Council of Nicaea in 325 C.E. In addition, there was the historical influence of the Hellenized Jewish tradition in Alexandria which also affected early Egyptian Christianity. This Jewish tradition placed an emphasis both on knowledge by revelation and on the Jewish wisdom tradition, as reflected in the thinking of Philo. There was also a borrowing of ideas from the Greek philosophical schools, especially Platonic philosophy. Origen's model of the catechetical school in Alexandria was most likely in use in Egypt until his ideas came under condemnation in the mid-fourth century. Early collections of Christian texts from Egypt, especially the Bodmer and Bala'izah papyri³³ reveal that there were many Biblical texts in monastic libraries, some texts of Church fathers, as well as Gnostic and secular writings. Book lists of required reading for monks often contained some of Origen's works. So, it seems that Origenist ideas were probably familiar to the monks before controversy began to cast a shadow on Origen's orthodoxy later in the fourth century. The variety of texts in the libraries reflect, perhaps, the ability of the monks to choose texts wisely and interpret their content with discernment, just as any modern day reader would when faced with a plurality of written material on a subject.

I think the plurality in the type of manuscripts found in the monk's libraries indicates that at this particular period in Egyptian history (third and early fourth century), there was a

³³ Samuel Rubenson, *The Letters of St. Antony*, p. 124, 125.

zealous pursuit of knowledge from many sources, but not knowledge simply for knowledge sake, but rather as a means to virtue and spiritual transformation. Orthodoxy was not well-defined, so many options could be considered in arriving at true insight into a *knowledge* giving way to a revelation and an experiencing of God Himself. Keeping this in mind, we will now turn our attention to Antony's Seven Letters. The notion of knowledge will be a key one in unravelling the letters' meaning.

Historicity of The Seven Letters

There are two collections of Antony's letters. The first is a collection of seven letters which exist in Latin, Arabic and Georgian, along with incomplete fragments in Coptic and Syriac. There is also a series of the above seven letters in Arabic followed by 13 other letters. The authenticity of the thirteen letters is questionable³⁴. They are thought, perhaps, to have been written by Antony's immediate successors, especially Ammonas, since they reflect in a general way his spirituality. Ammonas was a person of high calibre to whom Antony entrusted the direction of the monastic community at Pispir.

A comparison of existing versions points to an original Coptic text, although this cannot be proven with absolute certainty. The Arabic version appears to be a translation from the Coptic as it is also stated in the text itself.³⁵ The Latin and Georgian texts, as well as the Syriac fragment seem to have been translated from a lost Greek translation. This is further

³⁴ Père Mata El-Maskine, (trans.); *Saint Antoine ascète selon l'Évangile* [les vingt lettres de saint Antoine selon la tradition arabe]; Collection *Spiritualité orientale, série monachisme primitif*. Maine & Loire, France: Abbaye de Bellefontaine, 1993.

³⁵ Samuel Rubenson, *The Letters of St. Antony*, p. 30, 33, 34.

attested by the fact that the Arabic version does not directly correspond to the Syriac, but that the Syriac fragment does correspond to the Latin and Georgian texts, indicating that these last three had a common source. The Latin text is at times unclear, indicating, perhaps, a poor original source in Greek or an unreliable translator. The Arabic is a very free translation and often summarizes rather than translates. The most reliable text in its entirety (except for the Coptic fragment) is the Georgian version. For the purposes of this study, I will be quoting from Derwas Chitty's English translation of the Georgian text³⁶, unless otherwise indicated.

During the last 100 years the authorship of the seven letters has been contested. One of the main obstacles seemed to come from the disparity between the author revealed in the letters and the Antony described in the *Vita Antonii*, especially the emphasis that he had not been educated and that he was "unlettered" (*agrammatos*). A cursory reading of the letters indicates that the author had a great familiarity with Scripture (there are many allusions to the Bible) and also a certain general background in Origenian ideas. For many scholars at the turn of the century, it seemed impossible to think that the "unlettered", uneducated Antony of the *Vita Antonii* could have written the seven letters. However, Gerard Garitte, who published the complete Georgian version, gave convincing proofs from outside evidence that Antony should be considered the true author of the Seven Letters.³⁷ Since then, most have affirmed the letters as genuinely written by Antony.

³⁶ Derwas Chitty, J. (trans.); *The Letters of St. Antony the Great*. Fairacres Publication 50; Oxford: Sisters of the Love of God Press, 1975.

³⁷ Gérard Garitte; « A propos des lettres de S. Antoine l'Ermitte »; *Muséon* 52 (1939): 11-31.

Here are a few arguments for the authenticity of the Letters. The first evidence is from the manuscripts themselves. All of the manuscripts in each language name Antony as their author, including the oldest Syriac manuscript dating from 534 C.E. Jerome in his *Viris illustribus*, written in 392, makes mention of seven letters written by Antony in Coptic and translated into Greek. Shenoute, who became director of a large monastery in 388 C.E., quotes sections of Antony's letters, attributing these quotations to Antony himself. There is also information suggesting that Antony actually wrote letters. There is a short letter he wrote in Coptic and that was translated into Greek which is found in the *Letter of Ammon* which dates from the final decades of the fourth century. Then, two letters of Antony's are mentioned in the *Vita Pachomii*, one written to Athanasius and the other to Theodore. The one written to Theodore, has a style of vocabulary reminiscent of the Seven Letters.³⁸ Finally, there are a few sayings from the section of the *Apophthegmata Patrum* attributed to Antony that are similar to what we find in the Seven Letters.³⁹ The historical reliability of the *Apophthegmata Patrum* seems to reside in the individual saying itself rather than in the particular collection of

³⁸ *Epistula Ammonis* 29 and 34. (footnote #2 cited in Rubenson's, *The Letters of St. Antony*, p. 170).

³⁹ "He (Antony) also said, 'Some have afflicted their bodies by asceticism, but they lack discernment, and so they are far from God.' " (Benedicta Ward, *Apophthegmata Patrum [Sayings of the Desert Fathers]*, Mowbrays, 1975, #8) and "I want you to know that there are many who have pursued asceticism throughout their life but lack of discernment killed them." (Antony's Letter VI.11); also see "Abba Antony said, 'I believe that the body possesses a natural movement, to which it is adapted, but which it cannot follow without the consent of the soul; it only signifies in the body a movement without passion. There is another movement, which comes from the nourishment and warming of the body by eating and drinking, That is why the apostle said, 'Do not get drunk with wine for that is debauchery' (Eph. 5:18). And in the Gospel the Lord also recommends this to his disciples: 'Take heed to yourselves lest your hearts be weighed down with dissipation and drunkenness' (Luke 21:34). But there is yet another movement which afflicts those who fight, and that comes from the wiles and jealousy of the demons. You must understand what these three bodily movements are: one is natural, one comes from too much to eat, the third is caused by the demons.' " (*A. Patrum* #22) and compare with : "And, as I think, there are three types of motion of the body. There is that which is implanted in the body by nature, ...but this is not operative if the soul does not will it, And there is another motion when a man stuffs his body with food and drink, and the heat of the blood from the abundance of nourishment rouses up warfare in the body, because of our greed. For this cause the Apostle said, 'Be not drunk with wine, wherein is excess.' (Eph. 5:18). And again the Lord enjoined His disciples, 'Take heed lest at any time your hearts be overcharged with surfeiting and drunkenness' (Luke 21:34) or pleasure.....And there is a third motion, from the evil spirits which tempt us out of envy" (Antony's Letter I.3).

sayings. Each collection appears to reflect more about the historical context of certain sayings that were grouped together⁴⁰, i.e., the collections reveal which sayings were considered worth saving.

In conclusion, then, evidence seems to point to an original Coptic collection of seven letters written by Antony. Antony is said to have written letters on various occasions to persons of importance, such as Athanasius and Emperor Constantine's sons and also, to Theodore, a monk. Jerome also mentions seven letters written by Antony in Coptic and subsequently, translated into Greek. Probably, the most reliable translation of the letters in their entirety that we currently have available is the Georgian version.

Key Concepts in the Seven Letters

Knowledge, salvation and the return to the original condition

Antony's Seven Letters, at first reading, exhort their readers to "know themselves." This is repeated at least nine times in the letters⁴¹. They are also encouraged to gain wisdom. "Give occasion to the wise man, and he will be yet wiser" (Prov. 9:9) is repeated five times. Those who are able to know themselves are said three times to also know themselves in their *intellectual substance*⁴². Those who know themselves, also "know God"⁴³. But just what kind

⁴⁰ Samuel Rubenson, *The Letters of St. Antony*, p. 150, 152.

⁴¹ Refer to Derwas J. Chitty, (trans.); *The Letters of St. Antony the Great*. Fairacres Publication 50; Oxford: SLG, 1975, letters: II.1; II.4; III.3; III.4; IV (last paragraph); VI.1; VI.7; VI.8; VII.8.

⁴² "The rational man who has prepared himself to be set free through the advent of Jesus, knows himself in his intellectual substance"; "For those who have drawn near, and have been taught by the Holy Spirit, have known themselves according to their intellectual substance; For all who know themselves, know that they are of one immortal substance" (Chitty, *The Letters of St. Antony*, Letter III.1, IV, VI.8).

of knowledge is Antony talking about and what is he referring to when he speaks about the *intellectual or immortal or invisible substance*?

I believe it will be important to keep in mind that although Antony's Seven Letters were most likely written in Coptic, some of the key ideas found in them appear to reflect the early Greek theological tradition of Origen and Clement of Alexandria in their descriptions. Antony, like Origen and Clement, mixes Biblical thoughts with philosophical notions. His letters are not theological treatises, but exhortations to a godly life, yet they reveal something about his cosmology. The emphasis on knowledge and self-knowledge as crucial to spiritual living and growth may seem at first to take on undue importance. However, to those living in a culture that was in many ways still permeated by Platonic terms and ideas, even among Christians, the emphasis on knowledge as a function of virtue and holiness, is not unusual. In Platonic thinking knowledge (*gnosis*) is not simply discovering something previously unknown, it demands a moral and spiritual effort by the person seeking it. This effort is a movement toward the spiritual, not simply an intellectual exercise. Virtue is part and parcel of this *gnosis*. In Plato's thinking, the progress toward attaining true knowledge was not to find something never seen before, but to understand what the soul first knew. Ignorance, the opposite of knowledge, is to forget one's origin. The return to this first condition or nature, the spiritual nature, created by God is at the heart of Origen's theology. We see this same idea present in Antony's letters.

Those who became "irrational", i.e., those whose spiritual capacity became diminished and began to worship the creation instead of the Creator, were those who "were no longer able

⁴³ "For he who knows himself knows the dispensations of the Creator and all that He does among His creatures"; "you know that he who knows himself knows God" ; "For he who knows himself, knows God" (Chitty, *The Letters of St. Antony*, Letters III.1, III.4, IV).

to know themselves according to their creation.”⁴⁴ Another description of this same decline of the soul describes the state as follows: “the senses of the soul grew weak, so that men could not find themselves as they truly are according to their creation, that is to say, an immortal substance.”⁴⁵ In Platonic thought, the true nature of things and our authentic nature is not what is visible or material but that which is immortal and spiritual, frequently referred to in Greek as the mind (*nous*). This invisible, spiritual, immortal (and what Antony often refers to as “intellectual”) substance is the part of us that has been created by God.⁴⁶ Antony refers to God, the Creator, as immortal substance and as the Unity of intellectual substance.⁴⁷ He also says, “Truly, my beloved, this is a great thing for you, that you should ask concerning the understanding of the intellectual substance, which has a beginning but no end.”⁴⁸ This intellectual substance has a beginning because it comes from God who created it and is its source, but it has no end because it is immortal and “not to be dissolved with the body.”⁴⁹

However, this immortal substance “has fallen altogether into humiliation and great disgrace” and “for evil is come about in us, wherein we have all died, since it is alien to the nature of our intellectual nature.” Furthermore, “this (*immortal*) substance could not be set

⁴⁴ Chitty, *The Letters of St. Antony the Great*, Letter II.1.

⁴⁵ *Ibid.*

⁴⁶ “since we are all created of the same invisible substance” (D. J. Chitty, *The Letters of St. Antony the Great*, Letter VI.8).

⁴⁷ “But the Creator of all...For He is immortal substance” and “God is One, that is to say, Unity of intellectual substance” (D. J. Chitty, *The Letters of St. Antony the Great*, Letter II.1 and III.1).

⁴⁸ D. J. Chitty, *The Letters of St. Antony the Great*, Letter VI.1.

⁴⁹ *Ibid.*, Letters V.2; VI.1; VI.8.

free by its own righteousness.”⁵⁰ We, then, come to another important theme that Antony weaves throughout the seven letters - salvation of humans by the bounty of God. Antony’s interesting way of describing our need for salvation and the fallen state of our intellectual (spiritual) substance is to refer to it as a “great wound.” He makes reference to our “great wound” eight times and that this “wound is incurable” four times in relation to our fallen soul. It is repeated in the letters that no creature was able to heal this wound, but God in His bounty, is referred to as the “physician.”⁵¹ God sent the Saviour who “emptied Himself, taking the form of a servant (Phil. 2:7,8)”⁵² and it is by “His (the Saviour’s) wound we all are healed (Isa. 53:5).”⁵³

The result of this healing, in Antony’s words, is a “resurrection of our hearts (minds) from the earth, teaching us that we are all of one substance, and members of one another.”⁵⁴ The resurrection brings a return toward unity. We recognize that “we are all of one substance,” i.e., that our intellectual substance comes from God, the Unity, the source of our spiritual nature. This recognition of our spiritual unity in God leads us to realize also that “we are members of one another.” Thus knowing that we are members of one another it follows in

⁵⁰ *Ibid.*, Letters VI.1, VII.1 and III.1.

⁵¹ “they saw that none among the creatures was able to heal that great wound, but only the bounty of God, that is to say His Only-begotten, whom He sent to be the Saviour of all the world; for He is the great physician, who is able to heal the great wound”; “For these knew that the Saviour is the great physician”; “And the Creator saw that their wound was grown great, and needed the care of a physician - and Jesus Himself is their Creator, and Himself heals them”; “ For He is our great and faithful high priest and true physician, who is able to heal the great wound” (D. J Chitty, *The Letters of St. Antony the Great*, Letters III. 2, II.2, III.2 and VI.2).

⁵² This reference is found five times in the letters; See Chitty, *The Letters of St. Antony*, Letters II.2, III.3, VI.2, VI.9 and VII.5.

⁵³ This biblical reference is repeated seven times; See Chitty, *The Letters of St. Antony*, Letters II.2; III.3; V.2; VI.2, VI.9; VII.3 and VII.8.

⁵⁴ *Ibid.*, Letter VI.9; to see the repetition of the theme of resurrection, see also Letters II.2; II.3; V.2 and VII.8.

other texts of his letters that we also should love one another.⁵⁵ The resurrection, the healing of our fallen spiritual nature is a returning toward our original and true condition. Antony resumes this thought in saying, “For every man who seeks God or serves Him, does what is natural to his substance. But every sin of which we are guilty, is foreign and unnatural to our substance.”⁵⁶

In summary, then, knowledge, especially self-knowledge in Antony’s letters is closely associated with knowledge of many other things - of one’s “intellectual substance”, of “the dispensations of the Creator and of God Himself.”⁵⁷ This self-knowledge is also a recognition and a return toward the original nature created by and for God. Self-knowledge of one’s “intellectual substance” or one’s spiritual nature is a key concept in understanding Antony’s view of cosmology, salvation, and, as we shall see a little later, his concept of spiritual discernment. Deficiency in this knowledge so described leads to an eventual instability, a sort of weakening of our spiritual nature. There are also evil forces at work, not only within, but also without, to deter us from self-knowledge, knowledge of God and love of one another. We will now take up Antony’s thinking in his letters on the subject of evil.

Evil and Free Will

With regard to the origin of evil, we find several statements in Antony’s letters that are similar in idea to Origen’s. Antony understands that “God is One, that is to say, Unity of

⁵⁵ *Ibid.*, Letters VI.7; VI.8; VI.9; VI.11.

⁵⁶ *Ibid.*, Letter VII.6.

⁵⁷ See Footnotes # 42 and # 43 for references.

intellectual substance,”⁵⁸ God is the source of all unity. Antony affirms as Origen that all rational beings whether angels, humans or evil spirits have their source in God.⁵⁹ The diversity that resulted in the works of evil by both humans and evil spirits was the departure from that Unity, a departure from God Himself, the true and absolute Unity. Antony writes that Christ “is the life of every rational nature created by Him after the likeness of His own image.” He “is the true Mind of the Father, and unaltered Image of the Father.” “But the creatures made in His image are of changeable substance; for evil is come about in us.”⁶⁰ Evil, then, for Antony and Origen, is always associated with mutability, dissociation from our original, immortal nature: “For they (*evil spirits*) are all from one source in their intellectual substance: but in their flight from God, great diversity arises between them through the variety of their working.”⁶¹

What brings about this diversity, what Antony calls “the grievousness of our inconstancy”?⁶² Whereas Origen makes a protracted argument to support the notion that it is our free will that has opened the door to diversity and evil,⁶³ Antony makes reference to the misuse of our free will. He exhorts his readers that “we may not bring about our own death

⁵⁸ D. W. Chitty, *The Letters of St. Antony*, Letter III.1.

⁵⁹ “Now therefore understand that, be it the holy heavens or angels...or prophets or apostles, or...evil spirits..., or ...be it man or woman, in the beginning of their creation they are all derived from one”; “For they (*evil spirits*) are all from one source in their intellectual substance”; “Now therefore He is the life of every rational nature created by Him after the likeness of His own image; who Himself is the true Mind of the Father, and unaltered Image of the Father (Heb. 1:3). But the creatures made in His image are of changeable substance; for evil is come about in us” (Chitty, *Letters of St. Antony*, Letters V.4, VI.6, VII.1).

⁶⁰ See previous footnote for VII.1.

⁶¹ Chitty, *The Letters of St. Antony*, Letter VI.6.

⁶² *Ibid.*, Letter VII.4.

⁶³ Origen, *De Principiis*, Book III.

by misusing the free will with which we were created.”⁶⁴ On two occasions he refers to the fact that we become enslaved to our “own free choice.”⁶⁵ Becoming slave to our own will, according to Antony, leads to an increased wounding of the soul and makes room for evil. He warns against delighting in one’s own will and thoughts, for that person becomes a haven for evil spirits, and evil powers are able to have great power over that person.⁶⁶ The reason that this person becomes a mooring for evil spirits is hinted at by Antony in other texts concerning the corruption of the devil himself: “For knowing this that the devil fell from heaven through pride, for this cause also they attack first those who have attained to a very great measure.”⁶⁷ Pride becomes the door through which the person is tempted, especially those who want to make spiritual progress. Antony classifies pride as a “sickness of the soul” that, if unchecked, causes the soul to become “guide to the evil spirits.”⁶⁸

So, Antony acknowledges the power that each person has over their free will, while also affirming the constant battle that evil spirits are waging, as well, against humankind to turn them away from God and toward evil. Those who are on the side of the evil spirits will

⁶⁴ Chitty, *The Letters of St. Antony*, Letter VI.10.

⁶⁵ “for each one of us has sold himself of his own free choice, and we are dominated of our free choice, and we are not willing to lift up our eyes to heaven, to seek the glory of heaven” (Chitty, *The Letters of St. Antony*, Letter V.4).

⁶⁶ “I tell you that every man who delights in his own will, and is subdued to his own thoughts, and takes up the things sown in his heart, and rejoices in them, and supposes in his heart that these are some great chosen mystery, and justifies himself in what he does - the soul of such a man is a lair of evil spirits, counselling him to evil, and his body a store of evil mysteries which it hides in itself: and over such a one the demons have great power, because he has not dishonoured them before all men” (Chitty, *The Letters of St. Antony*, Letter VI.6).

⁶⁷ Chitty, *The Letters of St. Antony*, Letter VI.11.

⁶⁸ “This I have said concerning the sicknesses of the soul which are mingled with the members of the bodily nature in which the soul moves and works; and so the soul becomes guide to the evil spirits” (Chitty, *The Letters of St. Antony*, Letter I.4).

try to change us “according to their own will.”⁶⁹ Antony entreats his readers to realize that these evil powers “are always plotting evil” because they want humans to be lost with them.⁷⁰ One of the chief ways the evil powers seduce a person who wants to make spiritual progress toward God (Antony is writing to monastic communities, those who have come to learn how to live holy lives) is “the contempt they set in our hearts by pride.” The result of this is that we become hard-hearted and bitter toward others.⁷¹ Antony comments: “They know that in this way they can cut us off from God, for they know that he who loves his neighbour loves God, and for this cause the enemies of virtue sow division in our hearts.”⁷²

Division again is the sign that evil is at work, deviation from God Himself, who is perfect Unity. The war that the evil spirits carry on against the soul of the person is also described by Antony as “hidden malignities,” “subtle malice,” “hidden persecution,” “evil counsel” and “machinations and arts.” Therefore, discernment is needed. In summary, then, though humans open themselves to evil through the misuse of their free will and often choose the path of their own passions, leading them away from God and to “sickness of soul”, this

⁶⁹ “I want you to know,...all who have become estranged from virtue and acted wickedly, are reckoned as children of the devil; and those who are of the devil know it, and that is why they try to change each of us according to their own will” (Chitty, *The Letters of St. Antony*, Letter VI.11).

⁷⁰ “do you not know, beloved, that the enemies of virtue are always plotting evil against the truth?”; “all the evil counsels of the devil and his ministers, the evil they meditate always for our perdition, since their portion is to be in hell, and for this cause they want us to be lost with them” (Chitty, *The Letters of St. Antony*, Letter VI.10 and VI.4).

⁷¹ “Truly, my children, they (*evil spirits*) envy us at all times, with their evil counsel, and hidden persecution, and subtle malice, and spirit of seduction,...which they sow in our heart every day,...and all the anger and mutual slander which they teach us, and the self-justifications in what we do, and the judgments which they set in our hearts,...and the contempt which they set in our hearts by pride, when we are hard-hearted and despise each other,...sitting in judgment on what appears outwardly, while the robber is all within our house” (Chitty, *The Letters of St. Antony*, Letter VI.5).

⁷² Chitty, *The Letters of St. Antony*, Letter VI.11.

does not account for all of the struggle. Not only is there a struggle of the self-will to choose good over evil. There is also the dangers of the concealed ruses by spiritual enemies to confuse and deceive the person into taking a path leading to bondage to the evil powers and to spiritual sickness. Consequently, the necessity of spiritual discernment takes on real importance. This is the theme we now turn to in Antony's Seven Letters.

Discernment and Self-Knowledge

I would propose that in Antony's letters the notions of discernment and self-knowledge are intimately connected. We have an example of this close association in a section of Letter III:

"I write to you as men of understanding, who are able to know yourselves - you know that he who knows himself knows God....Prepare yourselves...that you may be able to exercise your hearts and senses to know how to discern the good from the bad, the right from the left, reality from unreality."⁷³ Antony's premise as we have discussed briefly under *knowledge, salvation and the return to the original condition* is that those who "know themselves" also know God, His dispensations and all that He does among His creatures; they also "know their time, are able to stand firm, and not be moved about by divers tongues."⁷⁴ Antony also urges them to imitate the example of Jesus and "know his mind and discern between bad and good."⁷⁵ This self-knowledge which enables a person to truly understand their original condition, the "immortal substance" within them that was created, but will never die, and to understand that

⁷³ *Ibid.*, Letter III.4.

⁷⁴ *Ibid.*, Letter IV (last paragraph).

⁷⁵ *Ibid.*, Letter II.3.

sin is foreign to this spiritual immortal nature, is also what will help that person discern the difference between evil and good, between what is alien and what is authentic to the nature of their “immortal substance.”⁷⁶

Antony also warns about a lack of discernment by those seeking to lead a holy life that indicates that they have not understood themselves and their works and have fallen into the traps that the devil has laid for them: “Truly, my children, I want you to know that there are many who have pursued asceticism throughout their life, but lack of discernment killed them. Truly, my children, I think it is no great wonder, if you neglect yourselves and do not discern your works, that you should fall into the hands of the devil, when you think you are near to God, and that in your expectation of light, darkness should overtake you.”⁷⁷ So, here we see a direct relationship between understanding oneself and one’s works and discernment. Antony is proposing that those in monastic communities be vigilant, to examine, not just their actions, but their motives. In the section immediately following this warning, he brings in the example of Jesus girding himself with a towel to wash the feet of His disciples. This is a model of the opposite motivation of the devil - humility. Pride is the original motion that turned the devil away from God. Just as Jesus’ action of humility is to remind them of “their own first beginning”, so the devil’s action of pride is the “motion” that brought the diversity that turned rational creatures (both human and evil powers) away from the Unity of God. That

⁷⁶ “Truly, my children, though we should give ourselves with all our power to seek the Lord, what thanks do we deserve? For we are only seeking our own reward; we are only seeking what is natural to our substance. For every man who seeks God or serves Him, does what is natural to his substance. But every sin of which we are guilty, is foreign and unnatural to our substance” (Chitty, *The Letters of St. Antony*, Letter VII.6).

⁷⁷ Chitty, *The Letters of St. Antony*, Letter VI.11.

is why Antony exhorts them to humility as a means of escape and return to their “first beginning.”⁷⁸

Discernment and self-knowledge are very important to Antony, not for the sake of the knowledge itself, but as a means to advance in virtue and to progress in holiness. These also are the means to understanding temptation and the tactics of spiritual enemies to dissuade those who would give themselves to God on their path to sanctification. True self-knowledge and discernment are, in fact, for Antony, a sort of spiritual arsenal from which one can pull out the appropriate weapon of insight to protect oneself from self-deception and the craftiness of evil powers. Antony’s counsel to the monastic communities to whom he is writing is in the wisdom tradition. He is the spiritual father giving advice to his spiritual children. The use of repetition of certain thoughts and key expressions is a typical feature of wisdom writing.⁷⁹ The intent of such writing is to reinforce and impart heart rather than head knowledge.

Antony is exhorting the monks to holiness via wisdom. This wisdom consists in, among many things, knowing themselves, understanding the spiritual value of their works, discerning what is good and what is not, and protecting themselves from the many and varied stratagems of the evil powers to turn them away from holiness. In the next section, I will

⁷⁸ “ For what need was there at all for Jesus to gird Himself with a towel and wash the feet of His inferiors, but that He should make this an example, to teach those who should turn to Him their own first beginning? (Cf. Jn. 13:4-17). For the beginning of their motion is the pride which came at the first. That is why, except through great humility in your whole heart and mind and spirit and soul and body, you will not be able to inherit the Kingdom of God.” (Chitty, *The Letters of St. Antony*, Letter VI.11).

⁷⁹ For further information about how Antony’s letters fit into this tradition, see Rubenson, *The Letters of St. Antony*, 59-51.

attempt to further explore Antony's teaching on the manoeuvres of the evil powers against those who would make spiritual progress and summarize his notion of spiritual discernment.

Antony's Notion of Spiritual Discernment

Antony's prayer for those seeking to make spiritual progress is essentially that they be given discernment. This is so they can detect "the many hidden malignities which the evil spirits pour upon us daily."⁸⁰ He also reminds them that the evil powers do not always use the same tactics to lure us to evil; neither do they have a visible body so that we can flee from them. Rather, these invisible powers seek out humans through whose bodies they can act out their wicked schemes. Only then, does their evil intent become obvious.⁸¹ Also, while they may try to prevent us from doing good, we may not be aware of their action.⁸² Antony explains: "The evil spirits make us zealous for works which we are not able to perform, and cause us to faint in tasks on which we are engaged, and which are profitable for us. Therefore they make us laugh when it is time for weeping and weep when it is time for laughter, and simply turn us aside at every time from the right way."⁸³

Another important way that the evil powers try to separate us from God is by stirring up discord and hatred in our hearts toward our neighbour: "They know that in this way they

⁸⁰ Chitty, *The Letters of St. Antony*, Letter VI.5.

⁸¹ "Do you not know that they have not one uniform method of hunting, that we should know it and flee from it? Seek, and you will not find their sin and iniquity revealed bodily, for they are not visible bodily; but you must know that we serve as bodies for them, for our soul receives their wickedness, and when it receives them, then it brings them to manifestation by the body in which we dwell" (Chitty, *The Letters of St. Antony*, Letter VI.6).

⁸² "Or who ever saw a demon in his fight against us, while he prevents us from doing good and attacks us, standing in a bodily place, so that we fear him and flee from him? For they are in secret, and we make them manifest by our works" (Chitty, *The Letters of St. Antony*, Letter VI.6).

⁸³ Chitty, *The Letters of St. Antony*, Letter VI.5.

can cut us off from God, for they know that he who loves his neighbour loves God.”⁸⁴

Antony continues to expound on this theme, asserting that one does in fact do evil to oneself by sinning against one’s neighbour, just as one does good to oneself by doing good to one’s neighbour. The way to avoid becoming subject to these evil spirits who sow enmity in our hearts against our associates, is by acting according to self-knowledge, the knowledge of the spiritual nature created in God’s image, demonstrating the nature of God’s love for us: we are to love others as we have been shown compassion and love by Him.⁸⁵

The spiritual nature, the “intellectual substance” that is the object of self-knowledge by the one seeking holiness, is also the means by which that person experiences the bounty of God’s love and would also seek to express it. Hence, perhaps, the rather enigmatic relationship that Antony makes linking self-knowledge and love of self and love of others - “For he who knows himself, knows all men....But he who can love himself, loves all men.”⁸⁶ For Antony, the love of God and neighbour is the surest protection against pride and the snares of malignant forces. I would even go so far as to say that this love coupled with self-knowledge is a good way to dispel the “confusion” that comes upon us: spiritual discernment is given instead of spiritual confusion. Antony bemoans the “confusion” that overtakes us either, from our own sin or from our spiritual enemies.⁸⁷ We can say that even as he decries

⁸⁴ *Ibid.*, Letter VI.11.

⁸⁵ “For this cause, therefore, he who sins against his neighbour sins against himself, and he who does evil to his neighbour does evil to himself; and he who does good to his neighbour, does good to himself....let us rouse up God in ourselves...and deliver ourselves to death for our souls and for each other; and if we do this, we shall be manifesting the substance of His compassion for us. Let us not be lovers of ourselves, so as not to become subject to their inconstant power. For he who knows himself, knows all men....But he who can love himself, loves all men” (Chitty, *The Letters of St. Antony*, Letter VI.7).

⁸⁶ *Ibid.*

⁸⁷ “And the Creator of All,...desiring to visit our sickness and confusion....for He desires that we should be brought back to our first beginning”; “my great grief which I have for you, when I see the great confusion which is coming upon us all, and consider the great labour of the saints...as they see all the labour of their Creator, and all

this confusion, he is exhorting and praying that God may open the “eyes” of their hearts, that they may be granted “a heart of knowledge and a spirit of discernment.”⁸⁸

In summary, then, although Antony uses the word “discernment” and “discern” fairly sparingly in his letters⁸⁹, the desire that he expresses to his readers time and again is that they understand the way that God and His Spirit are seeking to lead them and purify them. The one that draws near to God and His grace, is given the Holy Spirit who allows them to “know themselves according to their intellectual substance.”⁹⁰ They who know themselves in their intellectual substance are said by Antony to know God, to understand how He works among His creatures, to understand the age that they are living in and to understand others.⁹¹ This understanding and knowledge so mentioned, we might say, is, for Antony, the foundation of his notion of spiritual discernment. Without this essential knowledge of our spiritual nature’s need to return to its original condition and return to God who has provided a remedy for “our great wound”, the spiritual senses are ineffective, God’s principles planted within are said to

the evil counsels of the devil and his ministers, the evil they meditate always for our perdition”; “I ask my Creator day and night...to open for you the eyes of your heart to know...and the ears of your soul to perceive you own confusion. For he who knows his own disgrace, seeks again his elect grace” (Chitty, *The Letters of St. Antony*, Letters II.2; VI.4; VI.12).

⁸⁸ “I cease not to pray God for you night and day, that He may open for you the eyes of your hearts, to see the many hidden malignities which the evil spirits pour upon us daily in this present time. I want God to give you a heart of knowledge and a spirit of discernment” (Chitty, *The Letters of St. Antony*, Letter VI.5).

⁸⁹ The word “discernment” is used four times and the word “discern” is used three times. For references see Chitty, *The Letters of St. Antony*, Letters III.1, VI.5, VI.11, VII.11 and Letters II.2, III.4 and VI.11.

⁹⁰ “For those who have drawn near, and have been taught by the Holy Spirit, have known themselves according to their intellectual substance” (Chitty, *The Letters of St. Antony*, Letter IV).

⁹¹ For references to these, see Chitty, *The Letters of St. Antony*, Letters IV, III.1, and VI.7.

be “dried up.”⁹² Therefore, the spiritual senses are rendered unable to properly discern between good and evil and come into bondage to evil passions and schemes of malignant powers. Spiritual discernment comes from this knowledge of the fallen state of our intellectual substance and its need for healing, purification and resurrection.⁹³ The resurrection, in turn, teaches us “that we are all of one substance, and members of one another.”⁹⁴

Spiritual discernment involves, first, understanding the spiritual sickness that has befallen the faculty that is at the centre of this discernment, “the intellectual substance.” Once a person has realized the true state of their “intellectual substance” and seeks deliverance through Christ’s salvation, then there is a “resurrection of the mind.” Through the cooperation of the mind with the Holy Spirit, there is a progressive healing of the wounds of the soul and of the will. The soul of the person is brought back to recognize their original condition; they are brought once again under the Unity of God.⁹⁵ This person will be increasingly endowed with that knowledge, spiritual discernment, enabling them to distinguish good from evil and to perceive the spiritual combat which is being waged against them by spiritual forces of evil.

⁹² “But by reason of the spread of infirmity, and the heaviness of the body, and evil cares, the implanted law dried up and the senses of the soul grew weak, so that men could not find themselves as they truly are according to their creation, that is to say, an immortal substance”; “But by the abundance of wickedness and stirring up of evil and the cupidity of the passions, the implanted law of the covenant dried up, and the senses of our soul perish and therefore we could not perceive the glorious intellectual substance” (Chitty, *The Letters of St. Antony*, Letters II.1 and VII.1).

⁹³ “for our iniquities humbled Him, and by His wound we all are healed (Isa. 53:5); and He gathered us out of all regions, till He should make resurrection of our hearts from the earth, and teach us that we are all of one substance, and members one of another” (Chitty, *The Letters of St. Antony*, Letter VI.9).

⁹⁴ *Ibid.*

⁹⁵ “And, taught, by the Spirit, the mind becomes our guide to the labours of body and soul, showing us how to purify them. And it separates us from all the fruits of the flesh which have been mingled with all the members of the body since the first transgression, and brings back each of the members of the body to its original condition” (Chitty, *The Letters of St. Antony*, Letter I.2).

Instead of succumbing to their own passions and being seduced by the evil forces to pride, they choose of their own free will to love their neighbour because they have “known” that they have been greatly loved by God. The spiritual discernment endorsed by Antony is present in the life of a person along with all the fruit expected of a holy life: peace, mercy, charity, self-control, fortitude and, especially, a desire to love God above all things.

IV. Antony and Origen: Complementary Notions of Discernment

Spiritual Discernment and Free Will in the Battle against Evil

According to Origen all rational beings that were created by God were given the capacity of free will. The liberty that they were granted, to be able to choose, opened the door to diversity because all rational beings could choose good or evil. Anything that ushers in diversity, changeableness or inconstancy brings in evil. This is because in Origen's thinking God is purest unity. He is incapable of mutability, of acting contrary to His essential unity. Therefore, all rational beings, especially humans are called upon constantly to exercise their free will. However, to properly exert their free will, humans must discern what is good and what is not. For Origen, free will automatically creates the necessity for people to discern between the different spirits, the movements from within and temptation from without. Origen sometimes refers to this capacity as "reasoning", a sort of power that each one has to distinguish between good and evil and then, to decide how to make a good or bad use of what is presented to them.

Origen states in his preface that "every rational soul is possessed of free will and volition; that it has a struggle to maintain with the devil and his angels, and opposing influences, because they strive to burden it with sin."⁹⁶ Because every rational being is confronted with these contrary forces, spiritual discernment becomes imperative. Origen refutes the thinkers of his day who tried to say that humans actually do not have free will since they may be acted upon by outside forces which impel them to some course of action.

⁹⁶ Origen, *De Principiis*, Preface, #5.

He argues that even though we can be influenced either for good or for evil, we can never be compelled to act in a certain way. We are master with regard to our will.⁹⁷

For Origen the crux of spiritual discernment centres upon distinguishing the different “energies” or movements that the person experiences and receives. In fact, no rational being, says Origen, can subsist without receiving these influences, whether good or bad. These movements, he describes as a “diversity of good and evil spirits.”⁹⁸ Those who freely choose to put themselves under the influence of evil powers, imitating their way of life and admiring their wisdom, these eventually come under the mastery of the spirits they have chosen to serve. They are moved by these same spirits to do their bidding. Origen implies that there are degrees of severity with which the wicked spirits may gain control of a rational being. In each case, however, the person chose initially to come under their power by an act of their free will. There is the case of those persons who enter under the complete control of evil spirits and who lose the capacity of understanding and feeling. They are considered to be insane and are mentioned among some of those whom Jesus healed in the Gospels. The other case is that of a rational being who is tempted by evil powers who persuade the person to commit some kind of evil. However, even with this temptation, the free will is active as Origen explains: “when an enticement to any desire arises, nothing is accomplished until the assent of the soul

⁹⁷ “For if we are our own masters, some influences perhaps may impel us to sin, and others help us to salvation; we are not forced, however, by any necessity either to act rightly or wrongly, which those persons think is the case who say that the courses and movements of stars are the cause of human actions” (Origen, *De Principiis*, Preface, #5).

⁹⁸ “Nor can any rational and sentient being, i.e., a mind or soul, exist without some movement either good or bad”; “while the soul of man exists in this body, it may admit different energies, i.e., operations from a diversity of good and evil spirits” (Origen, *De Principiis*, Book III, Chap. III, #5 and #4).

is gained, and the authority of the mind has granted indulgence to the wicked suggestions.”⁹⁹ He likens this to an interior tribunal with a judge presiding over the testimony of two parties. It is from the judgment of reason (a sort of combination of the free will and discernment) that the person ultimately decides whether to follow the suggestion or not.

The first indication, according to Origen, that the good spirit is in operation is because the person is aroused to good and drawn to God. The second distinctive of the good spirit’s working is that the will of the person is left free to judge and select an appropriate action in response. Finally, the third evidence that the person is being acted upon by good, is that the person experiences no agitation; they are not troubled in their soul by what is being suggested.¹⁰⁰ As we shall see later on, some of the signs explained here by Origen are remarkably similar to some of the tests of discernment proposed by Ignatius of Loyola in the *Spiritual Exercises*.

In addition, Origen suggests that not all enticements to evil can be entirely blamed on the influence of wicked powers. Some enticement to evil arises from imprudence, slothfulness or excessive indulgence on our part.¹⁰¹ Origen’s advice, then, is: “it follows that we have to

⁹⁹ Origen, *De Principiis*, Book III, Chap. I, #4.

¹⁰⁰ “But a man receives the energy, i.e., the working, of a good spirit, when he is stirred and incited to good, and is inspired to heavenly or divine things;....yet so, indeed, that it remained within the will and judgment of the individual, either to be willing or unwilling to follow the call to divine and heavenly things. And from this manifest distinction, it is seen how the soul is moved by the presence of a better spirit, i.e., if it encounter no perturbation or alienation of mind whatever from the impending inspiration, nor lose the free control of its will” (Origen, *De Principiis*, Book III, Chap. III, #4).

¹⁰¹ “But if the possibility of conquering be equally conferred on us all, and if it be in our own power how to use this possibility, i.e., either diligently or slothfully....I think, clearly evident that there are certain transgressions which we by no means commit under pressure of malignant powers; while there are others, again, to which we are incited by instigation on their part to excessive and immoderate indulgence. Whence it follows that we have to inquire how those opposing powers produce these incitements within us ” (Origen, *De Principiis*, Book III, Chap.

inquire how these opposing powers produce these incitements within us.”¹⁰² Inquiring into these incitements to indulgence or to slothfulness is the task of spiritual discernment. In other words, Origen is telling his reader to ask themselves: What is trying to influence and gain control of my free will at any given moment? What is its manner of persuasion? What are the manifestations as to its source?

What is Antony’s notion of spiritual discernment in the battle against evil? How does it differ from Origen’s? How does it resonate with that of Origen’s? The first parallel that we find present in Antony’s letters as well as in Origen’s *De Principiis* is their agreement as to the source of evil. For both, evil comes in the departure from God, the source of all unity and in the manifestation of diversity and changeableness: “For they (*evil spirits*) are all from one source in their intellectual substance: but in their flight from God, great diversity arises between them through the variety of their working.”¹⁰³ Evil, according to Antony, has come about in created beings due to their inconstancy, diversity and mutability.¹⁰⁴

But what of our free will? Origen is interested in the function of the free will assigned at creation for each rational being. Antony is more interested in the misuse of the free will and in the spiritual battle waged by evil powers to turn us away from pursuing holiness. Antony’s letters are warning monastic communities how to recognize the signs of

II, #3).

¹⁰² *Ibid.*

¹⁰³ Chitty, *The Letters of St. Antony*, Letter VI.6.

¹⁰⁴ “But the creatures made in His image are of changeable substance; for evil is come about in us” (Chitty, *The Letters of St. Antony*, Letter VII.1).

the assault on the free will by evil spirits. The misuse of our free will includes being dominated by our self-will, i.e., what we wish to do whether it is in “unity” with God’s will or not and, then, we become enslaved to it.¹⁰⁵ Part of the healing of our “spiritual sickness” involves the purification of our will by the Holy Spirit as Antony mentions several times.¹⁰⁶ Another example cited by Antony concerning the misuse of the free will is that of the person “who delights in his own will, and is subdued to his own thoughts...and justifies himself in what he does - the soul of such a man is a lair of evil spirits, counselling him to evil.”¹⁰⁷ This person has been led astray by pride, treasuring their own will and thoughts above all else. However, it is actually they who are becoming victim to the enemy’s attacks. For the devil himself, according to Antony, was thrown down from heaven because of pride and he and the evil powers are always trying to conform our free will to theirs because they wish humans to be lost even as they are.¹⁰⁸ Finally, the evil powers try to turn our free wills to jealousy, anger and contempt against each other, producing division rather than unity. This is a sure sign for Antony that evil powers are at work seeking our downfall, turning us away from God, the

¹⁰⁵ “for each one of us has sold himself of his own free choice, and we are dominated of our own free choice”; “but each one of us sold himself to his own will for evil, and became slave to it” (Chitty, *The Letters of St. Antony*, Letters V.4 and VII.4).

¹⁰⁶ “And the Spirit teaches the mind how to heal all the wounds of the soul, and to rid itself of every one, ... and other passions which are altogether outside the body, being mingled with the will....But if the mind is strengthened with the strength that it receives from the Spirit, first it is purified and sanctified, and learns discrimination in the words that it delivers to the tongue, that they may be without partiality and without self-will....At one time they were not making their steps aright according to God; but now the mind, being unified under the authority of the Spirit, effects their purification, that they should walk according to its will, going and ministering in good works” (Chitty, *The Letters of St. Antony*, Letter I.4).

¹⁰⁷ Chitty, *The Letters of St. Antony*, Letter VI.6.

¹⁰⁸ “and those who are of the devil know it, and that is why they try to change each of us according to their own will”; “all the evil counsels of the devil and his ministers, the evil they meditate always for our perdition, since their portion is to be in hell, and for this cause they want us to be lost with them” (Chitty, *The Letters of St. Antony*, Letter VI.11 and VI.4).

source of unity and pure love.¹⁰⁹ These many and varied tactics of malignant powers to direct us away from a life of holiness is the impetus behind the prayers that Antony makes - that these Christians be given spiritual discernment.

In summary, I would like to make a few comparisons with regard to spiritual discernment and free will in the battle against evil as seen by Origen and, then, by Antony. First, for Origen, it is the free will which needs to be informed by spiritual discernment in order to be able to properly choose between what is good and what is not. Spiritual discernment is described by Origen as a sort of reasoning power enabling us to differentiate between good and evil using the auxiliary function of the free will to select the course of action it approves or to reject it: “the nature of this reason which is in man has within itself the power of distinguishing between good and evil and while distinguishing possesses the faculty of selecting what it has approved.”¹¹⁰ Moreover, Origen asserts that, although we may receive temptations or persuasions to do certain things from outside sources, our free will coupled with our ability to discern, never gives us the option of abdicating moral responsibility by claiming that we were impelled to certain deeds. Our free will and spiritual discernment enable us to freely select or reject to carry out certain actions: “The result of our reasoning therefore, is to show that those things which happen to us from without are not in our own power; but that to make a good or bad use of those things which do so happen, by help of that

¹⁰⁹ “for this cause also they attack first those who have attained to a very great measure, seeking by means of pride and vainglory to turn them against one another. They know that in this way they can cut us off from God, for they know that he who loves his neighbour loves God; and for this cause the enemies of virtue sow division in our hearts, that we may be filled with great enmity against each other” (Chitty, *The Letters of St. Antony*, VI.11).

¹¹⁰ Origen, *De Principiis*, Book III, Chap. I, #3.

reason which is within us, and which distinguishes and determines how these things ought to be used, is within our power.”¹¹¹

For Antony, spiritual discernment is needed by those seeking a holy life to help them see how evil powers wish to gain control and enslave their free will. There are traps being laid at every turn for those who would closely follow after God. Antony likens spiritual discernment to a type of understanding, a sort of perception where “the eyes” of the heart are opened to be able to see the hidden and often subtle malice that evil powers seek to bring to deceive and persuade humans to evil.¹¹² The evil spirits seek to sow discord in our hearts and turn our wills away from persevering in good. They try to implant in our heart anger, contempt and judgment toward other so that we will “misuse” our free will. They want to fill us with pride, so that we will exalt our own thoughts and will above others and above God. Not only do we need to “see”, to discern the battle being waged against us, we need a special energy from God. Antony, therefore, urges them: “Prepare yourselves while you have intercessors to pray to God for your salvation, that He may pour into your hearts that fire which Jesus came to send upon the earth (Luke 12:49) that you may be able to exercise your hearts and senses to know how to discern the good from the bad, the right from the left, reality from unreality.”¹¹³ Here we see spiritual discernment described as the capacity to exercise heart and senses which comes from the “fire” which Jesus came to send upon the earth, i.e.,

¹¹¹ *Ibid.*, Book III, Chap. I, # 5.

¹¹² “I want you to know, my children, that I cease not to pray God for you night and day, that He may open for you the eyes of your hearts, to see the many hidden malignities which the evil spirits pour upon us daily in this present time. I want God to give you a heart of knowledge and a spirit of discernment” (Chitty, *The Letters of St. Antony*, Letter VL5).

¹¹³ Chitty, *The Letters of St. Antony*, Letter III.4.

the power of His Holy Spirit. The role of the Holy Spirit in spiritual discernment will be the object of our discussion in the next section.

Spiritual Discernment as a Gift of God

Although Origen maintains that we have all been given a free will and the reasoning capacity to be able to distinguish between good and evil and consequently, choose a response, he does acknowledge that there are limits to our power of being able to resist opposing powers.¹¹⁴ Humans, he asserts, cannot contend successfully against evil without divine assistance but God's help must be joined by our collaboration, i.e., the free will is always in operation in the presence of spiritual discernment: "we are not to suppose either that those things which are in our own power can be done without the help of God, or that those which are in God's hand can be brought to completion without the intervention of our acts, and desires, and intention."¹¹⁵ Furthermore, Origen says: "the human will alone is not sufficient to obtain salvation."¹¹⁶ He uses an analogy to explain the relationship of free will and human cooperation to divine salvation and grace. The comparison is one of skilled sailors guiding a ship through stormy seas. In spite of using all their navigational proficiency, when they safely reach their desired port, they will not claim to have "saved" the ship and brought it to security.

¹¹⁴ "For I am of opinion that there is a certain limit to the powers of human nature, although there may be a Paul,... or a Peter,... yet not one of them could sustain, without destruction to himself, the whole simultaneous assault of these opposing powers, unless indeed the might of Him alone were to work in him" (Origen, *De Principiis*, Book III, Chap. II, # 5).

¹¹⁵ Origen, *De Principiis*, Book III, Chap. I, # 21.

¹¹⁶ *Ibid.*, Book III, Chap. I, # 18.

They will attribute it to divine mercy. However, as Origen points out, the sailors' contribution was essential.¹¹⁷

Origen also reminds his readers that they are not in a physical battle, but in a spiritual one with the powers of darkness and so their fight must also be spiritual.¹¹⁸ Therefore, their power in the struggle must be from the grace of God.¹¹⁹ Nevertheless, how the person makes use of this grace when they are deciding which course to follow, whether for good or for evil, can be affected by spiritual readiness. The grace given by God may be used by the free will, either in a diligent manner resulting in victory or in a careless manner resulting in defeat. Furthermore, Origen (like Antony) cautions that our mind and heart must be tended at all times, for there are evil spirits, waiting like robbers, for a good resting place. Our negligence may give them an opening because we have failed to call for help from God.¹²⁰

¹¹⁷ "So, when a ship has overcome the dangers of the sea, although the result be accomplished by great labour on the part of the sailors, and by the aid of all the art of navigation,...no one in his sound senses would ascribe the safety of the vessel, when, after being tossed by the waves, and wearied by the billows, it has at last reached the harbour in safety, to anything else than to the mercy of God. Not even the sailors or pilot venture to say, "I have saved the ship" (Origen, *De Principiis*, Book III, Chap. I, # 18).

¹¹⁸ "Nor are we, indeed, to suppose that struggles of this kind are carried on by the exercise of bodily strength, and of the arts of the wrestling school; but spirit contends with spirit, according to the declaration of Paul, that our struggle is against principalities, and powers, and the rulers of the darkness of this world" (Origen, *De Principiis*, Book III, Chap. II, # 6).

¹¹⁹ "And therefore Paul exclaims with confidence,... 'I laboured more abundantly than they all; yet not I, but the grace of God which was with me.' On account, then, of this power, which certainly is not of human origin operating and speaking in him, Paul could say, 'For I am persuaded that neither death, nor life, nor angels, nor principalities, nor powers, nor things present, nor things to come ...shall be able to separate us from the love of God, which is in Christ Jesus our Lord.'...From which I infer that a man perhaps would never be able of himself to vanquish an opposing power, unless he had the benefit of divine assistance" (Origen, *De Principiis*, Book III, Chap. II, # 5).

¹²⁰ "But this power which is given us to enable us to conquer may be used, according to our faculty of free will, either in a diligent manner, and then we prove victorious, or in a slothful manner, and then we are defeated"; "For occasionally the mind, when watchful, and casting away from it what is evil, calls to itself the aid of the good; or if it be, on the contrary, negligent and slothful, it makes room through insufficient caution for these spirits, which, lying in wait secretly like robbers, contrive to rush into the minds of men when they see a lodgment made for them by sloth....On which account our heart must be kept with all carefulness both by day and night" (Origen, *De Principiis*, Book III, Chap. II, # 3 and Book III, Chap. III, # 5).

To be able to live a life of holiness, in Antony's thinking, requires spiritual discernment, the ability to distinguish between spiritually natural and unnatural movements in the body and soul. Knowledge of the demons he would also consider an essential part of this discernment. Where does this ability to discern between different motions in body and soul come from?

Antony essentially sees this growing spiritual discernment coming from the "loving partnership" that the Holy Spirit is able to have with the "mind" which opens the eyes of the soul.¹²¹ It is the Spirit who from the beginning calls the person to return to his original condition at creation, before his soul was wounded and distorted by sin. The Holy Spirit calls the mind, body and soul to repentance and gradual purification. As this process proceeds the spiritual eyes of the soul are gradually sensitized to observe the spiritual combat being waged against it. As the Holy Spirit purifies more and more the body, soul and will¹²², then that person may begin to experience the Holy Spirit, not only as a guide and the one bringing about purification, but also as a gift granting him wisdom and spiritual discernment.

This "fire" or gift of the Spirit which is granted is given only to those whose soul and body has been consecrated: "For the Spirit enters not the soul of one whose heart is defiled,

¹²¹ "Then the Spirit has a loving partnership with the mind, because the mind keeps the commandments which the Spirit has delivered to it....And for the eyes it sets a rule, that they may see rightly and purely"; "Then the Spirit that is his guide begins to open the eyes of his soul, to give to it also repentance, that it may be purified. The mind also starts to discriminate between the body and the soul, as it begins to learn from the Spirit how to purify both by repentance" (Chitty, *The Letters of St. Antony*, Letter I.4 and I.2).

¹²² "And if the mind conquers in this conquest, then it prays in the Spirit, and begins to expel from the body the passions of the soul which come to it from its own will. Then the Spirit has a loving partnership with the mind....And the Spirit teaches the mind how to heal all the wounds of the soul, and to rid itself of every one, those which are mingled in the members of the body, and other passions which are altogether outside the body, being mingled in the will" (Chitty, *The Letters of St. Antony*, Letter I.4).

nor the body that sins; a holy power it is, removed from all deceit.”¹²³ Therefore, the initial work of the Holy Spirit progresses only with the full assent of the free will of the person who gives the Spirit of repentance permission to instruct the “mind” and purify the body and soul.¹²⁴ Next Antony prays that they might have poured into their hearts “that fire which Jesus came to send upon the earth”, i.e., the Holy Spirit who may also grant them spiritual discernment and wisdom.¹²⁵ This wisdom that is granted them as a gift from the Holy Spirit has to do with being “taught by the Holy Spirit”¹²⁶ and in knowing themselves “according to their intellectual substance.” The Spirit helps the “mind” or the “intellectual substance” to reinstate the whole of the person to its original condition¹²⁷, i.e., to a state of harmony, of unity with God, its Creator. This enables the person at this point, being under authority of the Holy Spirit, to discern good from evil and to perceive in the words of Antony “the many hidden

¹²³ Chitty, *The Letters of St. Antony*, Letter IV.1.

¹²⁴ “if the soul exerts itself and perseveres in the testimony which the Spirit bears within the mind, both soul and body are purified from this kind of sickness. But if in regard to these three motions, the mind spurns the testimony which the Spirit bears within it, evil spirits take authority over it, and sow in the body all the passions, and stir up and quicken strong war against it” (Chitty, *The Letters of St. Antony*, Letter I.3).

¹²⁵ “Prepare yourselves while you have intercessors to pray to God for your salvation, that He may pour into your hearts that fire which Jesus came to send upon the earth (Luke 12:49), that you may be able to exercise your hearts and senses, to know how to discern the good from the bad, the right from the left, reality from unreality” (Chitty, *The Letters of St. Antony*, Letter III.4).

¹²⁶ “And as many as became worthy of God and grew by His implanted law, and were taught by His Holy Spirit”; “And Jesus our Saviour understood that these were near to receiving the Spirit of adoption, and that they knew Him, having been taught by the Holy Spirit”; “For those who have drawn near, and have been taught by the Holy Spirit, have known themselves according to their intellectual substance” (Chitty, *The Letters of St. Antony*, Letters II.1, II.4 and IV.1).

¹²⁷ “And, taught, by the Spirit, the mind becomes our guide to the labours of body and soul, showing us how to purify them. And it separates us from all the fruits of the flesh...and brings back each of the members of the body to its original condition, having nothing in it from the spirit of satan” (Chitty, *The Letters of St. Antony*, Letter I.2).

malignities which the evil spirits pour upon us daily.”¹²⁸ The role of spiritual discernment and self-knowledge is the subject I will now turn to in our discussion.

Spiritual Discernment as a Function of Self-Knowledge

The purpose of Antony’s repeated exhortation in his letters to the communities to “know themselves”¹²⁹, is so that they may understand how to make spiritual progress: they must allow the Holy Spirit to purify and guide the “immortal substance”, sometimes referred to as the “mind” within them to direct their body, soul and will back to their original condition, to unity with God. As more and more of the members of their body are purified and come under the authority of the Holy Spirit, they are given spiritual discernment so that they may evaluate the significance of their actions. They are also given the ability to detect the hidden snares that evil spirits are laying for them, to turn them away from the path of holiness.

One of the most common snares of malignant powers is the temptation to pride, and, then, to jealousy, enmity and separation from neighbour. The person who lacks self-knowledge falls easily into these enemy pitfalls: “Truly, my children, I think it is no great wonder, if you neglect yourselves and do not discern your works, that you should fall into the hands of the devil.”¹³⁰ There is even the observation by Antony that those who have done great spiritual disciplines and have spared no effort at pursuing holiness, can also fall victim to

¹²⁸ Chitty, *The Letters of St. Antony*, Letter VI.5.

¹²⁹ *Ibid.*, II.4; III.1; III.3; III.4; IV; VI.7; VI.8; VII.8.

¹³⁰ Chitty, *The Letters of St. Antony*, Letter VI.11.

darkness due to lack of self-knowledge.¹³¹ I think we can say that to “neglect” oneself, according to Antony, is to forget the vulnerability of the “immortal substance.” True self-knowledge involves the realization that the “immortal substance” was subject to humiliation and was greatly wounded, in need of salvation and resurrection. God in His goodness was wounded so that we could be healed. God’s love and salvation result in a “resurrection”, a kind of transformation of individuals’ hearts and minds. This transformation reminds us of the essential unity that the “immortal substance” shares with God and also with all those who have been created by God, “that we are all of one substance” and should, therefore, love one another.¹³² This awakening self-knowledge about our true substance and our origins, thus gives insight into the snares of evil spirits who always try to tempt us to act in a manner that is alien to our “intellectual substance.”¹³³

But what is self-knowledge for Origen and how is it active in spiritual discernment? I think self-knowledge for Origen is, first of all, being able to recognize that we are beings subject to various influences. Self-knowledge involves becoming aware of these motions¹³⁴

¹³¹ “I want you to know that there are many who have pursued asceticism throughout their life, but lack of discernment killed them....I think it is no great wonder, if you neglect yourselves and do not discern your works, that you should fall into the hands of the devil, when you think you are near to God, and that in your expectation of the light, darkness should overtake you” (Chitty, *The Letters of St. Antony*, Letter VI.11).

¹³² “since we are all created of the same invisible substance, which has a beginning but no end, we may love one another with a single love. For all who know themselves, know that they are of one immortal substance”; “He gathered us out of all regions, till He should make resurrection of our hearts from the earth, and teach us that we are all of one substance, and members one of another. Therefore, we ought greatly to love one another. For he who loves his neighbour, loves God: and he who loves God, loves his own soul” (Chitty, *The Letters of St. Antony*, Letter VI.8 and VI.9).

¹³³ “For first the rational man needs to know himself, and then to know the things of God, and all the bounties which His grace is ever showing towards him; and then to know that all sin and guilt is foreign to the nature of his intellectual substance” (Chitty, *The Letters of St. Antony*, Letter VII.8).

¹³⁴ “It is certain that there is no living thing which can be altogether inactive and immoveable, but delights in motion of every kind,...and this nature, I think it is evident, is in all living things. Much more, then, must a rational animal, i.e., the nature of man, be in perpetual movement and activity” (Origen, *De Principiis*, Book II,

which are constantly acting upon us, trying to persuade our free will to some response either to good or to evil.¹³⁵ There are a diversity of good and evil spirits vying to take control of our soul. Spiritual discernment and self-knowledge give us the ability to read the signs that it is the good spirit at work, or, on the contrary, that evil powers are active.

When the good spirit is present, we are moved toward what is good, toward the things of God and of increasing righteousness in our life. Yet, the will feels at complete liberty to follow the suggestion or not, and the person experiences an absence of agitation. When wicked powers are present and succeed in taking complete control of a person, the person experiences a loss of reasoning power and feeling. We could even say that the free will has come into captivity of the evil spirits whom the person has decided to serve. Self-knowledge and spiritual discernment then suffers. However, there are other times when a person has simply decided to carry out some suggestion made to it by evil powers without coming under their full control.¹³⁶ In this last case, the person's spiritual discernment and self-knowledge has suffered, been taken off guard by the suggestions of the evil powers. Origen attributes this to two possible causes. The first may be that the person has become lax and has not remained spiritually alert, thereby carelessly leaving the door of their soul (mind) open to motions or

Chap. XI, #1).

¹³⁵ "and freedom of will is always directed either to good or evil. Nor can any rational and sentient being, i.e., a mind or soul, exist without some movement either good or bad" (Origen, *De Principiis*, Book III, Chap. III, # 5).

¹³⁶ "Now of wicked spirits there is a twofold mode of operation: i.e., when they either take complete and entire possession of the mind, so as to allow their captives the power neither of understanding nor feeling,...or when by their wicked suggestions they deprave a sentient and intelligent soul with thoughts of various kinds, persuading it to evil" (Origen, *De Principiis*, Book III, Chap. III, # 4).

influences which have come its way.¹³⁷ The second reason may be that the person has failed to call for divine help. If the person is vigilant, they may, by means of spiritual discernment and self-knowledge, discern the pernicious nature of the suggestion which is being made and call for divine assistance.¹³⁸ In fact, the operation of this self-knowledge and discernment, like that of Antony's, recognizes the limitations of the person's capacity to battle evil powers, their vulnerability and, hence, their need for divine help. Origen underlines the fact that we are not contending with human powers, but with principalities and rulers of darkness.¹³⁹

Origen also brings forth the case of the person who deliberately chooses to put themselves in the camp of malignant powers by their own free will because they admire the wisdom or the way of life of certain princes of this world, imbued with the wisdom of opposing powers. Their mind becomes absorbed with the wisdom of these evil powers and shares in its inspiration. The result is that these persons become filled with the motivations of these evil spirits and become their servants.¹⁴⁰

¹³⁷ "or if it (the mind) be, on the contrary, negligent and slothful, it makes room through insufficient caution for these spirits, which, lying in wait secretly like robbers, contrive to rush into the minds of men when they see a lodgment made for them by sloth; as the Apostle Peter says, 'that our adversary the devil goes about like a roaring lion, seeking whom he may devour' " (Origen, *De Principiis*, Book III, Chap. III, # 4).

¹³⁸ "For occasionally the mind, when watchful, and casting away from it what is evil, calls to itself the aid of the good" (Origen, *De Principiis*, Book III, Chap. III, # 4).

¹³⁹ "For I do not think that human nature can alone of itself maintain a contest with angels, and with the powers of the height and of the abyss, and with any other creature;....From which I infer that a man perhaps would never be able of himself to vanquish an opposing power, unless he had the benefit of divine assistance....Nor are we, indeed, to suppose that struggles of this kind are carried on by the exercise of bodily strength, ...but spirit contends with spirit, according to the declaration of Paul, that our struggle is against principalities, and powers, and the rulers of the darkness of this world" (Origen, *De Principiis*, Book III, Chap. II, # 5 and # 6).

¹⁴⁰ "so also are we to suppose that those who place themselves in the way of the opposing powers, i.e., who purposely admire and adopt their manner of life and habits, receive their inspiration, and become partakers of their wisdom and doctrine. And the result of this is, that they are filled with the working of those spirits to whose service they have subjected themselves" (Origen, *De Principiis*, Book III, Chap. III, # 3).

Finally, both Origen and Antony, would agree that spiritual alertness is of the utmost importance in spiritual discernment and is, indeed, a mark of self-knowledge: “On which account our heart must be kept with all carefulness both by day and night, and no place be given to the devil; but every effort must be used that the ministers of God - those spirits, who were sent to minister to them who are called to be heirs of salvation - may find place within us,... and dwelling within us may guide us by their counsels”¹⁴¹ and “I cease not to pray God for you night and day, that He may open for you the eyes of your hearts, to see the many hidden malignities which the evil spirits pour upon us daily in this present time. I want God to give you a heart of knowledge and a spirit of discernment.”¹⁴²

¹⁴¹ Origen, *De Principiis*, Book III, Chap. III, # 5.

¹⁴² Chitty, *The Letters of St. Antony*, Letter VI.5.

V. Ignatius of Loyola: Discernment as Finding the Will of God so as to Obey it

Background of Ignatius of Loyola's Life

Ignatius of Loyola was born in a Basque province in the north of Spain around 1491 (the exact date is disputed) to Beltrán, a soldier for the king of Castile and Aragon, and to Marina Liona. Iñigo López (Ignatius) was the youngest of probably 13 children. His mother tongue was Basque, but he later learned to read, write and speak Spanish. His mother died before he was twelve and his father died when he was 14 years of age. He became a page for the master of the royal treasury. Here he was trained as a soldier and introduced to court life. Chivalry became his ideal, along with gambling, duelling and pleasing women. When his master died, he entered the service of a relative, Antonio de Manrique, the Viceroy of Navarre. He was assigned to defend Pamplona, a crossroads between France and Spain, then, possessed by Spain. The French attacked Pamplona in May 1521 and Ignatius was wounded in both legs by cannon artillery. Pamplona surrendered and Ignatius was transported to the family home in Loyola. The bones in his legs were not healing and by June 24th he was close to death. However, around midnight, he improved and his life was spared.

During his ensuing convalescence, he was confined to bed. He asked for reading material. The only books available were Ludolph of Saxony's *Life of Christ* and Jacopo de Voragine's *Golden Legend* which recounted the lives of the saints. Although he preferred tales of romance, he began to notice different movements within his soul. Daydreaming of great exploits he might do to win the favour of a lady, left him empty and dispirited, while those thoughts he had of imitating the deeds of the saints for God, brought him satisfaction and joy afterwards. In a vision one night, he was filled with loathing for his sinful past.

God's grace met him in a special way and his heart was forever changed. He wanted to serve God.

Upon his recovery in February 1522, he paid off his debts and made a personal retreat at Montserrat under the guidance of a Benedictine abbot, Juan Chanones. He made a general confession and then, left his armour, weapons and clothing in the chapel there, donning the clothes of a beggar as a sign of his new life of consecration and service to God. From there he went to Manresa where he spent ten months. He begged alms and stayed at the house of Agnes Pascual. He gave what he had earned to the poor in the evening. This was a tremendously formative time in Ignatius' faith journey. God's grace was poured out upon him during this period and he received deep spiritual illumination. It is thought that during this time he wrote most of the foundational notes for the *Spiritual Exercises* (which were published more than 25 years later). In the next few years he began teaching the *Spiritual Exercises* to a few people. However, this was the period of the Inquisition in Spain and anyone who tried to teach without official recognition or theological education was suspect. Ignatius was imprisoned more than once by religious authorities but always was released with the warning that he should not give spiritual counsel until he had finished his studies.

In 1528 Ignatius decided to go to the University of Paris, a renowned international learning centre of Western Europe. It was not easy for a former soldier to sit and learn Latin grammar with students much younger than he, but he succeeded with the help of his two roommates, Francis Xavier and Pierre Favre, who later became his companions. Nine years later, Ignatius had finished his Masters of Arts in Theology. He had also gained a number of companions to God's service using the *Spiritual Exercises*. They made vows together and

planned to meet in Venice after their studies were finished to embark on a ministry to Moslems in Palestine.

Due to ongoing war with the Turks in Palestine, this dream was never realized. Instead, Ignatius and his companions fanned out in cities of influence in Italy like Padua, Ferrara, Bologna and Sienna. They were to attend to the needs of the sick and poor, preach, teach and give the *Spiritual Exercises*. Ignatius and Pierre Favre went to Rome and on the way, Ignatius received a message from God at La Storta. The message promised God's favour in Rome and declared God's desire that Ignatius serve His Son, Jesus. Ignatius and Pierre agreed to name their group, "The Company of Jesus", reflecting the message Ignatius had received.

Everywhere they went the members of the Company of Jesus were recognized as a powerful incentive to individual spiritual renewal and an example of reform that was necessary for the Church. In September 1540, the Company of Jesus was officially recognized as a religious order by Pope Paul III and Ignatius was elected as director general. The members of this new order multiplied rapidly and soon had members in France, Germany, Portugal, India, Japan, Brazil, the West Indies and Africa. Between 1549 until his death in 1556, Ignatius wrote or entrusted to his secretary 6,641 letters. Some were written to prominent lay people or royalty who requested spiritual counsel. Others were written to members of the order working in many parts of the world. He also started a number of schools to meet the needs of Jews, Moors and Germans who wished to study Christian doctrine and theology in Rome. The *Spiritual Exercises* were published in 1548. As he was beginning to write down the Constitutions for the order, he went through a process of discernment that he recorded as a

sort of spiritual log for a year (*The Spiritual Diary: 1544-1545*). This diary also leaves us with a glimpse of his regular mystical encounters with God.

The Constitutions did not seek to mould novices into one type of ascetical practice or devotion, other than that of the *Spiritual Exercises*. Instead, Ignatius wished that they learn to seek God's presence in all they did, whether study, ministry or domestic tasks. He placed a higher value on overcoming self than in long hours of prayer. His health gradually deteriorated until his death on July 31, 1556.

Background and Content of the *Spiritual Exercises*

As I previously mentioned, most biographers of Ignatius' life believe that the essential notes for the *Spiritual Exercises* were written sometime in the year 1522-1523 during the time Ignatius spent in Manresa following his recovery from his injuries and his conversion. Diego Laynez, one of his early biographers, writes of Ignatius during this period: "At Manresa Inigo (*Ignatius*) was strengthened, taught and illumined by His Divine Majesty in a wholly singular manner. As a consequence he began to look at the things of God with entirely different eyes, to distinguish and test the different spirits, to relish interiorly divine things and to impart them to his neighbour with the same simplicity and love with which he himself had received them."¹⁴³ This highlights an important quality that we find in the *Spiritual Exercises*. They are not so much an attempt to describe and teach a path for holiness and discerning God's will, as an invitation to embark on spiritual experiences designed to teach the exercitant how to test the different spiritual motions that occur in the soul. Ignatius writes more like a coach than a sage. His desire is for the learner to come to "experience" as he did the guidance of

¹⁴³ Hugo Rahner, S. J. (trans. Francis J. Smith, S.J.); *The Spirituality of St. Ignatius of Loyola*. Chicago: Loyola University Press, 1953, p. 48.

the Holy Spirit in all things. In fact, he cautions the director who oversees the person taking the exercises not to explain too much to them.¹⁴⁴ The *Spiritual Exercises* are not so much to be studied as to be encountered through the work of the Holy Spirit in the life of the exercitant.

It is probable that Ignatius corrected and refined the *Spiritual Exercises* over the years as he gave them. It is thought that he scrutinized them carefully after finishing his theological studies in Paris and before they were published in 1548. The original Spanish text was translated into two different Latin texts for publication, one as a more literal text and the other a more polished version. The text of the *Spiritual Exercises* that I will be using in this study¹⁴⁵ has been translated from the Spanish *Autograph* of Ignatius. This is a copy of an original manuscript, but it contains 18 marginal notes in Ignatius' handwriting. Hence, it is the earliest Spanish text available.

The text itself is mainly addressed to the director of the person taking the exercises. It begins with twenty initial instructions ("Annotations") for the director. The "First Annotation" gives us a definition of *spiritual exercises* including any type of praying, meditating or other spiritual activity and "every way of preparing and disposing the soul to rid itself of all the disordered tendencies, and, after it is rid, to seek and find the Divine Will as to the management of one's life for the salvation of the soul."

¹⁴⁴ Ignatius of Loyola, *The Spiritual Exercises* (trans. Elder Mullan, S.J.) [book on-line] New York: P. J. Kenedy and Sons, 1914, (accessed April 2000; available from <http://ccel.wheaton.edu/i/ignatius/exercises1.0html>), "Second Annotation".

¹⁴⁵ *Ibid.*

The *Spiritual Exercises* have a four-week format with instructions given for the exercitant to follow for each week. After the exercises of the Fourth Week, there are some additional meditations on the life of Christ, instructions to gain love, methods of prayer and finally, some rules for spiritual discernment, i.e., for distinguishing the motions caused in the soul. Most of these directives are, again, for the director of the exercitant. A short summary of the purpose of the *Spiritual Exercises* is given after the “Annotations” and before the exercises of the First Week: “to conquer oneself and regulate one’s life without determining oneself through any tendency that is disordered.” The exercises of the First Week begin with “Principle and Foundation” which reminds the exercitant that humans are created “to praise, reverence and serve God our Lord.” Since this is our end, our use of created things and of our free will should always aim us toward this end. In fact, he says, “it is necessary to make ourselves indifferent to all created things” in order to achieve this. I will take this up in more detail a little later.

The exercises of the First Week are to help the exercitant raise their awareness of sin operating in their life and to help the person to cleanse their soul from sin through different methods of examination of conscience, prayers of repentance, as well as various meditations on sin and hell. The person doing the exercises is effectively inviting God and His Holy Spirit to help them know their sin and then, to avoid it. Ignatius comments that “there are three kinds of thoughts in me: that is, one my own which springs from my mere liberty and will; and two others, which come from without, one from the good spirit, and the other from the bad.”¹⁴⁶ This is reminiscent of Antony’s description of three types of motion in the body.¹⁴⁷

¹⁴⁶ *Ibid.*, “General Examen of Conscience” [32], p. 22.

¹⁴⁷ “I think there are three types of motion of the body. There is that which is implanted in the body by nature,...but this is not operative if the soul does not will it,...And there is another motion, when a man stuffs his body with food and drink, and...the abundance of nourishment rouses up warfare in the body, because of our

The three motions mentioned by Antony are: that which is there at creation, but is only activated by the will; that which springs from overindulgence and greed, producing warfare and that which arises directly from the efforts of evil spirits who tempt us. Finally, it is the work of the Holy Spirit which helps the person avoid and be purified from evil. Origen follows a kind of three-fold motion in the use of a person's free will. First, a person can exercise their free will in a worthy fashion, by accepting the grace of divine assistance and choosing to do good. Secondly, the person can decide to use their own liberty, yielding to indulgence and spiritual defeat. Thirdly, a person can be directly acted upon by evil powers who incite them to choose to do evil.¹⁴⁸

Ignatius describes the spirit in which the individual doing the exercises should enter into them - with great openness, commending their will and liberty to God for Him to use as He wills.¹⁴⁹ Ignatius expects the person doing the exercises of the First Week to gain noticeable progress in their fight against sin and to begin to seek specific graces from God.

In the exercises of the Second Week, the exercitant is invited to use the "five senses of the imagination" in various guided meditations on the life of Christ. The purpose is to use the

greed.....And there is a third motion, from the evil spirits which tempt us out of envy.....And now, my beloved children, in these three types of motion, if the soul exerts itself and perseveres in the testimony which the Spirit bears within the mind, both soul and body are purified from this kind of sickness" (Chitty, *The Letters of St. Antony*, Letter I.3).

¹⁴⁸ "But this power which is given us to enable us to conquer may be used, according to our faculty of free-will, either in a diligent manner, and then we prove victorious, or in a slothful manner, and then we are defeated....it is, I think, clearly evident that there are certain transgressions which we by no means commit under the pressure of malignant powers; while there are others, again, to which we are incited by instigation on their part (*malignant powers*) to excessive and immoderate indulgence" (Origen, *De Principiis*, Book III, Chap. II, # 3).

¹⁴⁹ "It is very helpful to him who is receiving the Exercises to enter into them with great courage and generosity towards His Creator and Lord, offering Him all his will and liberty, that His Divine Majesty may make use of his person and of all he has according to His most Holy Will" (Ignatius of Loyola, *The Spiritual Exercises*, "Fifth Annotation" [5], p. 13).

imagination's power of sight, sound, smell, taste and touch to enhance the person's contemplation on these events. The meditations on how Christ was obedient to His parents are a sort of preparation for "making an election", i.e., a decision with regard to an important issue. In the "Meditation on the Two Standards" the person is to "ask for knowledge of the bad chief and help to guard myself against them, and for knowledge of the true life which the supreme and true Captain shows and grace to imitate Him."¹⁵⁰ There are also meditations on "Three Pairs of Men" and on "Three Degrees of Humility." These are all designed to help the person distinguish and to choose what is best according to God's will and perfection.

The next to last section of the exercises of the Second Week is entitled "Times for Making an Election". It reminds the person of the "Principle and Foundation" of the exercises and that what they choose should correspond to the end for which they have been created: to praise God and serve Him. Secondly, it states that everything concerning an election should be good or at least, indifferent *per se*.¹⁵¹ Next, Ignatius presents in detail three times for making a "good and sound election." The first occasion is "when God our Lord so moves and attracts the will, that without doubting, or being able to doubt, such a devout soul follows what is shown it." The second instance is "when light and knowledge is received by experience of consolations and desolations, and by the experience of the discernment of various spirits." This subject is broached in some detail after the exercises of the Fourth Week in further notes to the director ("Rules for Perceiving the Movements Caused in the Soul") and I will comment on it later.

¹⁵⁰ St. Ignatius of Loyola, *The Spiritual Exercises*, "Meditation on Two Standards, Third Prelude" [139], p. 41.

¹⁵¹ "It is necessary that everything about which we want to make an election should be indifferent, or good, in itself" (Ignatius of Loyola, *The Spiritual Exercises*, "Prelude for Making Election, First Point" [169], p. 46).

The Third Time for making an election is a “time of quiet when the soul is not acted on by various spirits, and uses its natural powers freely and tranquilly.”¹⁵² However, this Third Time is followed by two possible means to pursue this. The First Way is to always keep in mind the end for which we were created and try to be indifferent, i.e., not inclined to choose one thing over another, but seek what we judge would be more to the glory of God, the end for which we have been created. Then we are to make use of our reasoning power to consider the advantages and disadvantages of choosing one decision over another, or, conversely, in not choosing it. Using then, our power of reasoning and deliberation to pour over these pros and cons, we make a decision, offering it up in prayer for a confirmation from God.

In the Second Way to make an election which comes out of the Third Time, the time of quiet, when we are free to use our powers of imagination, sensing and feeling in the determination; there are Four Rules which are proposed. In the First Rule, the suggestion is that whatever moves us toward a particular decision, should be prompted by and have its origin in the love of God above all else. In the Second Rule, we are to consider what advice we would give a stranger in our situation and then, take it ourselves! The Third Rule asks us to consider what we would decide if we were facing imminent death; what would we want to have chosen? In the last rule, we are to imagine ourselves standing before God on the Day of Judgment and how we would want to have made the decision that is on hand.¹⁵³

¹⁵² Ignatius of Loyola, *The Spiritual Exercises*, “Three Times for Making a Sound and Good Election” [175, 176, 177], p. 47.

¹⁵³ *Ibid.*, “The Second Way to Make a Good and Sound Election” [184-187], p. 48.

The Third Week of the exercises are comprised of a series of meditations on the final days of Christ and His passion. There are also some guidelines given with regard to fasting and eating. During this week the exercitant is to focus on the sufferings and pain of Christ. The Fourth Week of the exercises begins with meditation on the resurrection. This time the person is to focus on “things that move to spiritual pleasure, gladness and joy, as of heavenly glory.”¹⁵⁴ Next, there is a meditation on how to increase in love for God and “Three Methods of Prayer”. The Fourth Week exercises finish with a series of 51 meditations on dramatic scenes and biblical passages from the life of Christ, including His death and resurrection.

The last part of the text of the exercises are instructions given to the spiritual director of the retreatant. This last section is a kind of mini-handbook summarizing the discernment of spiritual motions in the soul. Ignatius has distilled the essence of his own experiences and put them into Fourteen and then, Eight Rules, corresponding to their helpfulness to the First and Second Week exercises respectively. In the Rules of Discernment for the First Week, Ignatius explains several key points for detecting the presence either of the good spirit or the evil spirit. For the person who is progressing in evil, the good spirit’s presence goads them in their conscience, producing distress so as to move them to repentance. For those seeking to better serve God, the presence of the evil spirit troubles, saddens and puts obstacles in the way of the progress of the person, while the good spirit’s presence gives strength and consolation, clearing away all obstacles to doing good. In this first section, Ignatius defines what he means by “spiritual consolation” and “spiritual desolation” , words he uses in the exercises.

¹⁵⁴ *Ibid.*, “How Christ Our Lord Appeared to Our Lady, Fourth Note” [229], p. 59.

“Spiritual Consolation” occurs when the soul is inspired and moved by the love of God or when the person sheds tears because of either sorrow for sin or love for God. Finally, he says, “I call consolation every increase of hope, faith and charity, and all interior joy which calls and attracts to heavenly things and to the salvation of one’s soul, quieting it and giving it peace in its Creator and Lord.” On the other hand, “spiritual desolation” is the opposite of the above. The soul suffers turbulence, darkness and temptation, where there is the “movement to things low and earthly, the unquiet of different agitations and temptations...when one finds oneself all lazy, tepid, sad, and as if separated from his Creator.”¹⁵⁵ Ignatius proceeds to give instructions on how to react in times of spiritual desolation. Because it is the evil spirit rather than the good spirit at work in times of desolation, we should not change our course, but continue along the resolution we had set beforehand. Instead, we are to be patient, persevere in prayer and remember that God’s aid is always ready to help in spite of how we might feel.

In the Ninth Rule, Ignatius gives three possible reasons that we may find ourselves in spiritual desolation. One reason is that we have been negligent in our spiritual exercises and so God’s grace has partially departed from us. Another reason may be that God is allowing us to serve and praise Him without the benefit of spiritual consolation. The third reason is to give us inner knowledge of how great is God’s grace which strengthens us and gives us consolation, preventing us from pride, thinking that we are able to serve God by our own spiritual strength. After this, Ignatius reflects on the different tactics the enemy of our souls may take to tempt us, using three different analogies. In the first, he says our adversary “acts

¹⁵⁵ *Ibid.*, “Rules for Perceiving and Knowing in Some Manner the Different Movements Which Are Caused in the Soul; Third Rule; Fourth Rule”, [316, 317], p. 83.

like a woman, in being weak against vigour and strong of will”¹⁵⁶, i.e., the enemy is persistent in wanting his own way, but when confronted by courage and steadfastness of spiritual resolve, he will flee. We are to oppose any suggestions on his part and, in fact, do the opposite. The second analogy is where Satan is compared to an illicit lover who wants to solicit our favour secretly and not be discovered. As soon as we reveal the temptations we are experiencing to another spiritual person, Satan’s attempt to deceive us is thwarted. Our adversary, thirdly, is compared to a captain of an army who examines all sides of his enemy’s defenses, “and where he finds us weakest and most in need...there he attacks us and aims at taking us.”¹⁵²

In the next section, the Eight Rules are to give help with the exercises of the Second Week. There is greater detail given in describing the characteristics of the motions of the good and evil powers (“the good angel” and “bad angel”). God and the good Angel “give true spiritual gladness and joy, taking away all sadness and disturbance which the enemy brings on.” This consolation from God also comes “without preceding cause”, i.e., with no apparent reason or source for its coming to us. However, the bad Angel can also mimic spiritual consolation, introducing seemingly good thoughts to us, but then, little by little turning us toward evil. Ignatius give us the way we can distinguish between true and false consolation: “We ought to note well the course of the thoughts, and if the beginning, middle and end is all good, inclined to all good, it is a sign of the good Angel”. However, on the other hand, if it ends in something less than good or bad, or if it weakens or disquiets the soul, taking away its peace, this is a sign that the evil spirit is at work. Ignatius also speaks of the motion of the good Angel and the bad Angel in the soul of the one who is progressing in holiness: “the good

¹⁵⁶ *Ibid.*, “Twelfth Rule, Fourteenth Rule” [325, 327], p. 84, 85.

Angel touches such soul sweetly, lightly and gently, like a drop of water which enters into a sponge; and the evil touches it sharply and with noise and disquiet, as when the drop of water falls on the soul.” He summarizes that the motion of the spirit which is contrary to that in the soul of the person “enter perceptibly with clatter and noise; and when it is like, they enter with silence as into their own home, through the open door.”¹⁵⁷

Finally, Ignatius, discusses “scruples”, another way that our adversary seeks to trip us up by a false sense of guilt or self-imposed judgments about our actions. He defines false “scruples” as “what proceeds from our own judgment and freedom: that is to say, when I freely decide that that is sin which is not sin....This is properly an erroneous judgment and not a real scruple.”¹⁵⁸ A real scruple, explains Ignatius, is when some thought enters our mind accusing us, telling us that we have sinned, when it appears to our intelligence that we have not sinned. So, a doubt is raised, creating a certain sense of distress. This particular distress, the way Ignatius sees it, is part of learning how to do spiritual exercises, to discern the tactics of the enemy and to purify our souls. Ignatius comments that in those who will not consent to any sin or appearance of sin, Satan will try to make them imagine there is sin, when there is none. His conclusion is: “The soul which desires to benefit itself in the spiritual life, ought always to proceed the contrary way to what the enemy proceeds; that is to say, if the enemy wants to make the soul gross, let it aim at making itself delicate. Likewise, if the enemy tries

¹⁵⁷ *Ibid.*, “Rules for the Same Effect with Greater Discernment of Spirits; First Rule, Second Rule, Fourth Rule, Fifth Rule, Seventh Rule”, [329, 330,332, 333,335,], p. 86, 87.

¹⁵⁸ *Ibid.*, “Scruples and Persuasions of our Enemy, First Note”, [346], p. 90.

to draw it out to extreme fineness, let the soul try to establish itself in the mean, in order to quiet itself in everything.”¹⁵⁹

The goal of the *Spiritual Exercises* is to teach the exercitant spiritual discernment in order to determine God’s will for their life so as to carry it out in the best possible way. The best possible way is whichever will give the most praise, honour and service to God. This is the Foundation of the exercises. The First Week exercises create awareness of sin, discernment of its gravity and opportunity for increasing openness to the grace of God in His Holy Spirit. During the Second Week exercises, the retreatant is encouraged to use their five senses, and to fully enter into contemplation on the pivotal events in Christ’s early life. They are then to begin to integrate their previous experiences up until now (purification from sin, recognizing spiritual consolations and desolations and their movement in the soul and seeking to be free from disordered attachments) so as to determine God’s will on an important issue in their life. The “Second and Third Times for Making an Election” are, perhaps, those which will be the experience of the great majority of those doing the exercises. The First, being reserved for those who have a clear and strong indication of what God desires without being able to doubt.¹⁶⁰ Each of the two ways which follow the Third Time for making an election, must be offered up and confirmed, using, in fact, the truths of the Second Time which involves the active discernment of the different spirits, consolations and desolations at work with regard to the decision.

¹⁵⁹ *Ibid.*, “Fifth Note”, [350], p. 90.

¹⁶⁰ “The first time is, when God our Lord so moves and attracts the will, that without doubting, or being able to doubt, such devout soul follows what is shown it, as St. Paul and St. Matthew did in following Christ our Lord”, (Ignatius of Loyola, *Spiritual Exercises*, “Three Times for Making a Sound and Good Election, First Time”, [175], p. 46).

The Third Week Exercises focus the person's attention on Christ's suffering and death, thereby, perhaps, continuing the work of stripping away the tendency toward any inordinate attachment in the person's life which might prevent a good election. The exercises of the Fourth Week turn the person's heart toward the grace and love available in the risen Christ. They are to seek to increase in love for God. The meditations on the life of Christ are a possible means to increasing the person's identification and love for Christ in continually seeking His will in all circumstances, in all things.

The instructions given to the director of the exercises at the end are very practical pointers for the director to aid the exercitant in his growing process of spiritual discernment. Here we find teaching on how to distinguish the different motions produced in the soul whether they are from good or an evil source. We find also guidelines on temptation and the various ruses that evil powers use to turn us away from discerning and doing God's will. In the Rules for Discernment for the Second Week, Ignatius describes in some detail the characteristics of true and false consolations which may be the way the enemy tempts the soul making progress under the guise of good. The good spirit's work clears away all obstacles and makes it easy for the person to follow God's will, whereas the work of the evil spirit, under the pretence of good, always ends in doubt, agitation and distress for the soul who would do good. There is even a warning given to the soul who has rightly discerned that the consolation they have received is indeed from God. The danger is that this person will be tempted to certain judgments and decisions, riding on the energy of the consolation, which are not necessarily given by God. They should instead wait and examine their inclinations before hastily putting them into action. Lastly, in their learning on spiritual discernment, Ignatius includes a section for the director on the problem of true and false sense of guilt over what is

judged to be sin (“scruples”) by the person doing the exercises. Even this can be turned for advantage in the exercitant’s experience and learning on spiritual discernment: “The soul which desires to benefit itself in the spiritual life, ought always to proceed the contrary way to what the enemy proceeds.”¹⁶¹ In the next section, I would like to attempt to summarize Ignatius’ most important notions about spiritual discernment as can be gleaned from the *Spiritual Exercises* and to this I now turn.

¹⁶¹ Ignatius of Loyola, *The Spiritual Exercises*, “Scruples and Persuasions of Our Enemy, Fifth Note”, [350], p. 90.

The notion of spiritual discernment in the *Spiritual Exercises*

Ignatius, I believe, had a twofold goal for the *Spiritual Exercises*. The first he mentions at the very beginning before the exercises of the First Week: “to conquer oneself and regulate one’s life without determining oneself through any tendency that is disordered.”¹⁶² This was the practical and spiritual transformation that had to take place before the final purpose might be realized : “desiring and choosing only what is most conducive for us to the end for which we are created.”¹⁶³ The end for which we are created is to bring praise to God and to serve Him. In more simple words, I would say that Ignatius’ ultimate purpose for the exercises was to bring the person doing them to the point of being able both to discern and to desire to do the will of God above all else. Hence, this is the reason why I have entitled Ignatius’ notion of spiritual discernment as *Finding the Will of God so as to Obey it*. Ignatius indicates that spiritual discernment should never be a means simply to acquire knowledge about what God wants us to do so that we can then determine whether we wish to follow it or not. The spirit of the person who enters this process of discernment and election (decision) through the *Spiritual Exercises* should be one of great openness toward God, offering Him all so that God may fully reveal and accomplish His will.¹⁶⁴

¹⁶² *Ibid.*, [21], p. 17.

¹⁶³ *Ibid.*, “Principle and Foundation”, [23] , p. 19.

¹⁶⁴ “It is very helpful to him who is receiving the Exercises to enter into them with great courage and generosity towards his Creator and Lord, offering Him all his will and liberty, that His Divine Majesty may make use of his person and of all he has according to His most Holy Will.” (Ignatius of Loyola, *The Spiritual Exercises*, “Fifth Annotation”, [5], p. 13).

The exercises that Ignatius have authored are meant as steps toward that end purpose (to discern and to desire to do the will of God) and build on one another. The exercises of the First Week are designed to help in the mastery of self through raising awareness of sin and stimulating the exercitant in their progress toward overcoming it. The person is called upon to examine their conscience regarding a specific sin several times a day and, then, to note the progress they are making day after day. The purpose of this exercise is to correct and overcome a particular sin or defect. Next, there is the “General Examen of Conscience” to increase the person’s discernment regarding the thoughts that arise within from three sources: the free will, the good spirit and the bad spirit. Sin can appear in three ways: in thought, in word or in deed. Part of the exercise involves the person asking for God’s grace in order to be able to recognize which sins are active in their life so as to remove them.

The “First Exercise” of the First Week is a “Meditation with the Three Powers on the First, the Second and the Third Sin.” The person is instructed to use the “three powers” of the soul in this exercise. What are these three powers? Ignatius seems to presuppose an understanding of them. Alexandre Brou suggests that the three powers were in common use in the Church since the time of St. Augustine. They were the memory, the intellect (reason or understanding) and the will.¹⁶⁵ From what we see in Ignatius’ instructions which follow, this does not mean that the three powers are necessarily used in a systematic order such as memory, then, understanding, and lastly will. They are found, at times, to intermingle and to dialogue with one another. What is curious about the way that Ignatius describes the work of the will (and also, that of the intellect to some extent) is that it involves arousing certain

¹⁶⁵ Alexandre Brou, S.J. (William J. Young, S.J. - trans.), “Ignatian Method of Prayer”, Milwaukee: The Bruce Publishing Company, 1949, p. 109 ff.

feelings or affections: “I say to bring to memory the sin of the Angels....and so then to discuss more in detail with the intellect: and then to move the feelings more with the will.”¹⁶⁶ But what precisely does Ignatius mean by “feeling”? Actually it is a word (*sentir*) in Spanish that Ignatius used frequently in the exercises.¹⁶⁷ However, its meaning in Spanish is not exactly the same as it is in English, which suggests emotion or feeling. It has often the sense in Spanish of understanding, knowing or even discerning as noted below in the underlined words signifying the occurrence of *sentir* in the Spanish text.¹⁶⁸ So, by using the three powers, Ignatius hopes that the person will not only “understand” with their mind, but discern and perceive in their inner being the gravity of the sin committed by Angels (First Sin), of that committed by Adam and Eve (Second Sin) and of the mortal sin committed by those who are in hell (Third Sin). This realization is to “feel” with “an interior knowledge” how terrible and bitter sin is and so strengthen the will to avoid it.¹⁶⁹ Ignatius’ goal in the exercises is always that the person experience with their whole being the different movements whether good or evil, and so be able to distinguish them - almost as one might taste the difference between food that is fresh and that which is spoiled.

¹⁶⁶ Ignatius of Loyola, *Spiritual Exercises*, “Meditation with the Three Powers on the First, the Second and the Third Sin, First Point”, [50], p. 26.

¹⁶⁷ Brou, “Ignatian Method of Prayer”, p. 115, 116.

¹⁶⁸ “that I may feel an interior knowledge of my sins...that I may feel the disorder of my actions”; “Rules for perceiving and knowing ...the Different Movements Which are Caused in the Soul”; Notes to “Help to Perceive and understand Scruples”; “For it is not knowing much, but realising and relishing things interiorly, that contents and satisfies the soul” (Ignatius, *Spiritual Exercises*, “First Week, Third Exercise, First Colloquy” [63], p. 28; [313], p. 83; [345], p. 90; “Second Annotation”, [2], p. 12).

¹⁶⁹ “that I may feel an interior knowledge of my sins, and hatred of them...that I may feel the disorder of my actions, so that hating them, I may correct myself”, (Ignatius of Loyola, *Spiritual Exercises*, “Third Exercise, First Colloquy”, [63], p. 28).

The exercises of the First Week are not meant solely to help the person to discern and resist sin, they are also designed to help the retreatant to seek actively to receive increasing grace from the Holy Spirit. There is, therefore, the active component of ascetical exercises to purge sin and then, there is the passive opening in faith to receive the gift of God - His grace. This seeking of grace is often expressed in the exercises as: "to ask God our Lord for what I want."¹⁷⁰ Ignatius sometimes gives instruction as to what it should be that the person should want depending on the particular theme of the meditation.¹⁷¹

The exercises of the Second Week are to help the person to begin to determine what is best according to God's will and move them to a Spirit-inspired decision. The path to this discernment, however, is found in attachment to Christ and His way and in indifference or detachment from the disordered affections which will lead us away from Christ's way. The retreatant is invited now to use the powers of their imagination and their five senses (sight, sound, smell, taste and touch) to enter into meditations with regard to crucial decision points in the life of Christ and on His kingship. These examples illustrate Christ's disposition of soul toward His service and obedience to God His Father. This series of exercises is followed by the "Meditation on Two Standards." Here the person is to ask for the grace of spiritual discernment and grace to follow Christ, our "Commander-in-chief."¹⁷² This meditation is to

¹⁷⁰ Ignatius of Loyola, *The Spiritual Exercises*, "First Exercise, Second Prelude", [48], p. 25; "Second Exercise, Second Prelude", [55], p. 27; "Fifth Exercise, Second Prelude", [65], p. 29.

¹⁷¹ "to ask for what I want: it will be here to ask for interior sense of the pain which the damned suffer, in order that, if, through my faults, I should forget the love of the Eternal Lord, at least the fear of the pains may help me not to come into sin", (Ignatius of Loyola, *Spiritual Exercises*, "Fifth Exercise, Second Prelude", [65], p. 29).

¹⁷² "to ask for what I want: it will be here to ask for knowledge of the deceits of the bad chief and help to guard myself against them, and for knowledge of the true life which the supreme and true Captain shows and grace to imitate Him", (Ignatius of Loyola, *The Spiritual Exercises*, "Meditation on Two Standards, Third Prelude", [139], p. 41).

help the exercitant to disengage himself from three disordered affections: longing for riches, longing for the vain honour of the world and pride that Ignatius identifies as that which our Adversary, Lucifer, calls us to.¹⁷³ The exercises on the “Three Pairs of Men” and the “Three Degrees of Humility” are to help the person discern what they should choose as God’s best will for them by getting rid of all that is less.

In the “Prelude for Making Election” the retreatant is reminded of two important things: that what they choose should correspond to the end for which they have been created (to praise and serve God), and that everything about the nature of the determination should be good or neutral in itself. Next, Ignatius outlines the three occasions when a rightful determination of God’s will may be expected to be found. The first is when the person receives a special grace from God which so convinces the will that the person has no doubt about the decision they are to make. He points to the example of Paul and Matthew at the moment they decided to follow Christ.

The second time is when the person through the process of experiencing the inner movements of consolations and desolations discerns which decision would be in line with God’s perfect will and which would not. This also involves the discernment of different spirits. Indeed, this way of determination seems to be the one of choice by which Ignatius would test any matter for discernment, including the Third Time for making a decision which follows. The Third Time occurs when the person is not experiencing a great diversity of movement by various spirits and is at rest, free to use the “natural powers” of intellect, feeling

¹⁷³ Ignatius, *Spiritual Exercises*, “Meditation on Two Standards, Third Point”, [142], p.41. We find the parallel to these three in 1Jn. 2:16 [“for all that is in the world - the desire of the flesh, the desire of the eyes, the pride in riches - comes not from the Father but from the world” - NRSV].

and will to ponder the decision. The first way that the person might do this would be by using their powers of reason to weigh the advantages and disadvantages of making a particular determination or in not making it. They are to always keep in mind the end for which they have been created and seek the decision which would seem to most likely move them toward that end. The second way involves the use of the powers of imagination, sensing and feeling to consider the decision they would make given the specific circumstances that Ignatius asks them to consider. In the first, they are to consider if this decision would be prompted by love for God; in the second, they are to ponder what counsel they would give a stranger faced with their decision; in the third, they are to consider what decision they would make if they were facing impending death and in the fourth, they are to imagine what decision they would want to have made if they were standing before the judgment seat of God.

The outcome of the decision determined during the Third Time, according to Ignatius, must be submitted to God in prayer and receive His confirmation. How is this done? This confirmation is received by applying the method of the Second Time and discerning the various movements produced in the soul by the decision they have chosen, whether consolations or desolations. Through this testing, the person should be affirmed in their decision or else, be deterred from it.

Third and Fourth Week exercises contain a series of meditations on the sufferings, death and resurrection of Christ. These are followed by a series of meditations on the "Mysteries of the Life of Christ Our Lord." These meditations are not so much teachings of Christ, as they are experiences and action points in His life on which the retreatant is invited to ponder, allowing the Spirit of God to do the teaching. I think that these series of exercises

are meant to continue to reinforce the person's attachment to Christ through identification with Him in His humanity, and in His sufferings and humiliation. They also continue the process of stripping away and of detachment of all that is disordered, and not from Christ or the "good Spirit" in the retreatant's heart and life. Christ and His Holy Spirit are to gain increasing influence over the person's affections, intellect and will. This, in turn, will enable the exercitant to better discern God's perfect will by producing also the desire to do it, i.e., to imitate Christ in His discernment and desire to carry out His Father's perfect will. In the exercises of the Fourth Week, there is also a meditation in order to increase in attachment to Christ, "Contemplation to Gain Love." The purpose here is to fan into flame the ardour and commitment that the person has made to Christ up to this point.¹⁷⁴ This is the culmination of the purgation of sin and detachment from self-life toward the attachment to Christ and expectation of His grace in order to carry out His perfect will. Ignatius also links love to knowledge and discernment in his preface to this exercise: "love consists in interchange between the two parties; that is to say in the lovers's giving and communicating to the beloved what he hasSo that if the one has knowledge, he give to the one who has it not."¹⁷⁵

The last section of the *Spiritual Exercises* are background notes written for the retreatant director to help in guiding the person doing the Exercises to benefit the most from their experience. We might say that these rules are the result of a distillation of many experiences that Ignatius observed in himself and others as they did the Exercises and sought

¹⁷⁴ "Take, Lord, and receive all my liberty, my memory, my intellect, and all my will - all that I have and possess Thou gavest it to me: to Thee, Lord, I return it! All is Thine, dispose of it according to all Thy will. Give me Thy love and grace, for this is enough for me" (Ignatius of Loyola, *Spiritual Exercises*, "Contemplation to Gain Love, First Point" [234], p. 62).

¹⁷⁵ Ignatius of Loyola, *Spiritual Exercises*, "Contemplation to Gain Love, Note" [231], p. 62.

to discern the different “spirits” at work in the soul. The first section of fourteen rules are designed to help the retreatant during the First Week exercises. They are entitled, “Rules for Perceiving and Knowing in Some Manner the Different Movements Which are Caused in the Soul.” The purpose follows: “The Good, to Receive Them, and the Bad to Reject Them.” These fourteen rules are a kind of basic training in recognizing signs of good and evil at play in a person’s life. For those advancing in sin, the movement of the good spirit in their soul will be distressing and disturbing. For those seeking to advance in holiness the presence of the good spirit (the Holy Spirit) will strengthen, give peace and clear the way to do good. Conversely, the movement of the bad spirit will be soothing to the person progressing in sin and distressing for the one desiring to do God’s will.

Ignatius attempts to describe the actions of the good and bad spirit, so as to help the director discern which is at work in the retreatant’s experience. His description of “spiritual consolation” and “spiritual desolation”, I would say, are Ignatius’ valuable contributions to the study of spiritual discernment. He not only describes each in detail, he prescribes the attitude to take when these are encountered by the retreatant seeking to advance in discernment and holiness. Spiritual consolation is an inner movement in the soul where the person is filled with love for God and a desire to serve and praise Him. Spiritual desolation is an inner movement that causes the soul to be disturbed and tepid, tempting the person to withdrawal from God. He gives this advice to the soul in desolation: “Because, as in consolation it is rather the good spirit who guides and counsels us, so in desolation it is the bad, with whose counsels we cannot take a course to decide rightly.”¹⁷⁶ In times of desolation, the soul should

¹⁷⁶ *Ibid.*, “Rules for Perceiving and Knowing in Some Manner the Different Movements Which are Caused in the Soul, Fifth Rule” [318], p. 83.

stay to the course determined beforehand and not be swayed by these inner motions. This is an important aspect of spiritual discernment - to perceive and then, to choose to act appropriately. We find this same notion present in Origen - to discern means to be able to distinguish the origin of the movement and then, to choose the good over the evil which is being proposed. For Ignatius spiritual desolation is a normal occurrence in the life of every person seeking to live for Christ. It can be used to help us progress in virtue and to instruct us in the spiritual disciplines necessary to holiness as he explains in the Ninth Rule.¹⁷⁷

In the last three rules of this first section, Ignatius uses three different analogies to help the director recognize the possible ruses that the bad spirit will use to discourage, entrap or mislead the soul during times of desolation and temptation, and the counterattack to take. Ignatius uncovers the different faces of the evil spirit, the enemy of our souls, in his attacks. There is his weakness (like the anger of a woman) when faced with spiritual boldness and a resolute will to not obey his demands. Next, there is his evil persuasions given in secret (like that of an illicit lover) which when revealed to another spiritual person by the one being tempted, will fall to the ground. Finally, he seeks to attack us on our weakest spiritual side (like the captain of an army). Each desolation may, of course, be turned to a person's spiritual

¹⁷⁷ "There are three principal reasons why we find ourselves desolate. The first is, because of our being tepid, lazy or negligent in our spiritual exercises; and so through our faults, spiritual consolation withdraws from us. The second, to try us and see how much...we let ourselves out in His service and praise without such great pay of consolation and great graces. The third, to give us true acquaintance and knowledge, that we may interiorly feel that it is not ours to get or keep great devotion... or any other spiritual consolation, but that all is the gift and grace of God our Lord." (Ignatius of Loyola, *The Spiritual Exercises*, "Rules for Perceiving and Knowing in Some Manner the Different Movements Which are Caused in the Soul, Ninth Rule" [322], p. 84).

advantage with the help of the director, and most of all, with the enlightenment and grace provided by the Holy Spirit of God.¹⁷⁸

If the enemy's skill used during times of spiritual desolation to discourage those seeking to draw near to God demands spiritual discernment, how much more so is discernment needed to determine if the enemy is at work again under the guise of spiritual consolation. This is, perhaps, a greater danger for those who have advanced a little farther into the exercises. This false spiritual consolation is principally the concern of the eight rules for "Greater Discernment of Spirits" designated for those undertaking the exercises of the Second Week. Ignatius explains this phenomenon: "With cause, as well the good Angel as the bad can console the soul, for contrary ends: the good Angel for the profit of the soul...and the evil Angel, for the contrary...to draw it to his damnable intention and wickedness."¹⁷⁹ Ignatius relates how even the evil spirit can propose good thoughts, but then gradually turn them to pull the soul toward that which is deceitful and corrupt. The key to discerning whether a consolation is from an evil or good source is found in Rules 5-8 that Ignatius outlines. It is most important to perceive the movement of the thoughts that enter. Does the beginning, the middle and the end of the reflections move always in the direction of what is good? Or is there something that comes after the beginning thoughts that disturbs the soul's peace or proposes something that is less good than at the start? Ignatius states that the enemy is

¹⁷⁸ "On the contrary, let him who is in desolation think that he can do much with the grace sufficient to resist all his enemies, taking strength in his Creator and Lord" (Ignatius, *Spiritual Exercises*, "Rules for Perceiving and Knowing...., Eleventh Rule" [324], p. 84).

¹⁷⁹ Ignatius, *Spiritual Exercises*, "Rules for the Same Effect With Greater Discernment of Spirits, Third Rule" [331], p. 86.

uncovered when he is recognized “by his serpent’s tail and the bad end to which he leads on.”¹⁸⁰ Ignatius gives other tips in the Seventh Rule on discerning the quality of the spirit moving in the soul. For those souls growing in grace, the touch of the good spirit is delicate “like a drop of water which enters into a sponge”, whereas that of the evil spirit is jolting like “when the drop of water falls on the stone.”¹⁸¹ Any spirit which is contrary to that found in the soul will enter noisily and perceptibly; however, when the spirit is in harmony with that of the soul, it enters quietly without any resistance as if coming through the door of its own home.

Another way that the soul can be tripped up in its progress is in the aftermath of a consolation from the good spirit. How does this happen? Even though the soul has received grace and encouragement from the good spirit, the person may be influenced either by his own habits and thoughts or by other false suggestions proposed by the evil spirit. Then, the person may be inclined to a judgment or to a course of action which is not from God and may, actually harm the soul’s progress. Therefore, Ignatius advises that these resolutions be carefully looked at before being put into practice.¹⁸²

The next set of notes for the director treat the subject of “Scruples and Persuasions of the Enemy.” These six notes speak about discerning between a true and false sense of guilt

¹⁸⁰ *Ibid.*, “Sixth Rule” [331], p. 86.

¹⁸¹ *Ibid.*, “Seventh Rule” [335], p. 86.

¹⁸² “for often in the second time, through one’s own course of habits and the consequences of the concepts and judgments, or through the good spirit or through the bad, he forms various resolutions and opinions which are not given immediately by God our Lord, and therefore they have need to be very well examined before entire credit is given them, or they are put into effect” (Ignatius, *Spiritual Exercises*, “Rules for the Same Effect With Greater Discernment of Spirits, Eight Rule” [336], p. 87).

about sin. Another device of the enemy to disturb a soul who does not readily yield to sin is by sowing doubt in their mind about whether a word or thought they had is sinful. The state of distress or doubt produced when a person thinks that they might have sinned, even though it seems that they have not, is what Ignatius calls a “real scruple.”¹⁸³ There is such a thing as a false scruple which Ignatius explains as doubts arising from a person’s erroneous judgment about his action. The person assumes something to be sin when it is not, solely by reason of his own opinion and not through an inner conflict produced by the movement of the evil spirit.¹⁸⁴

In the case of the real scruple, the enemy’s goal is to try to push the soul to some extreme, depending on the soul’s nature. If the soul is sensitive, he will try to push the desire for perfection to the extreme, disturbing the soul’s peace. If the soul is more callous, the enemy will try to push the person into overlooking small sins, steadily progressing to larger ones. Ignatius sees even this trial of doubt as beneficial to the soul’s growth in discernment and spiritual discipline. His advice to the director by way of conclusion about how to deal with this state of doubt is found in the Fifth Note: “The soul which desires to benefit itself in the spiritual life, ought always to proceed the contrary way to what the enemy proceeds.” He gives the example in the sixth note of a soul in the midst of a real scruple. They want to do something that is good, but, then, suddenly, there is a “thought or temptation from without” that to do so would be out of pride or vainglory. The person is to bring this thought to God

¹⁸³ “after I have thought or said or done some other thing, there comes to me a thought from without that I have sinned, and on the other hand it appears to me that I have not sinned; still I feel disturbance in this....That is a real scruple and temptation which the enemy sets” (Ignatius, *Spiritual Exercises*, “Scruples and Persuasions of the Enemy, Second Note” [347], p. 90).

¹⁸⁴ “They commonly call a scruple what proceeds from our own judgment and freedom: that is to say, when I freely decide that that is sin which is not sin....This is properly and erroneous judgment and not a real scruple” (Ignatius, *Spiritual Exercises*, “Scruples and Persuasions of our Enemy, First Note” [346], p. 90).

and, if there is nothing in what they want to do that is contrary to God's will, they should resist the temptation to refrain and instead, do what they set out to do before the thought came to them.

Ignatius' ultimate purpose for the exercises is to help the person doing them to both discern and desire to do God's will above all else. It is important to note that this spiritual discernment in Ignatius' thinking is for the purpose of obedience and praise to God. However, this obedience and service is not to be performed in a vacuum, but in recognized structures of the Church community. He speaks of eighteen rules for a proper attitude to have as the "Church Militant" in the last section of the exercises in the notes to the director. In the Eighteenth Rule he says: "serving God our Lord much out of pure love is to be esteemed above all."¹⁸⁵ He concedes, however, that the fear of God is also good, if only to keep oneself from serious sin.

Ignatius, like Origen and Antony, sees discernment as an important quality to attain in the spiritual battle between good and evil. Each person's soul becomes the terrain where there is free interplay between the movement of good and evil powers. Holiness for Ignatius is often characterized by obedience of soul to God's will. The exercises are designed to help the person doing them experience the exchange of these good and evil movements within and, so learn to cling to the good and reject the evil. Nevertheless, some of the evil is so terribly entwined in our "disordered affections" that it is no simple manner to cut oneself off from it so easily. The exercises of each week are so conceived as to help the retreatant advance in the

¹⁸⁵ "To Have the True Sentiment Which We Ought to Have in the Church Militant, Eighteenth Rule" [370], p. 94.

detachment from sin and disordered affections and on to attachment to Christ and the affections that “move” in Him. In the First Week exercises the person’s awareness of sin is heightened so as to help them “feel” its movement and its bitterness and then, to seek grace to overcome it. The person during the Second Week exercises are to find themselves moving toward increasing attachment to Christ and detachment toward their own disordered affections. Arriving at this state, the person is ready to begin seeking God’s will through a process of spiritual discernment involving movements of consolation and desolation. This is the way *par excellence* that Ignatius outlines, although several other means may be taken. However, these other means (such as the use of rational powers or powers of imagination and feeling) must always be tested by the process of discerning the various movements (consolations and desolations) produced in the soul by the decision they have chosen.

I see the Third and Fourth Week exercises as disciplines meant to strengthen the person’s attachment to Christ through identifying with Him in various scenes from His life in the Gospels. The Fourth Week exercises, “Contemplation to Gain Love”, is a high point in the exercises in terms of the person’s commitment and self-offering. Their self-offering opens the door for them to freely receive grace and the discernment of God’s will.

All the effort on the person’s part in the exercises to rid themselves of sin and disordered affections is but a preparation to receive the gift of God’s grace through the ministry of the Holy Spirit. It is through the gift of the Holy Spirit, that spiritual discernment is continually granted to the soul in search of God’s will. The notes for the director which follow the exercises are in essence, a summary of the obstacles that the soul will encounter in this process of spiritual discernment. At the same time that the notes are a description of how

the enemy of our soul will attempt to block our progress, they are also a description of how to expect the Holy Spirit to act in the soul to counteract the adversary's ploys. "Spiritual Exercises" are disciplines of the inner movements of the soul, but they are animated in the Christian's soul by the Spirit of Christ, the Holy Spirit who always seeks to glorify Christ (Jn. 16:13,14). This is also the foundation and goal for the soul mentioned at the beginning of the exercises - to bring praise, reverence and service to God our Lord.¹⁸⁶ I would therefore conclude that the *Spiritual Exercises* of Ignatius of Loyola might also be called the exercises of the Holy Spirit's action in the soul.

¹⁸⁶ "Man is created to praise, reverence, and serve God our Lord,...For this it is necessary to make ourselves indifferent to all created things....desiring and choosing only what is most conducive for us to the end for which we are created" (Ignatius, *Spiritual Exercises*, "Principle and Foundation" [23], p. 19).

VI. Common Elements surrounding the Notion of Spiritual Discernment in Origen's *Peri Archon* and in Ignatius of Loyola's *Spiritual Exercises*

Evil, Free Will and Grace

In *Peri Archon* Origen elaborates a philosophical structure to explain how diversity (which to his Greek-trained mind was a synonym for evil) could exist, given the nature of God as a perfect Unity. He conceived of God as a triad of Ones (the Father, Son and Holy Spirit) co-existing in perfect unity having created all rational beings. He also teaches that all rational beings were given the power of free will. It is, therefore, this free will, providing a plethora of choice, which explains the existence of diversity, according to Origen. Rational beings have the freedom to choose good or evil. Free will necessarily opens the door to make a choice other than that of God's will, creating diversity rather than resonance with God's unity. This deviation from the way of God is what Origen sees as the essence of evil. In Origen's mind free will and evil are irrevocably linked.

Whereas Origen seeks to lay a foundation for understanding the entrance of evil into the cosmos and as a function of rational being's capacity of free will, Ignatius seeks to lay a foundation to train the Christian in the right use of the free will so as to choose God's way, the way of good. Ignatius sees evil as sin and disordered affections of the soul. These affections are in harmony with the evil spirit's intentions, but in disharmony with God's intentions. In fact, the *Spiritual Exercises* are a method which Ignatius proposes to train the free will how to come to choose good instead of evil. Ignatius treats the battle of the soul

with evil as a battle with sin. Winning over evil and sin involves detachment from disordered affections and attachment to what moves God's heart.

The First Exercise of the first week of exercises is a meditation on the entrance of evil into the world, but Ignatius refers to it as a meditation on the "First, Second and Third Sin." The First Sin is that of the Angels: "how they, being created in grace, not wanting to help themselves with their liberty and reverence and obey their Creator and Lord, coming to pride, were changed from grace to malice."¹⁸⁷ This, of course, is in agreement with Origen's cosmology which often refers to the wicked angel's free will as rational beings that chose to turn against God and now join in the battle to turn humans toward evil.¹⁸⁸ The Second Sin is the sin of Adam and Eve. The person is called to meditate on how because of this sin "corruption came on the human race" and there are "so many people going the way to hell."¹⁸⁹ The Third Sin is that of anyone who has committed mortal sin banishing them to hell. The remedy for "acting against Infinite Goodness" is to imagine being before Christ nailed to the cross dying for our sins and to ask for grace.

Both Origen and Ignatius are in agreement in the constant need for the free will to be guided and strengthened by God's grace. Ignatius punctuates his meditations and exercises with such phrases as "to ask for the grace which I want", "to ask grace to choose what is more to the glory of His Divine Majesty and the salvation of my soul" and "to ask grace to know

¹⁸⁷ Ignatius, *Spiritual Exercises*, "First Exercise, First Point" [50], p. 29.

¹⁸⁸ "every rational soul is possessed of free-will and volition; that it has a struggle to maintain with the devil and his angels, and opposing influences, because they strive to burden it with sins" (Origen, *De Principiis*, Preface #5).

¹⁸⁹ *Ibid.*, "First Exercise, Second Point" 51, p. 27.

our sins and cast them out.”¹⁹⁰ Likewise, Origen concedes that in spite of our free will, and as we will see, our powers of discernment, we would never be able to oppose evil without the benefit of God’s grace.¹⁹¹ Origen sees God’s grace working in and through the free will of the person who cooperates with it: “we are not to suppose either that those things which are in our own power can be done without the help of God, or that those which are in God’s hand can be brought to completion without the intervention of our acts.”¹⁹² Those who increasingly give themselves over to God and seek purity are often granted an increase in grace through spiritual gifts. Those, on the other hand, who put themselves under the influence of the suggestions of wicked spirits come increasingly under their power instead of God’s grace.¹⁹³ Ignatius also mentions this last concerning the progress of those moving from sin to sin. The enemy will do all to help these grow in evil and take pleasure in sin rather than in the action of the good spirit. The presence of God’s grace through the good spirit will produce distress in them because they are under the power of evil spirits rather than good. Both Origen and Ignatius would say that it is the experience of all souls, especially those actively seeking to select and do God’s will, to be acted upon by diverse spirits. This is the subject to which I now turn.

¹⁹⁰ *Ibid.*, “The Call of the Temporal King, Second Prelude” [91], p 34; “Three Pairs of Men, Third Prelude” [152], p. 43; “Method for Making a General Examen, Second Point” [43], p. 24.

¹⁹¹ “From which I infer that a man perhaps would never be able of himself to vanquish an opposing power, unless he had the benefit of divine assistance” (Origen, *De Principiis*, Book III, Chap. II, #5, p. 35).

¹⁹² Origen, *De Principiis*, Book III, Chap. I, # 21, p. 29.

¹⁹³ “As holy and immaculate souls, after devoting themselves to God...and imbued with holy and religious training, assume by this means a portion of divinity, and earn the grace of prophecy, and other divine gifts; so also are we to suppose that those who place themselves in the way of the opposing powers, i.e., who purposely admire and adopt their manner of life and habits, receive their inspiration....And the result of this is, that they are filled with the working of those spirits to whose service they have subjected themselves” (Origen, *De Principiis*, Book III, Chap. III, # 3, p. 38).

Discerning Movements of Good and Evil in the Soul

Origen states in *Peri Archon* “every rational soul is possessed of free will and volition;...(and) has a struggle to maintain with the devil and his angels.”¹⁹⁴ Origen also affirms: “a soul is always in possession of free-will...and freedom of will is always directed either to good or evil. Nor can any rational and sentient being...exist without some movement either good or bad.”¹⁹⁵ Because each soul has a free-will and lives in a world that diversity (evil) has entered, it is exposed to the influence of good and evil powers. However, Origen believes that each rational being has also been given a reasoning power capable of distinguishing between good and evil and then is able to choose to follow one or the other inspirations.¹⁹⁶ This spiritual discernment has been given to help the soul discern the different spirits at work in it. The will, however, is always free to choose whether to obey what it has discerned as good or evil. Origen supposes that there are several ways that diverse spirits can move in the soul. There is the case when the soul has freely chosen to admire and follow the suggestions of evil powers. Taken to its extreme, this soul comes completely under the power of these wicked spirits and may even be divested of reason and feeling. In other cases, evil spirits tempt souls by wicked suggestions to some sin or evil.¹⁹⁷ When the soul, however, is

¹⁹⁴ Origen, *De Principiis*, Preface, # 5, p. 2.

¹⁹⁵ *Ibid.*, Book III, Chap. III, # 5, p. 39.

¹⁹⁶ “since the nature of this reason which is in man has within itself the power of distinguishing between good and evil, and while distinguishing possesses the faculty of selecting what it has approved, it may justly be deemed worthy of praise in choosing what is good, and deserving of censure in following that which is base or wicked” (Origen, *De Principiis*, Book III, Chap. I, #3, p. 3).

¹⁹⁷ “Now, of wicked spirits there is a twofold mode of operation: i.e., when they either take complete and entire possession of the mind, so as to allow their captives the power neither of understanding nor feeling....or when by their wicked suggestions they deprave a sentient and intelligent soul with thoughts of various kinds, persuading it to evil” (Origen, *De Principiis*, Book III, Chap. III, # 4, p. 38).

acted upon by the good spirit, the person is encouraged to good and to the things of God.

Yet, the soul has full possession of their free will at all times to decide whether to follow the inspirations of the good spirit or not. In fact, one of the signs that it is the good spirit at work in the soul, according to Origen, is that the soul remains calm and in full possession of its free will.¹⁹⁸

These affirmations of Origen concerning distinguishing the movements in the soul are supported by Ignatius in the *Spiritual Exercises*. His presupposition in the notes to the director at the beginning of the exercises is that the retreatant *will* experience spiritual movements in the soul and if the person does not, then the director should investigate.¹⁹⁹ Ignatius considered it abnormal that there be no movement of spirits in the soul. Ignatius often refers to movements produced in the soul by the good spirit as spiritual consolation and that produced by the bad spirit as spiritual desolation. Spiritual consolation is a movement within that kindles the love of God in the soul and also moves it to an increase in faith, hope and charity, to an attraction to the things of God and to peace in its Creator. Spiritual desolation in the devout soul produces turbulence, agitation, loss of hope, apathy, sadness and everything which is contrary to spiritual consolation.

¹⁹⁸ "But a man receives the energy, i.e., the working, of a good spirit, when he is stirred and incited to good, and is inspired to heavenly or divine things...yet so, indeed, that it remained within the will and judgment of the individual, either to be willing or unwilling to follow the call to divine and heavenly things.. And from this manifest distinction, it is seen how the soul is moved by the presence of a better spirit, i.e, if it encounter no perturbation or alienation of mind...nor lose the free control of its will" (Origen, *De Principiis*, Book III, Chap. III, # 4, p. 38).

¹⁹⁹ "When he who is giving the Exercises sees that no spiritual movements, such as consolations or desolations, come to the soul of him who is exercising himself, and that he is not moved by different spirits, he ought to inquire carefully of him about the Exercises, whether he does them at their appointed times, and how" (Ignatius, *Spiritual Exercises*, "Annotations, Sixth Annotation" [6], p. 13).

Ignatius' description of the operations of the good and evil spirits in the soul is more elaborate than that of Origen. He goes into greater detail and qualifies his statements more. For instance, in the soul of the person who is habitually under the influence of evil powers, their movement within this soul is not to cause distress, but to keep it in the path of evil by suggesting to it ways to increase in evil. The effect of the good spirit on this soul, however, is just the opposite: "pricking them and biting their consciences." In those souls who keep cleansing themselves from sin, the operation of the evil spirit in their soul is to cause distress: "to bite, sadden and put obstacles, disquieting with false reasons that one may not go on." The action of the good spirit, on the contrary, gives peace, courage and strength, "putting away all obstacles, that one may go on in well doing."²⁰⁰

Ignatius also brings up another difficulty in spiritual discernment: the case of the evil spirit operating under the guise of good to deceive the devout soul and turn him little by little to evil. This is because the evil spirit can take the semblance of "an angel of light", bringing good thoughts to the devout soul with the intention of deceiving that person and drawing them into evil.²⁰¹ Ignatius recommends that the person take notice of the progression in the thoughts that come to them. If the beginning, middle and end result of the thoughts are always moving the soul toward good, then, most likely, the inspiration is from the good spirit. If at any time, the soul feels weakened, disturbed or moved toward what is less good than at the beginning,

²⁰⁰ Ignatius, *Spiritual Exercises*, "Rules for Perceiving and Knowing in Some Manner the Different Movements which are Caused in the Soul, First Rule and Second Rule" [314, 315], p. 83.

²⁰¹ "With cause, as well the good Angel as the bad can console the soul, for contrary ends: the good Angel for the profit of the soul, that it may grow and rise from good to better, and the evil Angel, for the contrary, and later on to draw it to his damnable intention and wickedness.... It is proper to the evil Angel, who forms himself under the appearance of an angel of light, to enter with the devout soul and go out with himself: that is to say, to bring good and holy thoughts, conformable to such just soul, and then little by little he aims at coming out drawing the soul to his covert deceits and perverse intentions" (Ignatius, *Spiritual Exercises*, "Rules for the Same Effect with Greater Discernment of Spirits, Third and Fourth Rule" [331, 332], p. 86).

then this false consolation is from the evil spirit and should be rejected.²⁰² Ignatius also warns against acting too quickly after receiving the inspiration of the good spirit by making a decision that comes from self rather than from God's will. He advises that any determination be thoroughly examined before being acted upon.

Ignatius also discusses a problem of discernment of evil that Origen does not really address: the problem of false guilt or scruples. Here the enemy tries to disturb the devout soul who does not yield to overt temptation, by causing the person to think that something might be sin, when it is not. The enemy sows doubt, creating conflict in the soul's capacity of discernment. Ignatius sees this as part of the spiritual discipline that God allows to sharpen a soul's capacity in spiritual discernment. It seems to me that Origen often treats this discerning capacity as a given for each soul. While he does admit that those under heavy influence of evil power will have a reduced ability to discern, he seems to assume that the ability to discern good or evil is assured, whereas Ignatius treats discernment as something that is gradually acquired and where there are various pitfalls that may prevent true discernment. Ignatius takes the essence of Origen's teaching on spiritual discernment and goes farther, using practical exercises to move a person to increasing detachment from self and into greater and greater spiritual discernment. Origen explains that phenomenon and describes it when it is functioning well. Both Origen and Ignatius are acutely aware of the battle which is being waged against humans by supernatural forces and it is this that I will now examine.

²⁰² Ignatius, *Spiritual Exercises*, "Rules for Greater Discernment of Spirits, Fifth and Sixth Rule" [333, 334], p. 86.

The Spiritual Battle

In his preface to *Peri Archon* Origen acknowledges the struggle that every rational soul, created with a free will, has with the devil and his angels. In his cosmology, humans are caught between angels who are assigned to help them in their progress toward good and the fallen angels who try to block their spiritual progress. Origen takes for granted that we are constantly being acted upon by diverse spirits. With regard to the thoughts that come to us, Origen, like Ignatius, names three possible sources: from ourselves, from wicked powers or from God and his angels.²⁰³ Origen maintains that the thoughts which come to us, moving us to good or evil do not translate directly into action but remain just that - an inner movement until our free will decides whether or not to act upon it. Our free will can reject the evil inclination, committing no evil. Likewise, the free will can decide not to obey the inducement to good brought about by God.²⁰⁴ Origen emphasizes, however, the importance of keeping watch over our hearts in this battle. He cites the possibility of our “preparing” a place in our heart for the devil through certain actions or by not maintaining spiritual alertness, but by being lax. He quotes the words of Paul to the Ephesians: “For our struggle is not against enemies of blood and flesh, but against the rulers, against the authorities, against the cosmic powers of this darkness, against the spiritual forces of evil in the heavenly places” (Eph. 6:12

²⁰³ “With respect to the thoughts which proceed from our heart,...we find that they sometimes proceed from ourselves, and sometimes are originated by the opposing powers; not seldom also are they suggested by God, or by the holy angels” (Origen, *De Principiis*, Book III, Chap. II, # 4, p. 33). See also Ignatius, *Spiritual Exercises*, “First Exercise, Meditation with the Three Powers, First Point, Second Point” [50, 51], p. 26.

²⁰⁴ “We are not, however, to imagine that any other result follows from what is suggested to our heart, whether good or bad, save a (mental) commotion only, and an incitement instigating us either to good or evil. For it is quite within our reach, when a malignant power has begun to incite us to evil, to cast away from us the wicked suggestion....And, on the other hand, it is possible, when a divine power calls us to better things, not to obey the call; our freedom of will being preserved to us in either case.” (Origen, *De Principiis*, Book III, Chap. II, # 4, p.33, 34).

NRSV). Once the devil has gained access into the soul, he may contaminate it, shoot at us with “his fiery darts” and may deeply wound the soul or even gain possession over it.²⁰⁵

Even as Origen underlines the responsibility of the Christian to watch over his soul in the struggle with evil powers, he also stresses the role of God’s grace. He quotes the Apostle Paul who “worked harder than any of them - though it was not I, but the grace of God that is with me” (1 Cor. 15:10b NRSV). Origen acknowledges that human power alone is insufficient to combat the opposing powers. In fact, a person could never overcome an evil spirit without the help of God’s grace. A spiritual battle cannot be carried out with physical strength or weapons: it is spirit fighting spirit.²⁰⁶ It is the soul’s responsibility in the battle against evil to call for divine assistance. If the soul becomes lazy, then the evil powers may rush in unimpeded like robbers through an open door.²⁰⁷

The other lure that the opposing powers lay for humans to draw them away is the attraction of false knowledge. Origen treats the subject of the wisdom of the princes of the world which includes “the secret and occult philosophy...of the Egyptians, the astrology of the

²⁰⁵ “And when he says, ‘Neither give place to the devil,’ he shows by that injunction that it is through certain acts, or a kind of mental slothfulness, that room is made for the devil, so that if he once enter our heart, he will either gain possession of us, or at least will pollute the soul, if he has not obtained the entire mastery over it, by casting on us his fiery darts; and by these we are sometimes deeply wounded, and sometimes only set on fire.” (Origen, *De Principiis*, Book III, Chap. II, # 4, p. 34).

²⁰⁶ “For I do not think that human nature can alone of itself maintain a contest with angels, and with the powers of the height and of the abyss, and with any other creature....Nor are we, indeed, to suppose that struggles of this kind are carried on by the exercise of bodily strength, and of the arts of the wrestling school; but spirit contends with spirit, according to the declaration of Paul, that our struggle is against principalities, and powers and rulers of the darkness of this world.” (Origen, *De Principiis*, Book III, Chap. II, # 5 and # 6, p. 35).

²⁰⁷ “For occasionally the mind, when watchful, and casting away from it what is evil, calls to itself the aid of the good; or if it be, on the contrary, negligent and slothful, it makes room through insufficient caution for these spirits, which, lying in wait secretly like robbers, contrive to rush into the minds of men when they see a lodgment made for them by sloth.” (Origen, *De Principiis*, Book III, Chap. III, # 5, p. 39).

Chaldeans and Indians, who make profession of the knowledge of high things, and also that manifold variety of opinion which prevails among the Greeks regarding divine things.”²⁰⁸ Origen maintains that these false systems of wisdom regarding God, spiritually oppose God’s wisdom revealed in Jesus Christ, for they unwittingly have been behind the crucifixion of the Lord of glory.²⁰⁹ He takes the example of the practice of certain poetical magicians who invoke evil spirits upon young boys so that they are able to recite poetical compositions to the amazement of their hearers. His conclusion is that, those, who have deliberately by an act of their free will, placed themselves under the power of opposing powers by admiring them and adopting their life-style, come under the inspiration of their false wisdom and seek to impart it to others.²¹⁰

While Origen highlights humans’ battle with cosmic powers opposing the good, Ignatius underlines the means by which these wicked powers have gained a foothold in human hearts: sin. The meditation of the very first exercises is to recall the sin of the angels, who by pride, freely chose to disobey their Creator and so “were changed from grace to malice, and hurled from Heaven to Hell.”²¹¹ Secondly, there is the sin of Adam and Eve which, according to Ignatius, paved the way for corruption and hell to entrap the entire human race. The free will choosing to disobey God (sin) also brought in the continual struggle against evil

²⁰⁸ Origen, *De Principiis*, Book III, Chap. III, # 2, p. 37.

²⁰⁹ Origen here quotes Ps 2:2 : “The kings of the earth set themselves, and the rulers take counsel together, against the lord and his anointed” and 1 Cor. 2: 7,8: “And we speak God’s wisdom, secret and hidden, which God decreed before the ages for our glory. None of the rulers of this age understood this; for if they had, they would not have crucified the Lord of glory.”[NRSV].

²¹⁰ Origen, *De Principiis*, Book III, Chap. III, # 3, p. 38.

²¹¹ Ignatius, *Spiritual Exercises*, “First Exercise, First Point” [50], p. 26.

dominating the heart, mind and will of each human. Ignatius' solution is to rid oneself of sin, especially the attachment to what leads the soul away from doing God's will - disordered affections.

Ignatius knows that it is no easy matter to command the mind, soul, body and heart into harmony with God's will. Sin and disordered affections are intermingled with what the mind, heart, soul and body perceive as good for them. The exercises are designed to help the person little by little to see what is truly ruling their heart. As the soul purifies itself, its powers of spiritual discernment are sharpened. However, the evil spirits also intensify their battle over the soul at the same time hoping to again gain control over it through more devious means. Ignatius, therefore, goes into considerable detail in the notes for the director at the end of the exercises to spell out the increasing cleverness by which the opposing powers seek to do battle as the soul advances in holiness.

The most common means of enemy attack upon the believer advancing on their journey is what Ignatius terms "spiritual desolation." It is an inner movement of darkness and agitation in the soul tempting it to sin, doubt, apathy and movement away from relationship with God. The temptation during these times of desolation will be to provoke the person to vexation and impatience. Ignatius constantly reminds the director that the person who discerns that they are in this spiritual battle of desolation ought to react in the opposite way that the enemy is moving and so counteract his schemes.²¹² Ignatius describes other devices that the

²¹² "Although in desolation we ought not to change our first resolutions, it is very helpful intensely to change ourselves against the same desolation, as by insisting more on prayer, meditation, on much examination, and by giving ourselves more scope in some suitable way of doing penance....The soul which desires to benefit itself in the spiritual life, ought always to proceed the contrary way to what the enemy proceeds" (Ignatius, *Spiritual Exercises*, "Rules for Discernment, Sixth Rule" [319], p. 84 and "Scruples, Fifth Note" [350], p. 90).

enemy uses in battle. He comes like a woman, who, although physically weak against strength and resolute will, tries to connive the person through argument to do his bidding. The person battling is to show a bold face and remain unmoved and so the enemy will flee. The enemy comes subtly and secretly like an illicit lover who tries to persuade a daughter or a wife to embrace his intentions. The Christian, so tempted, should reveal his temptation to a godly counsellor and so, the enemy's deviousness will be uncovered, losing their power. Finally, Ignatius warns, that the enemy is like the captain of an army, seeking to attack us on our weakest side. Ignatius, like Origen, mentions that the soul may fall into desolation due to laxness, but, at other times, God simply permit it for the soul's betterment.²¹³

Next, Ignatius contrasts the consolations which are from God versus the false ones which may also arise from our adversary. God gives "consolation to the soul without preceding cause....without any previous sense or knowledge of any object through which such consolation would come, through one's acts of understanding and will."²¹⁴ God's consolation takes away all distress and sorrow that comes from the enemy, fills the soul with love for God and leads the soul to good from beginning to end. The false consolation of the adversary, on the other hand, masks itself under the guise of good so as to lead the soul gradually to some evil and away from the love of God. It can be recognized by the flow of thoughts that the evil spirit inspires. Although, it may propose something that appears good at the start, as the course of its movement is followed, it will always lead to a lesser good and finally to an altogether downward spiral toward some evil. This is one of the insidious forms that spiritual battle takes on.

²¹³ See Ignatius, *Spiritual Exercises*, "Rules for Discernment, Ninth Rule" [322], p. 84.

²¹⁴ *Ibid.*, "Rules for Greater Discernment of Spirits, Second Rule" [330], p. 86.

Ignatius also treats the matter of “Scruples” and how the enemy may tempt the overly delicate conscience into thinking they have committed some sin when in reality they have not. This tactic while not overtly pushing the soul into sin may disturb its peace or prevent it from pursuing some good it had planned. Again his advice is to move in the opposite direction that the enemy is proposing. Ignatius, like Origen, believes that in all these tests and spiritual battles that God through His Holy Spirit will give both discernment to the soul and the grace to choose to follow the good inspiration and to reject the evil one.

The Role of Scripture

Although I have not previously examined this element with regard to the notion of spiritual discernment, I think I can safely say that it is at the foundation of Origen, Antony and Ignatius’ teaching on the subject. In some ways, the role of Holy Scripture is central to all they write and yet, each one makes use of biblical content in slightly different ways to support their thinking and to convince their hearers.

Origen was fluent in Greek and a master of biblical writing. He was taught both Greek and the Scriptures from his youth. He wrote many commentaries on various books of the Old and New Testament. He was a teacher in catechetical school, teaching the basics of Christianity. Origen was also trained in philosophy and Greek rhetoric. In *Peri Archon*, he attempts to provide a rational and Christian philosophical framework for foundational principles of Christianity. Throughout it, Origen makes constant reference to biblical passages. For him, the Scriptures are a sort of proof text, not only to support what he teaches, but to refute the anticipated arguments of his opponents.

He devotes the whole of Book IV of *Peri Archon* to the inspiration and interpretation of Scripture. He moves point by point in his rational arguments to demonstrate the proof within them of their being divinely inspired by God. He cites their surprising universality of application and knowledge to people of many different nations and even within those of the same nation. He mentions also the examples of fulfilled prophecies, especially those concerning Christ. Finally, he appeals to the individual who comes sincerely to read the Scripture for the first time. He thinks that they will come to the conclusion through their own experience that “these books were the compositions of no human skill, nor of any mortal eloquence, but, so to speak, of a style that is divine.” ²¹⁵

What are some of the key Scripture passages that Origen uses to prove his foundational notions surrounding spiritual discernment? There are quite a number, but I will but mention a few. First, he uses the discourse of Moses to the Israelites after he received the tablets of the law from God on the mountain. Origen quotes the words of Moses in Deut. 30:15: “I have placed before thy face the way of life and the way of death: choose what is good, and walk in it.”²¹⁶ The point he makes here is that Scripture tells us that we do have a free will and we have the power to choose to do good or not or else we would not be exhorted to obey God’s commandments.

Origen also mentions several passages as proof of the existence of opposing powers acting against humans, including Job 1 where Satan asks God’s permission to have Job’s possessions and person be delivered over to himself. There is the example of Satan inciting

²¹⁵ Origen, *De Principiis*, Book IV, Chap. I, # 6, p. 7.

²¹⁶ *Ibid.*, Book III, Chap. I, # 6, p. 5.

David to number the people in 1 Chron. 21:1. Origen quotes Paul in Eph. 6:10-12 concerning the powers of darkness against which we fight. Origen also uses passages in the New Testament to show that it is also God's grace that comes to the assistance of those in spiritual battle with opposing forces, including Paul's words, "I can do all things through Christ, who strengtheneth me"(Phil. 4:13). He makes mention as well of Ps 27:1-3 and the Lord's protection from enemies.²¹⁷ Finally, Origen warns against spiritual negligence and the need for watchfulness in discernment. He cites the example of Judas who was overcome by the devil. He refers to the Apostle Peter who says "that our adversary the devil goes about like a roaring lion seeking whom he may devour" (1 Pet. 5:8). He mentions the words of Solomon - "Keep thy heart with all diligence" - and the warning in Heb. 2:1 to give heed to what we have heard lest we slip.²¹⁸

Whereas Origen quotes widely, using Scriptures from both Old and New Testaments, Ignatius focuses his attention for the most part on the words and actions of Jesus contained in the four Gospels, including his childhood, his life, his crucifixion, burial and resurrection. Ignatius' prescribes meditation on Gospel passages, not for analysis or for the purpose of giving proof texts, but as an encounter with Jesus to be experienced through the sanctified imagination. He wants the retreatants' heart to be sanctified and transformed by walking with and where Jesus walked. Jesus' example is the one to emanate in all things. Doing so will free the person from attachment to self and the soul's disordered affections. The soul will then receive a greater influx of the Holy Spirit's power and their capacity to discern the will of God in all things will be heightened. The person will not only be moved to distinguish the

²¹⁷ *Ibid.*, Book III, Chap. II, # 5, p. 34, 35.

²¹⁸ *Ibid.*, Book III, Chap. II, # 4, p. 34.

source of the different movements at work within, but will also give the person the desire to do God's will above all, to choose the better part, like that of Jesus.

VII. Common Elements surrounding the Notion of Spiritual Discernment in Antony of Egypt's *Seven Letters* and Ignatius of Loyola's Spiritual Exercises

Salvation, Self-Knowledge and Spiritual Discernment

Self-knowledge is a key one in Antony of Egypt's concept of the soul's salvation. This self-knowledge of one's "intellectual substance" or one's spiritual nature is an awakening to the immortal part of oneself that was created by and for God. However, to know this part of the soul is also to acknowledge its fall, its humiliation, "for evil is come about in us, wherein we have all died since it is alien to the nature of our intellectual nature" (or substance).²¹⁹ Antony refers to this as a "great wound" that only God in His bounty could heal by sending His Son. It is by His wound that we are healed. As the person becomes the recipient of God's grace, the Holy Spirit works within, seeking to heal the wounds of the soul, body and will. This process of sanctification brings the person back to their "original condition" that they were endowed with at creation.

This spiritual nature, which Antony refers to as the "intellectual substance" is also the seat of spiritual discernment. Those who through the work of the Holy Spirit come to "know themselves according to their intellectual substance" are said by Antony to know God, to understand His works and to understand others. They are enabled to discern between what is foreign and what is authentic to their spiritual nature. In other words, this person's ability to discern between evil and good is contingent on "knowing themselves according to their intellectual substance." Without this healing by the Holy Spirit, Antony says, our spiritual senses are effectively "dried up" and are unable to properly distinguish between good and evil.

²¹⁹ Chitty, *The Letters of St. Antony*, Letter VII.1.

Instead, the person may easily come under the influence of evil powers and succumb to pride, jealousy, anger and all sins against charity and self-control.

But what is salvation and self-knowledge for Ignatius and how is it related to spiritual discernment? The way to self-knowledge, salvation and spiritual discernment for Ignatius is through the *Spiritual Exercises*. He states this in his "Fifth Annotation" to the exercises where he defines them and specifies their purpose as "preparing and disposing the soul to rid itself of all the disordered tendencies, and after it is rid, to seek and find the Divine Will as to the management of one's life for the salvation of the soul." Ridding oneself of disordered tendencies is acquiring the knowledge of what is truly reigning in the soul - is it disorder and sin reigning or the will of God made known through the working of the Holy Spirit, the good spirit? Self-knowledge comes along the path of the exercises of the First and Second Week - confession and cleansing of sin, recognizing the origin of the thoughts that arise from within (free will, good spirit or evil spirit) and an ever increasing openness to God and His Holy Spirit.

Ignatius notion of salvation of the soul is found in the soul's discovery of God's will for it and in its obedience to that will. When the soul is moved by its disordered affections, it is unable to discover what God really wants and unable to carry it out because it is pulled by its own desires, fuelled by the wiles of opposing powers. Salvation and self-knowledge for Ignatius is found in detachment from self-will and attachment to Christ and His will. This is also the way to increasing spiritual discernment.

Spiritual discernment comes through experiencing the inner movements of consolations and desolations, arising from the Holy Spirit or from evil spirits, and learning to distinguish between them. The more the person is aware of their own disordered affections and is being cleansed from them (self-knowledge), the greater will be their capacity of spiritual discernment. Origen and Ignatius are keenly aware of the Holy Spirit's role in this process.

The Role of the Holy Spirit and the Community of Christ

Antony speaks of the "loving partnership" that the Holy Spirit develops in those who are being renewed by Him. This partnership is first with the "mind" which is taught by the Spirit how to heal the wounds of the soul, the body, and other passions mingled in the will.²²⁰ It is also the Holy Spirit who leads the soul into self-knowledge and a return to the discovery of their original nature.²²¹ Antony also prays for them that the "fire which Jesus came to send upon the earth" will help them to know how to discern good from evil. This fire is, I think, from the Holy Spirit which Antony prays will give them spiritual discernment. God's bounty and grace in salvation is present through the Holy Spirit, whom Antony also refers to as the "Spirit of Repentance" and the "Spirit of Adoption."²²²

²²⁰ "Then the Spirit has a loving partnership with the mind, because the mind keeps the commandments which the Spirit has delivered to it. And the Spirit teaches the mind how to heal all the wounds of the soul, and to rid itself of every one, those which are mingled in the members of the body, and other passions which are altogether outside the body, being mingled in the will" (Chitty, *The Letters of St. Antony*, Letter I.4).

²²¹ "For those who have drawn near, and have been taught by the Holy Spirit, have known themselves according to their intellectual substance"; "And this Paraclete Spirit comforts us and brings us back to our beginning, to recover our inheritance" (Chitty, *The Letters of St. Antony*, Letters IV.1 and VII.9).

²²² Chitty, *The Letters of St. Antony*, Letters II.1; I.2; II.4.

Ignatius' *Spiritual Exercises* are, in reality, an invitation for the person participating in them to let the Holy Spirit, the Spirit of Christ, act upon their soul, freeing it from sin and disordered tendencies and attaching it more firmly to Christ. The Holy Spirit always seeks to glorify Christ (John. 16:13,14). It is the Spirit who is the source of overflowing life and grace from God.²²³ As the person doing the exercises advances in them, Ignatius directs them to ask for increasing grace. It is an invitation to keep opening oneself to a greater fullness and action of the Holy Spirit in their lives, expressed in the words of the exercises "to ask for what I want."²²⁴ What Ignatius often describes as the action or touch of the "good spirit" or the "good angel" is really a description of the Holy Spirit's work. Ignatius expects the good spirit, the Holy Spirit to be constantly at work, directing the soul to reject the evil and to embrace the good, to move toward Christ and away from the soul's disordered tendencies. This Spirit will also help the person to determine what is best according to God's will in making a decision and in discerning the different spirits which are acting on the soul, at any given moment. The origin of these movements which Ignatius describes as "consolations and desolations" must constantly be discerned. Ignatius instructs the director to guide the person doing the exercises to only act upon the inspiration of the good spirit, the Holy Spirit. The sign of His work is unique to the person seeking to follow God from a pure heart. The Holy Spirit's work is gracious, i.e., comes from pure grace - "the consolation without preceding cause"²²⁵ that cannot be accounted for by virtue or knowledge present in the soul beforehand. The consolation of God's good Spirit takes away all doubts and distress, fills the soul with

²²³ John 7: 37-39.

²²⁴ Ignatius, *Spiritual Exercises*, "First Exercise, Second Prelude", [48], p. 25; "Second Exercise, Second Prelude", [55], p. 27; "Fifth Exercise, Second Prelude", [65], p. 29.

²²⁵ Ignatius, *Spiritual Exercises*, "Rules for Greater Discernment of Spirits, Second Rule" [], p.

love for God and clears away any difficulties in doing what God wants. This consolation is the work of God's empowering Holy Spirit and also produces the fruit of the Holy Spirit in the life of the person.²²⁶

Antony expresses the result of the Holy Spirit's work in the life of the soul as "the resurrection of the mind" or heart. The resurrection comes as the Holy Spirit purifies and heals the mind, body, soul and will of our fallen "immortal substance." The result of this resurrection and the work of the Holy Spirit is to teach us that "we are all of one substance, members of one another."²²⁷ Knowing that we are members of one another, we also should love one another as is mentioned in several texts of Antony's letters.²²⁸ So, the task of the Holy Spirit who grants us this spiritual discernment is also to call those who follow Christ into community and into love of one another. Indeed the sign that evil powers are at work rather than the Holy Spirit is when division and enmity are present, destroying the unity of Christ's members. As we shall see next, this is one of the important ways the enemy engages the Christian in spiritual battle.

Ignatius, also, would see the Holy Spirit as bringing a spirit of love and respect among those who belong to Christ, including obedience and service to the Church community.²²⁹ In

²²⁶ "By contrast, the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, generosity, faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control" (Galatians 5:22 NRSV).

²²⁷ Chitty, *The Letters of St. Antony*, Letter VI.9.

²²⁸ *Ibid.*, Letters VI.7; VI.8; VI.9; VI.11.

²²⁹ See Ignatius, *Spiritual Exercises*, "To Have the True Sentiment Which We Ought to Have in the Church Militant, First Rule" [353], p. 92.

fact, the goal for the person doing the exercises is to better serve Christ, His Church and all Christians.

The Spiritual Battle

Antony is only too aware of the spiritual battle being waged against Christians, having dedicated the latter of his eighty-some years of life to learn all he could. His letters written to various communities of desert monks are to encourage, to instruct and to warn those in these communities to become victors in this battle. In his first letter he outlines, first, “the sicknesses of the soul which are mingled with the members of the bodily nature in which the soul moves and works; and so the soul becomes guide to the evil spirits.”²³⁰ The solution here is that the soul learn from the Holy Spirit how to purify and expel the sickness that has come from sin reigning in the members.²³¹

Another important means that evil spirits use, according to Antony, to wage war against those who have made some progress is through inducement to pride and through turning Christians against one another: “For knowing this, that the devil fell from heaven through pride, for this cause also they attack first those who have attained to a very great measure, seeking by means of pride and vainglory to turn them against one another. They know that in this way, they can cut us off from God, for they know that he who loves his

²³⁰ Chitty, *The Letters of St. Antony*, Letter I.4.

²³¹ “The mind also starts to discriminate between the body and the soul, as it begins to learn from the Spirit how to purify both by repentance. And, taught, by the Spirit..., it separates us from all the fruits of the flesh which have been mingled with all the members of the body since the first transgression” (Chitty, *The Letters of St. Antony*, Letter I.2).

neighbour loves God.”²³² The remedy to avoid this pitfall is by seeking the same humility found in Jesus who washed the feet of His disciples before His crucifixion.²³³ Antony’s prayer is that they be made able to discern the ruse that the evil powers use to not only tempt us to do evil, but also to stop us from doing good.²³⁴ One of the most common ways they attack is by tempting us to judge, stirring up discord and enmity in our hearts against others. One of his key statements about spiritual discernment and the spiritual battle is : “I want you to know that there are many who have pursued asceticism throughout their life, but lack of discernment killed them....I think it is no great wonder, if you neglect yourselves and do not discern your works, that you should fall into the hands of the devil.”²³⁵ Antony underlines two problems that may lead to spiritual defeat. First, we neglect self-knowledge and hence, are lacking in discernment - so that we are not able to properly assess our actions. Secondly, we fall into judging others, “accusing each other and not ourselves...sitting in judgment on what appears outwardly, while the robber is all within our house.”²³⁶ Discernment, self-knowledge and charity toward others are what Antony would consider the traits evident in those gaining victory in the spiritual battle.

²³² Chitty, *The Letters of St. Antony*, Letter VI.11.

²³³ “For what need was there at all for Jesus to gird Himself with a towel and wash the feet of His inferiors, but that He should make this an example, to teach those who should turn to Him their own first beginning? (Cf. Jn. 13:4-17). For the beginning of their motion is the pride which came at the first. That is why, except through great humility in your whole heart and mind and spirit and soul and body, you will not be able to inherit the Kingdom of God” (Chitty, *Letters of St. Antony*, Letter VI.11).

²³⁴ “The evil spirits make us zealous for works which we are not able to perform and cause us to faint in tasks on which we are engaged, and which are profitable for us” (Chitty, *The Letters of St. Antony*, Letter VI.5).

²³⁵ Chitty, *The Letters of St. Antony*, Letter VI.11.

²³⁶ *Ibid.*, Letter VI.5.

Ignatius would be in agreement with Antony concerning the problem of pride as a major pitfall in humans' battle against evil. As has been mentioned, the fall of the angels and that of Adam and Eve which Ignatius mentions at the beginning of the *Spiritual Exercises* have their origin in pride. Antony points to humility as the remedy and safeguard against pride. Likewise Ignatius underlines the importance of humility in his exercises of the Second Week, especially the "Three Manners of Humility." Ignatius highlights, as well, the importance of preferring poverty to riches and contempt to worldly honour.

Antony describes the action of the Holy Spirit's "loving partnership" with the mind as leading to the progressive purification of the body, soul and will of corruption. Ignatius similarly outlines the steps of the exercises as a means for the Holy Spirit to reveal what is really ruling the affections (self-knowledge) so as to rid the soul of whatever is undesirable through the action of the Holy Spirit. In like manner, Ignatius recognizes the intensification of the enemy's strategies as the soul progresses in purity just as Antony does. Ignatius explains this in the notes to the director. The notes move in order of increasing discernment as can be seen by the titles of the first two sections.²³⁷ He warns, like Antony, of the consolation of the adversary which may mask itself under the guise of good so to draw the soul away from God.²³⁸ Both Ignatius and Antony advise a bold front when confronting the enemy's ruses, by

²³⁷ "Rules for Perceiving and Knowing in Some Manner the Different Movements Which are Caused in the Soul" and "Rules for the Same Effect With Greater Discernment of Spirits."

²³⁸ "Or do you not know, beloved, that the enemies of virtue are always plotting evil against the truth?" (Chitty, *The Letters of St. Antony*, Letter VI.10) and "It is proper to the evil Angel, who forms himself under the appearance of an angel of light, to enter with the devout soul and go out with himself: that is to say, to bring good and holy thoughts, conformable to such just soul, and then little by little he aims at coming out drawing the soul to his covert deceits and perverse intentions" (Ignatius, *Spiritual Exercises*, "Rules for Greater Discernment, Fourth Rule" [332], p. 86).

means of a resolute will and firm confidence in God's help through the Holy Spirit.²³⁹ Finally, both would agree that being able to discern the different spirits whether good or evil is essential in the spiritual battle.

The Role of Scripture

Antony's letters are full of allusions to biblical passages. There are two passages that he quotes often in reference to salvation. The first is Phil. 2:7,8 where God empties Himself, taking the form of a servant. The other concerns the healing of our "wound" (our fallen nature). It is by the Saviour's wound that we are healed - Isa. 53:5.²⁴⁰ Another important verse that he uses in reference to our being instructed by the Holy Spirit, "the Spirit of Adoption" is Rom. 8:15 - "For we have not received the spirit of bondage again to fear, but the spirit of adoption whereby we cry, Abba, Father." He then adds an appendix to this which is from 1 Cor. 2:12 - "that we may know what God has given us."²⁴¹ Another verse

²³⁹ "in the same manner, it is the way of the enemy to weaken and lose heart, his temptations taking flight, when the person who is exercising himself in spiritual things opposes a bold front against the temptations of the enemy, doing diametrically the opposite" (Ignatius, *Spiritual Exercises*, "Rules for Discernment, Twelfth Rule" [325], p. 84 and "Or, do you not know what the many machinations and arts of the devil are like: for the evil envy us, ever since they knew that we have tried to see our disgrace, and have sought a way of fleeing from their works which they work with us; and not only do we try to reject their evil counsels which they sow among us, but even many of us laugh at their machinations. And they know the indulgence of our Creator that in this world He has condemned them to death, and has prepared for them to inherit gehenna because of their negligence" (Chitty, *The Letters of St. Antony*, Letter VI.4).

²⁴⁰ Phil. 2:6,7 is mentioned five times and Isa. 53:5 is repeated seven times.

²⁴¹ Chitty, *The Letters of St. Antony*, Letter IV.1.

which he repeats three times also reinforces his teaching that we are given wisdom, discernment and are taught by the Holy Spirit: Jn. 15:15.²⁴²

Finally, he quotes Prov. 9:9 (“Give occasion of wisdom to a wise man, and he will be yet wiser”) five times, often as a closing to his letter. Here we see his love for wisdom and his desire that those to whom he is writing will acquire this along with spiritual discernment. Antony uses passages from Scripture throughout his seven letters, not as proof texts, as Origen does, but more as a means of exhortation and pastoral counsel for his hearers. His knowledge of Scripture is very rich and he freely uses passages and thoughts from both testaments in his letters.

Ignatius, as I have previously mentioned, uses almost exclusively the four Gospels in his exercises. He wants the words and actions of Jesus in their contextual setting to be food for meditation and exhortation to the one doing the exercises. He wishes the person to focus their full attention on the person of Jesus Christ. He expects the Holy Spirit to do the exhorting, reforming and sanctifying work in the person’s life as they work through the meditation exercise using the five senses of the imagination (sight, sound, smell, taste and touch). As the person grows more and more like Christ in their desires, their capacity to discern God’s will among the different movements, the spiritual consolations and desolations, will be sharpened. Spiritual discernment for Ignatius, is very much a function of desiring to

²⁴² “For if a man draws near to grace, then Jesus will say to him, ‘I will no longer call you servants, but I will call you my friends and my brothers: for all things that I have heard of my Father I have made known unto you’ (Jn. 15:15). For those who have drawn near, and have been taught by the Holy Spirit, have known themselves according to their intellectual substance” (Chitty, *The Letters of St. Antony*, Letter IV.1; See also Letters II.3 and III.3).

do God's will from a pure heart (with no disordered affections). Hence, dwelling on Christ's life and actions from the Gospels is a means to attaining this.

VIII. Summary of Origen, Antony of Egypt and Ignatius of Loyola's Contribution to the Christian Notion of Spiritual Discernment

In this section I would like to highlight the major contributions of these three spiritual masters to our foundational understanding as Christians of the notion of spiritual discernment.

1. *Spiritual discernment is essential because movements of good and evil are continually acting upon us, seeking to persuade our free-will to some course of action.*

Origen demonstrates thoroughly and relentlessly in *Peri Archon* that God gave the capacity of free will to all rational beings that He created. Free will, in turn, made it possible for rational beings, especially humans, to choose either evil or good. This capacity to choose also opened up humans to experience different inner movements or a "diversity of good and evil spirits." Origen states that no rational being can exist without being acted upon by these different influences.²⁴³ Origen also remarks that every soul "has a struggle to maintain with the devil...and opposing influences, because they strive to burden it with sin."²⁴⁴ Confronted with these opposing forces, spiritual discernment becomes vital. This discernment involves distinguishing the different movements produced in the soul. The person is to ask: What is attempting to influence my free will? and What are the signs as to its source? The answer to these questions will inform the person's free will regarding the way they choose to decide something. The will, however, is never coerced by spiritual discernment. It is given knowledge which the person may or may not choose to act upon. Indeed the individual may

²⁴³ Origen, *De Principiis*, Book III, Chap. III, #5 and #4.

²⁴⁴ *Ibid.*, Preface, #5.

call upon the Holy Spirit for divine assistance in order to act upon the good inspiration and to refuse the evil.

Antony of Egypt compares spiritual discernment to a kind of perception where the soul's "eyes" are opened to detect the malice that evil powers are concocting to deter humans from a holy life lived for God. These powers seek to enslave the person's free will so that they will misuse it. The misuse of the free will often involves pride, judgment of others, envy and hatred of other Christians - all things which divide. Spiritual discernment for Antony is also contingent on the soul's ability to "know themselves" according to their spiritual nature involving redemptive healing of their "wound" of sin. This is so that they may be able to distinguish between what is authentic and what is not to their spiritual nature. I will speak more on this a little later. But this ability to distinguish between good and evil, between what is foreign and genuine to the spiritual nature is the way that the soul can also discern the movements of good and evil which act upon it.

Ignatius through the *Spiritual Exercises* invites those doing them to learn how to test the different motions that occur in the soul. Like Origen, Ignatius presupposes that each one doing them will experience these inner movements. The exercises, we might say, are designed to train the free will of the person to learn to cling to what is good and to reject what is evil. The first step is to move toward detachment from sin and one's disordered affections so as to attach oneself more firmly to Christ and to identify with His will. Spiritual discernment involves experiencing the inner movements of consolation and desolation, corresponding to those coming from the good spirit (the Holy Spirit) or from evil spirits, and learning to

distinguish between them. The more the person becomes separated from their own disordered affections, the greater the capacity of their discernment.

2. *Spiritual Discernment involves "self-knowledge".*

Self-knowledge for Origen is a matter of being vigilant, of becoming aware of the different motions in our soul which try to turn our free will to either good or evil. It involves learning to see the signs that the good spirit is at work, or else evil powers. The good spirit moves the soul toward the good things of God and yet the will remains completely free to follow their inspiration or not. The soul is not agitated, but is at rest. When wicked powers are operating and the soul yields to their suggestion, the person may experience a temporary or permanent loss of reasoning ability or even feeling, depending on the degree of the evil powers' influence on the soul. If the soul is diligent, it may recognize the evil trying to gain entrance and either resist it or call for divine assistance.

Self-knowledge is key to Antony of Egypt's understanding of salvation and of spiritual discernment. Self-knowledge involves an awakening to the immortal part of oneself (the "intellectual substance") that was created by God, but has been "wounded" and humiliated by evil. This "intellectual substance" is at the core of spiritual discernment. Those who are redeemed by the work of the Holy Spirit's purification in their spiritual nature, are endowed with the capacity to discern between good and evil. Without this work of the Holy Spirit, Antony contends, the spiritual senses are dimmed and are unable to properly distinguish between good and evil. Instead, the soul may fall into the enticements of evil powers and be filled with pride, anger, enmity and every kind of sin.

Ignatius proposes a path for self-knowledge and discernment of God's will through the *Spiritual Exercises*. These exercises are conceived in order to help the one doing them to rid their soul of their disordered affections. Ridding the soul of these affections enables the person to arrive at self-knowledge, i.e., an understanding of what is moving and gaining control of the soul - is it one's own desires fuelled by evil powers or is it the inspiration of God's Holy Spirit? Without this self-knowledge, the soul can never really discern what God wants nor carry it out because its discernment is clouded by its own wants and desires. Self-knowledge for Ignatius is found in disengagement from self-will and attachment to Christ and His will especially as one advances through the exercises of the first two weeks. This is also the path to growing spiritual discernment - to be able to separate one's own desires which may be enticed by clever devices of the enemy, such as false consolations from those which are true - the "consolation without preceding cause."²⁴⁵

3. *Spiritual Discernment comes from the Holy Spirit.*

Even though Origen affirms strongly the importance of free will and consequently, human responsibility in the face of evil and the spiritual battle, nevertheless, he readily admits the limits of human power alone to overcome evil powers. Humans cannot successfully contend in the battle without divine assistance, but God's grace must be accompanied by the free cooperation of our will to ensure victory. The powers of reason and capacity to discern are part of the gift of wisdom according to the power and working of the Spirit of God that is accorded to those who belong to Christ, who are being sanctified by the Holy Spirit.²⁴⁶

²⁴⁵ Ignatius, *Spiritual Exercises*, "Rules for Greater Discernment of Spirits, Second Rule" [330], p. 86.

²⁴⁶ Origen, *De Principiis*, Book I, Chap. III, #9, p. 16.

Finally, the grace granted by God to enlighten the free will, may be used either in a diligent manner resulting in spiritual victory or in a negligent manner resulting in defeat.

Antony sees spiritual discernment as the fruit of a “loving partnership” which the Holy Spirit establishes in those who are “being taught by Him.” Those taught by the Holy Spirit learn how to purify and be healed of the wounds of sin in body, soul and will. As this purification progresses, the Holy Spirit grants the soul gifts of wisdom and spiritual discernment. The soul also begins to know itself according to the “intellectual substance”, which leads to a return to the original spiritual nature created by God. This re-discovery of the original nature, for Antony, is key to the person’s capacity of spiritual discernment, as has already been outlined in the previous two sections. It is this nature, under the guidance of the Holy Spirit, which enables it to discern good from evil, from what is authentic and what is not to the spiritual nature and allows the person to discern spiritually.

Ignatius via the *Spiritual Exercises* expects the Holy Spirit to act directly upon the soul of the person doing them.²⁴⁷ He instructs the director how to react when there is evidence that the Holy Spirit is acting upon the soul (spiritual consolation) or when it is opposing powers (spiritual desolation) at work. The mindset present in the exercises is that the person will be growing closer to Christ and asking for His Holy Spirit and His grace to gain fuller access to their life. This fuller access is accomplished by detachment from sin and affections which are

²⁴⁷ “in the Spiritual Exercises, when seeking the Divine Will, it is more fitting and much better, that the Creator and Lord Himself should communicate Himself to His devout soul, inflaming it with His love and praise, and disposing it for the way in which it will be better able to serve Him in future. So, he who is giving the Exercises should not turn or incline to one side or the other, but standing in the centre like a balance, leave the Creator to act immediately with the creature, and the creature with its Creator and Lord.” (Ignatius, *Spiritual Exercises*, “Fifteenth Annotation” [15], p. 14).

not from God. This frees the Holy Spirit to move at will in the soul and turn it toward Christ's will. The consolation received from the Holy Spirit clears away the obstacles to the soul's knowing and doing the will of God. This consolation is at the heart of what Ignatius would define as spiritual discernment.

4. *Spiritual Discernment should lead to communion with the members of Christ's community.*

Origen maintains that humans are caught between the good angels which are to help them in their progress toward God and the wicked angels who try to hinder humans from communion with God by tempting them to choose to do evil. Evil, according to Origen (and to Antony) comes from the decision to follow a path contrary to God's will, creating a disunity between God and the rational beings he has created. This diversity or division from God's essential unity is the indication for Origen that evil powers are at work. When a soul discerns the movements of good and evil within and then, chooses by free will to follow the good spirit, then the soul is drawn to what is good, toward God.²⁴⁸ It follows also that the soul is drawn up into God's essential unity. Origen assumes, then, that this soul, enters into communion with all that is good, whether the good angels, the Holy Spirit or the community of apostles and prophets.²⁴⁹

²⁴⁸ Origen, *De Principiis*, Book III, Chap. III, # 4.

²⁴⁹ "But a man receives the energy, i.e., the working of a good spirit, when he is stirred and incited to good and is inspired to heavenly or divine things; as the holy angels and God Himself wrought in the prophets, arousing and exhorting them by their holy suggestions to a better course of life" (Origen, *De Principiis*, Book III, Chap. III, #4).

For Antony the transformation that the Holy Spirit effects in the mind, body, soul and will of our fallen “immortal substance” results in a “resurrection” of our minds and hearts. This resurrection reminds all those who share in it, “that we are all of one substance and members of one another” and furthermore, “that we ought greatly to love one another.”²⁵⁰ Recognition of our true nature, “immortal substance,” created by God, is a mark of our renewed self-knowledge. This self-knowledge is the key to spiritual discernment and this discernment leads us to realize that we are in communion also with the members of Christ’s community. Charity, humility and forgiveness are the signs of relationship within this community. Pride, enmity and bitterness leading to division among members of Christ’s community is evidence that evil powers have gained entrance and that spiritual discernment has been compromised.

Ignatius assumes the Holy Spirit to be constantly at work in the soul working through the *Spiritual Exercises*, moving that soul deeper into Christ and His will. The consolation from God fills that soul with love for God and also clears any obstacles to accomplishing His will. God’s will involves love and service to Christ’s members because of Christ’s example of service and laying down His life for His Church. Those seeking to follow in Christ’s footsteps, also follow in His commandment to love. Discerning and choosing to move upon the inspiration of the good spirit, is to choose to love the members of Christ’s community.

²⁵⁰ Chitty, *The Letters of St. Antony*, Letter VI.9.

5. *Spiritual discernment is prompted and guided by God's Word in the Scriptures.*

Origen constantly draws upon the Scriptures throughout *Peri Archon* both to support his teaching and to refute the anticipated arguments of his opponents. He uses Deut. 30:15²⁵¹ to sustain one of his important points concerning discernment - that we have a free will and have been given the capacity to choose good or evil. If not, we would not have been admonished to obey God's commandments. His premise that we are involved in a spiritual battle against wicked powers, he sustains with Eph. 6:10-12.²⁵² To show that we are in need of divine assistance in this battle, he uses Paul's words in Phil. 4:13 - "I can do all things through Christ, who strengtheneth me." Finally, he warns against spiritual negligence (Heb. 2:1) and the need for watchfulness in spiritual discernment (1Pet. 5:8).²⁵³

Antony's letters are also full of allusions to biblical passages. One important reference that Antony makes supporting God's desire to give us spiritual discernment through the Holy Spirit is found in 1 Cor. 2:12.²⁵⁴ Antony also refers to Jn. 15:15 in explaining how we are taught by the Holy Spirit and that we receive insight, wisdom and discernment from Jesus

²⁵¹ "I have placed before thy face the way of life and the way of death: choose what is good, and walk in it" (Origen, *De Principiis*, Book III, Chap. I, #6).

²⁵² "Finally be strong in the Lord and in the strength of his power. Put on the whole armour of God, so that you may be able to stand against the wiles of the devil. For our struggle is not against enemies of blood and flesh, but against the rulers, against the authorities, against the cosmic powers of this present darkness, against the spiritual forces of evil in the heavenly places [NRSV]" (Origen, *De Principiis*, Book III, Chap. II, #4).

²⁵³ "Therefore we must pay greater attention to what we have heard, so that we do not drift away from it" (Heb.2:1 -NRSV); "Discipline yourselves, keep alert. Like a roaring lion your adversary the devil prowls around, looking for someone to devour" (1 Pet. 5:8 - NRSV). See *De Principiis*, Book III, Chap. II, #4.

²⁵⁴ "Now we have received not the spirit of the world, but the Spirit that is from God, so that we may understand the gifts bestowed on us by God" (NRSV). See *The Letters of St. Antony*, Letter IV.1.

Himself as we “draw near to grace.”²⁵⁵ Antony’s desire that those to whom he is writing should grow in spiritual discernment is highlighted by his repeated use of Prov. 9: 9 - “Give occasion of wisdom to a wise man, and he will be yet wiser.”

For Ignatius spiritual discernment comes from desiring to do God’s will alone (with no disordered affections). He expects the Holy Spirit to do the sanctifying work necessary to arrive at this state largely through meditation on the life and actions of Jesus Christ drawn from scenes in the Gospels. By focusing on the example of the Master Himself, Ignatius believes that the person will be gradually transformed from disorder, complacency or indifference to vibrant zeal for God. This pure heart opens the person to the consolations and grace of the Holy Spirit and to increasing spiritual discernment. However, this discernment is always informed by the dynamic actions and example of Christ as gleaned from the Gospel accounts.

²⁵⁵ “For if a man draws near to grace, then Jesus will say to him, ‘I will no longer call you servants, but I will call you my friends and my brothers: for all things that I have heard of my Father I have made known unto you’ (Jn. 15:15). For those who have drawn near, and have been taught by the Holy Spirit, have known themselves according to their intellectual substance” (Chitty, *The Letters of St. Antony*, Letter IV.1).

X. Implications and Conclusions

This study has sought to highlight and to understand the notion of spiritual discernment as found in Origen's *Peri Archôn*, Antony of Egypt's Seven Letters and Ignatius of Loyola's *Spiritual Exercises*. In addition I have endeavoured to look at some of the elements common to each in this regard. The result has been a kind of synthesis as seen in the previous chapter.

As I close, I think it would be important to open a discussion, or at least suggest, some of the implications of this study on our Christian notion of spiritual discernment at present. I would propose that a dialogue with these three spiritual masters be encouraged in order to re-discover spiritual discernment for ourselves and our church communities for our time and context. How is the same Holy spirit at work now as He was 1800 years ago? How is continuity present in our notion of spiritual discernment? How is there divergence from the past? What aspects of the notion of spiritual discernment from Origen, Antony and Ignatius need to be rekindled? I would suggest several.

The first aspect concerns a recovery of spiritual discernment as insight which does not arise so much from human understanding or perception, but as a gift or a grace from the Holy Spirit. Origen, the brilliant debater and scholar, Antony, the holy solitary and Ignatius, the courageous pilgrim, all understood the limits of human strength, wisdom and righteousness. They made their most important spiritual decisions not in the light of circumstances, human counsel or knowledge. Instead they waited on the invisible spiritual power of the Holy Spirit working within them, trusting that He would never fail to guide them aright, even if

occasionally they misunderstood or took a wrong turn. They assumed that He was always active, always in motion in their lives. John Sheets in his excellent article²⁵⁶, explains the work of the Holy Spirit as two interdependent fields of action. The first field is the work of the Holy Spirit moving us from within pushing us from behind, which he refers to as the “Spirit-behind-us.” The second field emphasizes that the Holy Spirit is also converging different elements together, resulting in a union between earth-bound elements and those which are from God, the Holy Spirit. There is a kind of merging of earthly and spiritual components to produce an accord, resulting in the possibility of God’s will being done on earth through human collaboration. He calls this the “Spirit-ahead” of us, calling us into decision and action. I think Sheets’ model is a good way to bring into focus the global work of the Holy Spirit in spiritual discernment as outlined in the writings of Origen, Antony and Ignatius of Loyola. For Origen the Spirit’s work is involved within the soul through the reasoning power that is able to discern the diverse spirits of good and evil which move in the soul and also assail it from without. For Antony, the soul is purified and “taught” by the Holy Spirit to discern what is authentic to its true nature. For Ignatius, the Holy Spirit is intimately involved in making a “good election”, i.e., discerning rightly God’s will in a matter and then doing it. Hence, the Holy Spirit is at the centre of all aspects of spiritual discernment; without His influence, spiritual discernment is deficient.

The second important principle to renew in our notion of spiritual discernment is the recovery of “self-knowledge.” I think the insight of Antony of Egypt and Ignatius of Loyola have much to offer us in terms of the preparation of the soul so as to be able to rightly discern

²⁵⁶ John Sheets, S. J.; “Profile of the Spirit: A theology of Discernment of Spirits”; *Review for Religious* 30, 1971, p. 363-376.

the diversity of spirits both within and around us. Antony's accent on knowing oneself in one's "intellectual substance" involves an awareness of the soul's need for healing and redemption by God's grace and the work of the Holy Spirit's purification of mind, body, will and soul. Only this process, according to Antony, will enable a person to know God, understand His works and discern what is foreign and what is authentic to the "intellectual substance" (one's spiritual nature created by and for God). This capacity to discern between what is genuine to the "intellectual substance" and what is not, is the test for distinguishing good and evil. Without this self-knowledge, spiritual discernment is a risky business. Spiritual discernment devoid of self-knowledge leads one astray.²⁵⁷

Ignatius formula for self-knowledge is through the *Spiritual Exercises* whose goal is to rid the soul of disordered affections so as to be able to discern God's will above all else and to act upon it. Ridding the soul of disordered tendencies is to acquire self-knowledge, i.e., to know what is truly reigning in the soul. It is to be able to recognize the origin of the thoughts that arise from within (are they from free will, the good spirit or the evil spirit?). The exercises of especially the first and second week are designed to raise the soul's awareness of the different movements in the soul and to free oneself from what comes from evil and to give free access to what comes from good, from God's Spirit. In our era of desiring instant answers and results, we do not always value taking the time to take stock of what is happening in our souls, to know ourselves, our inspirations, our desires and our "disordered affections" which are leading us, albeit unconsciously, because we are impervious to the diverse

²⁵⁷ "Truly, my children, I want you to know that there are many who have pursued asceticism throughout their life, but lack of discernment killed them. Truly, my children, I think it is no great wonder, if you neglect yourselves and do not discern your works, that you should fall into the hands of the devil, when you think you are near to God, and that in your expectation of the light, darkness should overtake you" (Chitty, *The Letters of St. Antony*, Letter VI.11).

movements in our own souls. Here, I think, we have much to glean from Antony and Ignatius. Again, if we are essentially unaware of what is happening in our souls, how will we be able to properly discern good from evil?

The third important principle of Origen, Antony and Ignatius from which also we can draw upon and learn from is their awareness of the spiritual battle that our spiritual enemies are always waging against us. Origen's cosmology is filled with rational and celestial beings. Humans are caught between the angels who serve God, aiding humans and the fallen or wicked angels who seek human's spiritual demise. Antony takes it one step further and says that these enemies are filled with jealousy against us because they want us to be lost with them. The saints, on the other hand, see the battle that we are in and are "rooting" for us in this battle.²⁵⁸ How often as Christians are we surprised when we encounter opposition in some project that we have undertaken for God? Yet Ignatius would say that opposition is always intensified as we advance in spiritual understanding; Antony would say that the enemy's tactics become increasingly subtle and Origen would say that if it were not for divine assistance, no human could ever stand against this opposition from wicked powers. On the other hand, each would also agree that some evil comes upon us as a result of our own sin, carelessness or disordered affections. So, spiritual discernment is necessary to raise our awareness of the spiritual battle that wages against us from within and from without.

²⁵⁸ "I want you to know, my children, that I cease not to pray God for you night and day, that He may open for you the eyes of your hearts, to see the many hidden malignities which the evil spirits pour upon us daily in this present time. I want God to give you a heart of knowledge and a spirit of discernment.... Truly, my children, they envy us at all times, with their evil counsel, and hidden persecution, and subtle malice " and "I see the great confusion which is coming upon us all, and consider the great labour of the saints, and their groanings which they are always uttering before God on our behalf, as they see all the labour of their Creator, and all the evil counsels of the devil and his ministers, the evil they meditate always for our perdition, since their portion is to be in hell, and for this cause they want us to be lost with them, and to be with the multitude." (Chitty, *The Letters of Antony*, Letter VI.5,4).

The fourth element in spiritual discernment to re-discover is the relationship between free will, human responsibility and the grace of God. The question is the balance to strike in human collaboration with God's grace. It is Origen, I think, who puts this into sharpest relief in *Peri Archôn*. While Origen presupposes that we are always being acted upon by diverse spirits who attempt to persuade us to some good or evil, they cannot override our free will. Our free will and our ability or reasoning power given by God to discern good from evil, presupposes for Origen our responsibility to choose rightly. At the same time, we are to keep watch over our souls in the spiritual battle. Origen knows that human will power is not sufficient to combat opposing powers. God's grace is needed; therefore, the responsibility of humans is to call for God's grace, so as to receive the help that is needed to overcome.²⁵⁹

One of Origen's best illustrations of how responsibility and grace work together is his example of sailors in a ship on stormy seas. All their cooperation, strength and navigational skill is required, but once their ship reaches safe waters they will never claim that they themselves have saved the ship. They will attribute it to divine mercy and Providence. Origen's conclusion is: "So also in the race of life we ourselves must expend labour and bring diligence and zeal to bear; but it is from God that salvation is to be hoped for as the fruit of our labour. Otherwise, if God demand none of our labour, His commandments will appear to be superfluous."²⁶⁰ Origen rejects the idea either that we are powerless puppets at the mercy of all manner of opposing forces acting upon us or that the power of our own free will and discernment is sufficient to carry us through to spiritual victory. He recognizes that it is

²⁵⁹ "We are not to suppose either that those things which are in our own power can be done without the help of God, or that those which are in God's hand can be brought to completion without the intervention of our acts, and desires and intention" (Origen, *De Principiis*, Book III, Chap. I, #21).

²⁶⁰ Origen, *De Principiis*, Book III, Chap. I, # 18.

possible to surrender our free will to opposing powers, freely choosing the dark side. So, I think, that Origen's exhortation and instructions on free will, grace and human responsibility will help us to keep these three in tension without swinging too far to one side or the other. There is, perhaps, always a danger in spiritual discernment to place too much value on human power and responsibility or too little.

Another principle to restore in our understanding of spiritual discernment is the role of the Scriptures. I see that there is a two-fold interaction with Scripture. First, spiritual discernment is prompted, inspired and guided by the Scriptures. Here we have the example in Ignatius' *Spiritual Exercises* where the retreatant is to daily meditate on events in the life of Christ as a preparation and as a prompter toward discernment of the movements within the soul. In the Gospels, Christ is always seen seeking to know and to do the will of His Father. This is a keynote for Ignatian discernment - to seek to know and to do the will of God the Father and His son Jesus Christ. This means that meditation on Scripture may lead us into spiritual discernment and guide the inspirations that we receive. On the other hand, there is a second way that spiritual discernment interacts with God's Word - spiritual discernment that is from the Holy Spirit always leads us to the truth contained in the Scriptures. For Antony, true spiritual discernment leads to obeying the greatest commandment (Matt. 22:37-39) - to love God with all our heart and our neighbour as ourselves. When what one thinks is discernment leads us away from this, we can be sure that this discernment is not from God.²⁶¹ Ignatius

²⁶¹ "I want God to give you a heart of knowledge and a spirit of discernment, that you may be able to offer your hearts as a pure sacrifice before the Father, in great holiness, without blemish. Truly, my children, they (evil spirits) envy us at all times, ...and all the anger and mutual slander which they teach us, and the self-justifications in what we do, and the judgments which they set in our hearts, causing us, when we are sitting alone, to judge our fellows ...when we are bitter against each other with our hard words, grieving at every hour, accusing each other and not ourselves" (Chitty, *The Letter of St. Antony*, Letter VL5).

similarly exhorts us to test consolations to see if the beginning, middle and end of the inspiration always leads us to good or not. This test of the Scriptures and their truth is an important one for us to always keep in mind when we are trying to decide whether an inspiration is truly from God or not.

Last but not least, is the importance of spiritual discernment as from the Holy Spirit, the Spirit of Christ who creates Christian community and promotes harmony rather than division and competition. So, we can say that even as spiritual discernment should lead us to the truth in the Scriptures, so also, should it lead us toward the creation and appreciation of Christian community. How is this so? As mentioned earlier, both Origen and Antony believed that the origin of all evil resulted from the departure of rational beings from the essential unity (and spiritual constancy) of God. The result was diversity, division and as Antony describes it, “grievous inconstancy.” To enter into God’s goodness and likeness is to enter into His unity. For Antony, true transformation of our spiritual nature is marked by our identifying with all men and loving them as ourselves because we are all of “one substance”, i.e., we have been created by and for God. It is evil spirits who try to sow enmity, jealousy and judgment of others in our hearts. Their goal is to create division, so that we will “not hold any converse with our neighbour even from a distance.”²⁶² Ultimately they wish to prevent Christians from communing with each other; they want to destroy the Church of Christ. They want to prevent Christians from loving others as God loves them. So, spiritual discernment, which is genuine is true to the Spirit of Christ and will seek to restore and bring harmony to Christ’s community. I think this is important to remember because insight into spiritual matters can easily lead to pride or a feeling of superiority. When we look at Antony,

²⁶² Chitty, *The Letters of St. Antony*, Letter VI.11.

we see that his attitude is one of gratefulness to Christ for His great humility. Antony emphasizes forgiveness, mercy and charity towards others as a result of discernment and entering into deeper communion with God. This approach is surely one that is restorative to community and not damaging.

As I approach the close of this study, my thoughts return to one of my original questions in the introduction - How is a person's mind, will and spirit moved to decision and then into action for God? and What are the elements involved in the process of spiritual discernment leading up to that action? I would suggest several important constituents in the process of spiritual discernment in light of my study of this subject in the works of Origen, Antony of Egypt and Ignatius of Loyola. Because we have been created with a free will, we also are exposed to a variety of influences, both good and evil - some arising from within, others acting upon us from without. These different influences are constantly trying to persuade our free will to mobilize our mind and body to respond or act in some way. The more that we are aware of the nature of what is acting upon us and of who we are in our spiritual nature created by and for God, the greater our capacity to discern spiritually. This awareness, self-knowledge and ability to distinguish the nature of these interior movements are not self-produced, but are given by the Holy Spirit. The Holy Spirit opens our soul to God and helps us relinquish attachment to self. Spiritual discernment is a gift, but this does not negate the importance of human collaboration and responsibility (prayer, asking for assistance, practicing spiritual disciplines, etc.).

Finally, there are two indicators that spiritual discernment is truly inspired by God and not from "disordered affections." In the first we ask, am I being moved to accomplish the

truth expressed in the Scriptures? In the second, we ask, am I being encouraged to affirm my belonging and communion with the members of Christ's community? Lastly, does this spiritual discernment move me to be like Christ, to exhibit the "fruit of the Spirit"²⁶³ in the world, even as He did. If we can answer in the affirmative to these questions, we are on the path of spiritual discernment.

In reality, spiritual discernment has everything to do with keeping in step with the Holy Spirit. As we do so, we discern His particular way of moving in our soul and we may readily see those which counterfeit or oppose His way. This is the essence of discernment. However, the implications of how we choose to act upon the genuine spiritual discernment that we receive are far-reaching indeed and could be the subject of yet another thesis. I think it not an exaggeration to say that spiritual discernment is at the heart of spiritual living for the Christian and a foundational element in Christian spirituality.

²⁶³ "By contrast, the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, generosity, faithfulness, gentleness and self-control" [NRSV] Gal. 5:22.

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