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# Spiritual Conversation: An Important Tool for Discernment of One's Vocation in the Diverse Context of India

Francis Joseph Fernandes

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**Spiritual Conversation: An Important Tool for Discernment of One's  
Vocation in the Diverse Context of India**

A Thesis by  
**Francis Joseph Fernandes, S.J.**

Presented to  
The Faculty of the  
Jesuit School of Theology of Santa Clara University  
In partial fulfillment of the  
requirements for the degree of  
**Licentiate in Sacred Theology (STL)**

Berkeley, California

April 24, 2018

**The Committee**

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## *Abstract*

### **SPIRITUAL CONVERSATION: AN IMPORTANT TOOL FOR DISCERNMENT OF ONE'S VOCATION IN THE DIVERSE CONTEXT OF INDIA**

**Francis Joseph Fernandes, S.J.**

The Indian youth of today, including Christian youth, are deeply impacted by the values and culture of the modern world, a phenomenon which has adversely affected the Church of India in general and vocations to the priesthood and consecrated life in particular. Though at present, the Church in India is enjoying a springtime of vocations to the priestly and religious life, we cannot ignore the challenges posed by the present culture to the young people discerning their vocation and also to those who are in formation. This thesis argues that, given the gravity of today's challenges to vocational promotion and discernment in the Society of Jesus, it is important for the Jesuits of India to return to the Jesuit sources, to the tried and trusted ways of listening to God's presence and Spirit within others through spiritual conversation in order to effectively carry out the task of helping young men to rightly discern their life vocation.

The fundamental concern of this study, therefore, is to identify the concrete dimensions of the spiritual conversation which enable sound individual discernment, and how such a crucial tool of discernment is related to the present context of vocation promotion and formation in India. Specifically, it demonstrates that in light of the challenges and opportunities inherent within the Indian reality, Ignatian "spiritual conversation," which is intrinsically dialogical, contextual, and mission oriented in nature, will be an important tool for Jesuits to help young people to discern and verify their life vocation according to the "signs of the times."

The study is interdisciplinary in nature, employing historical, cultural, economic, and social analysis to examine the contemporary challenges to vocational promotion and discernment in the Indian context. It employs an experience-reflection-action methodology based on the Ignatian discernment process, namely, *sentir-conocer-hacer* (to feel-to know-to act). In this process, the study first examines the concrete situation of vocation to the priesthood and consecrated life by exploring the historical reality of India, including its multi-religious, socio-economic, and religio-cultural context. Second, it traces the development of spiritual conversation within Jesuit sources, namely the *Autobiography*, the *Spiritual Exercises*, the *Constitutions*, the *Spiritual Diary*, and the *Letters*, demonstrating that for Ignatius and the first companions, spiritual conversation was not only an effective means for “helping souls,” but for attracting and selecting young men to join the mission.

Third, the study explores how the various dimensions of Ignatian spiritual conversation may be applied in the present context of India. To that end, it proposes a model of spiritual conversation that may be fruitfully applied in vocational promotion and discernment, one which consists of personal sharing, noticing the movement of spirits, and finally, a response to the movements of the good spirit noticed in the conversation. In this way, the Jesuit, who is expected to possess the qualities of a good conversationalist, helps young people to recognize the will of God for their lives. My hope is that this study will help the Jesuits to further recognize the effectiveness of spiritual conversation in addressing both the vocation crisis and the selection of capable, motivated candidates to the Society of Jesus in India.

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Director: **Prof. Hung Pham, S.J.**

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## ABBREVIATIONS

Auto: The *Autobiography* of St Ignatius

Const: The *Constitutions* of the Society of Jesus

FI: Formula of the Institute

GC: General Congregation of the Society of Jesus

SpEx: The *Spiritual Exercises* of St. Ignatius

## **Introduction**

Today, we live in a world increasingly marked by globalization, materialism, and consumerism. While there is no doubt that globalization has re-emphasized human rights, human freedoms, and equality, the globalized market has manipulated and aroused needs and desires which can only be satisfied by the latest and the best consumer commodities and technologies. The materialistic and consumeristic culture of the modern world has led people to consider money and pleasure the highest values in society. Moreover, the breakdown of traditional family structures, notably in India, often leads to the desire on the part of young people to lead separate lives from their families and communities, and to abandon their educational pursuits in favour of employment in multi-national corporations. Indian youth, including Christian youth, are deeply impacted by the values and culture of the modern world, a phenomenon which has adversely affected the Church of India in general and vocations to the priesthood and consecrated life in particular.

At present, the Church in India is enjoying a springtime of vocations to the priestly and religious life. It is heartening to see that a sizable number of young people with strong convictions, character, and leadership are entering consecrated life. Though family sizes have decreased, the number of vocations has remained steady. At the same time, while affirming the strengths of religious life in India, we cannot ignore the challenges posed by the present culture to the young people discerning their vocation and also for those who are in formation. As an Indian Jesuit involved in the formation of Jesuit novices, helping young people to discern their vocation to consecrated life, interacting with many young and older religious, and reading some of the surveys done on the influence of the modern world on seminary formation, I recognize some of these

challenges posed by the modern culture. Though we cannot generalize these challenges, neither can we ignore them.

To a great extent, the modern culture has challenged a lifelong commitment to any way of life, especially to religious life. Moreover, in many cases, the motivation for priesthood and consecrated life lies not so much in the experience of God but in the desire for social and economic security, careerism, and the ambition for upward social mobility. While acknowledging the tremendous benefits of modern technology, we see its adverse effects on Indian youth, who are increasingly isolating themselves in an impersonal world of virtual reality. It has also resulted in a lack of depth and lack of inter-personal communication, both in general and in religious life.

It is in the face of these challenges that I attempt to locate the Jesuit mission of helping young people to discern their vocation to the Society of Jesus in the diverse context of India. Specifically, I consider how the inspiration of Ignatian “spiritual conversation,” intrinsically dialogical, contextual, and mission oriented in nature, calls Jesuit formators in India to help young men to discern and verify their vocation to the Society according to the “signs of the times.”

For St. Ignatius, spiritual conversation is a necessary tool to help candidates to make a vocational discernment that continues throughout the two years of novitiate and then for the novice master to get to know the candidates adequately.<sup>1</sup> Realizing the importance of spiritual conversation in the decision-making process, the 36<sup>th</sup> General Congregation (2016) reaffirmed the need for spiritual conversation in animating apostolic communal discernment. Reiterating the words of Fr. Adolfo Nicolás, the GC stated that,

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<sup>1</sup> *The Constitutions of the Society of Jesus*, trans., and ed. George E. Ganns (St Louis, MO: The Institute of Jesuit Sources, 1970), 84.

“given the magnitude and complexity of contemporary challenges to our mission, and the declining numbers in our “least Society,” adequate discernment is more critical than ever for apostolic effectiveness.”<sup>2</sup> Though the GC 36 stresses the need for spiritual conversation in communal discernment, I recognize its importance both in the initial discernment of vocation and in the context of the novitiate, which is a critical stage of formation in Jesuit life. Can spiritual conversation help Jesuit formators to carry out the mission of helping young men to discern their vocation to priesthood and consecrated life effectively in the diverse context of India today? This is the working question to which this study seeks to respond.

### **Scope and nature**

The term “spiritual conversation” suggests a form of communication between two or more persons that is characterized by interpersonal qualities of familiarity and intimacy. It involves sharing one’s personal experiences of finding God in daily life while paying attention to one’s desires, dreams, and emotions.<sup>3</sup> Further, through spiritual conversation, one seeks to identify what God is communicating to him/her. This in turn helps one to discern, take responsible actions, and make sound decisions for individual and communal wellbeing.<sup>4</sup> The two key features of spiritual conversation are “deep

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<sup>2</sup> GC 36, d.2, no. 5; *36<sup>th</sup> General Congregation Documents*, Private Edition (Rome: General Curia, 2017), 22.

<sup>3</sup> Luz Marina Diaz, “Spiritual Conversation as the practice of Revelation,” *The Way* 55, no. 2 (April 2016): 43.

<sup>4</sup> *Ibid.*

listening and storytelling,”<sup>5</sup> or, as the GC 36 puts it, “active listening and intentional speaking.”<sup>6</sup>

The concept of spiritual conversation was extremely significant for Ignatius. According to him, spiritual conversation is a prerequisite for all durable apostolic actions, including the search for and selection of candidates for the Society, formation, and apostolic discernment.<sup>7</sup> From the Ignatian perspective, spiritual conversation is the starting point for the direct and personal knowledge of the candidate. Starting from this knowledge, one can give the most adequate help or initiate a relationship which will prove profitable to the candidate. This form of conversation is further extended and integrated in the Spiritual Exercises, and through this process, the person is helped to make an election, to assume new directions, or to affirm a decision already taken.

In the process of the admission of the candidates to the Society, Ignatius established a first probation period, which represents the first contact between the candidate and the Society. It takes place outside of community life for a brief transitional period of one or two weeks. In the first probation, the candidate has already left his former life and habitation, but has not yet been incorporated completely into the life of the religious community. This brief period of admission leads the candidate to the long, second probation, beginning with the novitiate. Ignatius desires that in this second probation, the candidate continue his vocational discernment by living and associating

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<sup>5</sup> Ibid.

<sup>6</sup> GC 36, d.2, no. 5.

<sup>7</sup> German Arana, “Spiritual Conversation: A Privileged Apostolic Instrument of the Society of Jesus,” *Review of Ignatian Spirituality* 36, no. 1 (2005): 29.

with the other community members through spiritual conversation.<sup>8</sup> This requires a special closeness and transparency within the community and with the formators. In the *Constitutions*, Ignatius stresses the need for ongoing spiritual conversation, particularly through the “account of conscience” between the superior and the subject.<sup>9</sup> The account of conscience is vital and essential in the stage of formation and in the moments of giving and receiving a new mission.

Thus, spiritual conversation lies at the heart of the Jesuit “way of proceeding” and forms a tried and trusted way of perceiving God’s presence and Spirit within others. It prepares us personally and as a group for the decisions we are about to make. This was something the first Companions discovered in their desire to find God’s will for the leadership of the Company. They believed God called them to form themselves as a group and to discern the mission they were about to undertake. Today, therefore, we continue to draw on our rich Ignatian tradition of spiritual conversation when we seek to prepare for important decisions, both individually and communally. We return to prayer, we commit ourselves to reflection on what we are personally experiencing, and we enter into open and respectful conversations in order to arrive at an adequate decision. It is from this perspective that this study seeks to revisit and promote the need for spiritual conversation, not only in the process of communal discernment but also in the individual discernment process. This is particularly necessary within the context of India, where the candidates join the novitiate at a very young age and tend to focus on discernment within the novitiate itself rather than prior to joining.

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<sup>8</sup> Ganns, *The Constitutions of the Society of Jesus*, 8.

<sup>9</sup> *Ibid.*, 105.

This thesis explores the process of discernment in the light of Ignatian spiritual conversation. Two questions guide my study: 1) What are some of the concrete dimensions of the spiritual conversation that enable and empower individual discernment, and why are we concerned with them at this particular moment in history? 2) How is such a crucial tool of discernment related to the present context of India? Though the study is grounded in the Ignatian tradition, the recommendations can be employed not only by Jesuits but by all religious congregations of India who face similar problems in order to help their novices in their personal decision-making process.

The thesis unfolds according to the following structure. The first chapter offers an overview of the gifts and tensions inherent within the historical reality of India, including its multi-religious, socio-economic, and religio-political context, and considers the impact of globalization on the Church, and in particular, on religious vocations. The second chapter traces the development of spiritual conversation within Jesuit sources, namely the *Autobiography*, the *Spiritual Exercises*, the *Constitutions*, the *Spiritual Diary*, and the *Letters*, demonstrating that for Ignatius and the first companions, spiritual conversation was not only an effective means for “helping souls,” but for attracting and selecting young men to join the mission. The third chapter explores how the various dimensions of Ignatian spiritual conversation may be applied in the present context of India in vocational promotion and discernment.

### **Thesis statement**

This thesis argues that given the magnitude and complexity of the contemporary challenges to vocational promotion and formation in the Society of Jesus, it is important for the Jesuits, notably in India, to go back to the Jesuit sources, and to the tried and

trusted ways of listening to God's presence and Spirit within others through spiritual conversation in order to effectively carry out the task of helping young men to discern their life vocation.

## **Methodology**

This study draws on historical, cultural, economic, and social analysis to investigate the contemporary challenges to vocational promotion and discernment in the Indian context. It employs an experience-reflection-action methodology based on the Ignatian discernment process, namely, *sentir-conocer-hacer* (to feel-to know-to act). This methodology is an effective way to read the signs of the times and to engage in action that is transformative. In this process, the study first reviews the concrete situation of vocation to the priesthood and consecrated life in India today. Second, it demonstrates that spiritual conversation, as one of the clearly defined Jesuit ways of proceeding, emerged from the very founding of the Society of Jesus, considering the spiritual conversation in Ignatian sources and the practice of spiritual conversation in the early society. Third, the study considers what can and should be done in the present circumstances to implement these principles in the mission of guiding young men to discern their vocation according to the signs of the times in India.

## **Significance of Study**

As Jesuits sent on a mission, we serve the Lord in the world. While serving in the world, we need to be discerning persons, reading the signs of the times and constantly asking the Lord what he wants from us. How can we better serve God's people? Therefore, in his address to the delegates of GC 36, Pope Francis stressed the continuous



need for discernment. With the same words he used to address the Jesuits in Krakow during World Youth Day (2016), he urged that “an important task of the Society is to form seminarians and priests in discernment.”<sup>10</sup>

One of my main motivations for writing this thesis, which brings together discernment and spiritual conversation, is the recent General Congregation 36. It recognizes the greater need for discernment in today’s world given the magnitude and complexity of contemporary challenges to the Jesuit mission. But the congregation speaks in terms of communal discernment and presents spiritual conversation as a key tool to animate communal apostolic discernment. With the growing influence of globalization and modern culture on the youth of today, however, I believe that the Jesuits in India are more than ever in need of the resource of spiritual conversation, not only for their apostolic discernment but in order to accompany young men in their vocational discernment. For this reason, I submit that we need to adopt spiritual conversation in addressing the vocation crisis and also in selecting capable men for the Society of Jesus in India.

I take my cue from the idea that conversation is one of the most sacred and important experiences of human life. Most of us learn through conversation—bouncing ideas off one another and receiving challenging questions or pushback. Jesus had deep conversations with his disciples, especially on the way to Emmaus, where he helped them to discern their true vocation and motivation. Conversion occurred when people had personal encounters with Jesus through conversation. This kind of spiritual conversation was very important to Ignatius’s mission in the Society of Jesus. Through spiritual

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<sup>10</sup> “Address of His Holiness Pope Francis to the 36<sup>th</sup> General Congregation of the Society of Jesus,” *36<sup>th</sup> General Congregation Documents*, Private Edition (Rome: General Curia, 2017), 46.

conversation, Ignatius helped the early companions to discern their vocation, and specifically stated in the *Constitutions* that spiritual conversation is one of the apostolic works of the Society.

As Jesuits today reach all parts of the world, they need to make use of the opportunity of engaging the people of God in spiritual conversation in many different ways and for different purposes. This study will make a significant contribution to the Jesuit mission of “helping souls,” first, in its analysis of the crisis of vocations and the contemporary challenges to the youth of India; and second, by exploring the Ignatian principles of care for the whole person and the desire to know the individual on a deeper level in order to help him/her to make adequate life decisions in the diverse context of India.

## Chapter One

### The Context: Discerning the Signs of the Times

#### 1.0 Introduction

Priesthood and religious life are two vitally important expressions of Christian life and ministry in the Catholic Church. Therefore, they cannot be approached merely from an intellectual perspective because the constitutive elements of priesthood and religious life such as vocation, formation and spirituality emerge within the context of the life of the faith community. As the Second Vatican Council's "Decree on the Ministry and Life of Priests" (*Presbyterorum Ordinis*) states, priests "cannot be ministers of Christ unless they be witnesses and dispensers of a life other than earthly life. But they cannot be of service to [people] if they remain strangers to the life and conditions of [people]."<sup>1</sup> These words remind us of the fact that all priests are grounded and called to work within a certain social context. It is precisely this context I will explore in this chapter as I identify the socio-economic, cultural, and religious issues that both hinder and facilitate the birth of priestly vocations in India. This chapter will lay the groundwork for my analysis of the way in which "spiritual conversation" can help young aspirants and novices to discern and verify their vocation to the Society.

#### 1.1. Historical Context

India is a subcontinent known for its long history of civilization and diverse spiritual traditions. It is a land that has given birth to four major world religions, namely

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<sup>1</sup> Pope Paul VI, "Decree on the Ministry and Life of Priests, *Presbyterorum Ordinis*," December 7, 1965, no.12, accessed December 27, 2017, [http://www.vatican.va/archive/hist\\_councils/ii\\_vatican\\_council/documents/vatii\\_decree\\_19651207\\_presbyterorum-ordinis\\_en.html](http://www.vatican.va/archive/hist_councils/ii_vatican_council/documents/vatii_decree_19651207_presbyterorum-ordinis_en.html).

Hinduism, Buddhism, Jainism, and Sikhism, and to many renowned religious leaders.<sup>2</sup> Indian civilization began to emerge around 2,500 BCE, when the inhabitants of the Indus River Valley began commercial and agricultural trade. Around 1,500 BCE, the Indus Valley civilization began to decline, likely due to environmental changes.<sup>3</sup> At this time, Aryan tribes migrated into the Indian subcontinent and flourished in the Ganges River Valley. Throughout the ancient and medieval periods in India, a number of kingdoms ruled the country. In the fourth and fifth centuries CE, Northern India was unified under the Gupta dynasty, during which period Hindu culture, language and politics reached unprecedented growth.<sup>4</sup> Islam expanded across India over the next 500 years and in the tenth and eleventh centuries, Turks and Afghans invaded India and established their capitals in Delhi.<sup>5</sup>

In the sixteenth century, successors of Genghis Kahn established the Mughal dynasty, which lasted for over 200 years in Northern India, while the Hindu dynasties dominated Southern India. The Muslim and Hindu systems of North and South India (respectively) mingled and influenced each other socially and culturally, leaving a lasting impact on India.<sup>6</sup> With regard to Christianity, it is believed to have come to India in the first century CE through the preaching of the Apostle Thomas in Kerala.<sup>7</sup> “Thomas

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<sup>2</sup> John Sankarathil, “Consecrated Life in India: The Asset of a Model, or A Challenge to Remodel,” *Vidyajyoti Journal of Theological Reflection* 71 (March 2007): 185.

<sup>3</sup> Octavio Paz, *In Light of India* (London: Harcourt Brace & Company, 1995), 91.

<sup>4</sup> Hermann Kulke and Dietmar Rothermund, *A History of India* (London: Routledge, 2016), 56-57.

<sup>5</sup> *Ibid.*, 120.

<sup>6</sup> *Ibid.*, 142-148.

<sup>7</sup> Kerala is one of the states in India with the highest percentage of Christians compared to other states. It also has given to the Church the highest number of priests and religious.

Christians” in Kerala still trace the conversion of their community to the time of the Apostle many centuries prior to the arrival of the Portuguese in 1498.

In 1494, the Portuguese had discovered the first trading route to India. For the next two centuries, European powers such as the French, Dutch and British commenced trade with India, and the British colonized and controlled most of India. In 1857, the First War of Independence, led by mutinous Indians soldiers, broke out. It was intensified around 1920 under the leadership of Mahatma Gandhi, who led mass movements of civil disobedience to protest British colonial rule. Thus, India, along with Pakistan, became independent from British rule on August 15, 1947. The hostility between Hindus and Muslims led the British to separate Muslim-majority Pakistan from India. In 1971, the eastern portion of Pakistan later split off to form Bangladesh.<sup>8</sup> Despite all the struggles and upheavals of the past, however, India stands today as one of the largest democracies in the world and the fastest developing country.

## **1.2. Demographics**

India ranks the seventh largest country in the world in terms of land, consisting of 2,973,193 square km. It is one of the most densely populated countries in the world, with a population of 1.3 billion. Population density per square km is 450 (1,167 people per square mile).<sup>9</sup> The majority of the population lives in rural areas and only 32.8% live in the urban areas. India has the unique distinction of having a very large youth population.

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<sup>8</sup> Pranab Majumder, “Social Context in India: History, Religion, and Family” (Teaching notes for use in Global Consulting Practicum course at the Fuqua School of Business at Duke University, 2010): 21, accessed December 27, 2017, <http://www.unc.edu/world/2010Residential/Social%20Context%20in%20India.pdf>.

<sup>9</sup> The World Fact Book, accessed December 27, 2017, <https://www.cia.gov/library/publications/the-world-factbook/geos/in.html>.

It is home to more than 150 million young people in the age group of eighteen to twenty-three years. According to the census of 2011, 53.81% of India's population is below the age of twenty-five and thus India is a young country in an aging world.<sup>10</sup> The median age of India is 27 years.<sup>11</sup> India has made tremendous progress in its literacy rate. At the time of Independence, it had roughly a 12% rate, and through multi-tier efforts, has now attained a literacy rate of 72.99% as per the 2011 census. The literacy rate between the ages of 15-25 is 86%, which is very encouraging.<sup>12</sup>

The 1.3 billion people of India originate from five distinct racial types, the Aryan race in the North and the Dravidian race in the South being the primary ones. Eighteen official languages including English, 1,652 dialects belonging to five language families with twenty-five scripts, make India a complex nation. Indian society is built on the caste system, structured by four broad Hindu castes including the Brahmins, or priests; Kshatriyas, or rulers; Vaishyas, or commerce class; and Sudras, or peasants. About 15% are outside the caste system altogether and treated as outcastes and untouchables. Religious communities such as Muslims, Christians, Sikhs, Buddhists, Jains, Jews, Parsees, and animists coexist with the dominant Hindu community.<sup>13</sup>

Despite all these complexities and ongoing domestic challenges, including corruption and economic inequality, contemporary India is making progress in terms of well-developed infrastructure, a highly diversified industrial base in its pool of scientific

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<sup>10</sup> Deval Karthik, Rob Willis and Cassie Jones, "Consumer Identity and Marketing Implications: Indian Urban Youth," *International Journal of Consumer studies* 40 (December 2016): 435.

<sup>11</sup> Worldometers, accessed December 28, 2017, [www.Worldometers.info](http://www.Worldometers.info).

<sup>12</sup> UNICEF India, accessed December 28, 2017, <https://data.unicef.org/country/ind>.

<sup>13</sup> Augustine Kanjamala, *The Future of Christian Mission in India: Toward a New Paradigm for the Third Millennium* (Oregon: Pickwick Publications, 2014), 7.

and engineering personnel, in the pace of its agricultural expansion, and in its rich and vibrant cultural exports of music, literature, and cinema. Though the country's population remains largely rural, India has three of the most populous and cosmopolitan cities in the world and three other fast-growing, high-technology centres, where most of the world's major technology and software companies have their offices.<sup>14</sup>

### **1.3. Economic Reality**

The socio-economic factor deeply impacts Indian families and therefore Indian vocations. India being a sub-continent that predominantly consists of middle-class and poor, one could safely say that in India, vocations mainly come from these sectors. Therefore, an analysis of the socio-economic situation in the country is critical. India houses 17.74% of the world's population in its 2.5% of the world's surface and has a share of 2.8% of the world's GNP.<sup>15</sup> On the one hand, there is economic progress. The GNP has grown by 6 to 8% and more since Independence, and higher-quality consumer goods are becoming increasingly available. On the other hand, there are signs of greater misery, rising unemployment, and more families sinking below the poverty line. According to the World Bank report of 2013, 30% of the Indian population lives below the international poverty line. In contrast, this level of poverty is not found in any first world country. After more than seventy years of independence, India still has the world's largest number of poor people in a single country.

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<sup>14</sup> Encyclopaedia Britannica, accessed December 29, 2017, <https://www.britannica.com/place/India/Demographic-trends>.

<sup>15</sup> World Bank Data-2015, accessed January 2, 2018, <https://data.worldbank.org/indicator/NY.GDP.MKTP.CD>.

India is an agriculturally-based country, where more than 50% of the population is dependent on agriculture as the main source of income and provider of employment.<sup>16</sup> But due to unscientific methods of farming and lack of irrigation facilities, Indian farmers have mostly remained poor. The poverty profile reveals that the poor are predominantly rural, young, poorly educated, mostly employed in the agricultural sector, and live in larger households with more children. Further, there is a huge disparity of income distribution among the various classes of people in India. Though the size of the middle class has grown during the last four decades, the gap between the rich and the poor has increased.<sup>17</sup> The UN Human Development Report ranks India at No. 135 among 187 countries in terms of human development.<sup>18</sup> Human progress requires a substantial investment in the social sector, particularly education, health, and nutrition. But public expenditure on these social sectors has grown only marginally over the years. As a result, only 20% of Indians have access to modern medicine. Forty percent of children suffer from malnutrition. Of the 23 million children born every year, 2.5 million die within the first year. Of the rest, one out of nine dies before the age of five and four out of ten suffer from malnutrition. Life expectancy is approximately 57 years.<sup>19</sup>

As far as employment is concerned, in a country that needs at least 10 million new jobs a year, the number of employees in the formal and informal sector has declined due

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<sup>16</sup> Madhusudan L, "Agriculture Role on Indian Economy," *Business and Economics Journal* 6, no. 4 (2015), accessed December 29, 2017, <https://www.omicsonline.org/open-access/agriculture-role-on-indian-economy-2151-6219-1000176.pdf>.

<sup>17</sup> Walter Fernandes, "India's Socio-Economic Situation and the Poor" (Paper presented at the National Assembly Bangalore, September 20-24, 2000): 5.

<sup>18</sup> Human Development Report 2016: Human Development for Everyone, accessed January 3, 2018, [http://hdr.undp.org/sites/default/files/2016\\_human\\_development\\_report.pdf](http://hdr.undp.org/sites/default/files/2016_human_development_report.pdf).

<sup>19</sup> Fernandes, "India's Socio-Economic Situation and the Poor," 5.



to profit orientation and no thought of social justice and employment generation.<sup>20</sup> Most middle and upper-class persons belong to the dominant castes and most Dalits and tribals remain poor. Christians enjoy very low poverty rates in urban areas but their advantage in the rural areas is small.<sup>21</sup> The Dalit and tribal Christians are also part of the majority poor that exist in India and most of the vocations to priestly and religious life come from these sectors of the society.

The poor in India live severely constrained lifestyles due to deprivation of adequate education, health services, and the benefits of development. Therefore, it is natural that they dream of upward socio-economic mobility through good education, better jobs, and a better quality of life. Priesthood and religious life can become a channel for such upward mobility. This is certainly the case in the context of Asia, where priestly and religious life is generally seen as a step upward on the social and even the economic scale, a step into the culture of the higher middle class.<sup>22</sup> Therefore, the question of whether the candidate is genuinely drawn to religious life and all it implies, or is primarily seeking upward mobility, becomes an important factor when considering a candidate's motivation for the priesthood and religious life.

#### **1.4. The Socio-Cultural Realities**

The contemporary culture plays an important role in the life of young people. Therefore, when looking at the reality of vocations in a particular context, it is essential

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<sup>20</sup> Ibid., 10.

<sup>21</sup> Arvind Panagariya and Vishal More, "Poverty by Social, Religious and Economic Groups in India and Its Largest States," (Working Paper, Columbia University, 2013).

<sup>22</sup> Orlando B. Quevedo, "The Asian Context of Vocation," *FABC Papers*, no 123 (2007): 10, accessed January 5, 2018, [http://www.fabc.org/fabc%20papers/fabc\\_paper\\_123.pdf](http://www.fabc.org/fabc%20papers/fabc_paper_123.pdf).

to see the culture emerging around us and the examples and models the contemporary secular world offers our young people. Vocations in India are very much confronted by the challenges of our world today, which is marked by globalization, materialism, and consumerism. Globalization is a complex process by which the world is becoming highly interconnected through economic, social, political, and cultural contacts. As a result, the world is shrinking in terms of time and space, making it feel smaller and distances shorter. Globalization accelerates the movement of populations from the less affluent parts of the globe into the major urban centres of the “developed” and “developing” countries.<sup>23</sup>

Therefore, today we see people and cultures formerly located in different parts of the world occupying the same physical terrain. Such cultural interaction affects how we live and interact with our neighbours. Moreover, the intensification of the communication network through satellite television, Internet and e-mail brings images quickly to our private homes, providing the resources with which to fashion new ways of being in the world. All these affect our traditional ways of living. Individuals recognize the infinite fragmentation that globalization has caused in their lives.<sup>24</sup> Thus, as Pope John Paul II states in *Ecclesia in Asia*, “Globalization has become both a blessing and a bane in the world of politics, economics, communications, education, environment, technology, religion, culture, family, and values.”<sup>25</sup>

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<sup>23</sup> S.M. Michael, “Socio-Cultural Challenges in Formation Today,” *Claretian Formation*, accessed January 4, 2018, <http://www.claretianformation.com/socio-cultural-challenges-in-formation-today>.

<sup>24</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>25</sup> Cited in FABC at forty years: responding to the Challenges of Asia, FABC Papers, No 138, FABC Plenary Assembly 10, 16 December 2012, Viet Nam, 15.

While there is no doubt that globalization has re-emphasized human rights, human freedoms, and equality, the globalized market has manipulated and aroused needs and desires which can only be satisfied by the latest, best, and fastest gadgets and consumer commodities. Speed has become the hallmark of today. The things that give instant results, success and happiness are accorded the highest value. Parents try to give in to all the needs of their children, fearing that denying their requests might lead them to suicide. Finally, we see a growing individualism, self-centeredness, egoism, and selfishness.<sup>26</sup>

This global shift in values and morals is seen in India. The Indian joint-family system that has traditionally helped people to develop strong personal relationships and provide support to one another in hard times has changed to a nuclear family structure due to globalization. Today, young people seek to lead independent lives. Further, these nuclear families are often divided due to strained relationships of the partners or to displacement of one or the other partner to a distant place in pursuit of employment.<sup>27</sup> Families are becoming smaller, with one or two children. In addition, young people often choose to live alone when they reach 18 years of age, and to seek employment with one of the multi-national companies, thus leaving their education midway.

With the process of globalization, access to television in India has grown from 20% in 1991 to 90% in 2009 of the urban population. In the rural areas, satellite televisions have become part of most households.<sup>28</sup> Widespread internet access, the

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<sup>26</sup> Ibid.

<sup>27</sup> Jyoti Jindal, "Globalization, It's Socio-Economic Impact in India," *International Journal of Emerging Research in Management & Technology* 2, no. 12 (December 2013): 42, accessed January 4, 2018, [http://www.ermt.net/docs/papers/Volume\\_2/issue12\\_December2013/V2N12-126.pdf](http://www.ermt.net/docs/papers/Volume_2/issue12_December2013/V2N12-126.pdf).

<sup>28</sup> Steve Darné, "The (limited) Effect of Cultural Globalization in India: Implications for Culture Theory," *Poetics* 33 (2005): 35.

construction of shopping malls, and the profusion of multiplex theatres have further affected the culture. While computer and internet facilities are good in themselves, they also hold great potential for misuse. Studies show that the internet has also brought widespread, concrete expressions of hedonistic culture.<sup>29</sup> Expressions of adult sexual behaviour are easily accessible on the internet, thus leading to changes in sexual activity amongst teenagers, notably pre-marital sexual relationships. Such sexual promiscuity in society has caused the youth to devalue the gift of celibacy and to fail to perceive the sacredness of human sexuality.<sup>30</sup> Further it has led to a lack of understanding of the priesthood and religious life even among Christian youth.

The materialistic and consumeristic culture of the world has led youth to consider money and pleasure the highest values in society. Therefore, young people have come to resist a life in which charity, living simply, and practicing obedience and chastity carry the greatest value. Young people today are also encouraged by peers and family to measure their success in terms of careerism. This understanding of personal achievement dampens the noble desire to find fulfillment in serving others.<sup>31</sup>

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<sup>29</sup> Marysia Weber, "Pornography, Electronic Media and Priestly Formation," *Homiletics & Pastoral Review* 108, no. 7 (April 2008): 8-18, accessed January 4, 2018, <http://www.hprweb.com/2008/04/pornography-electronic-media-and-priestly-formation>.

<sup>30</sup> Edward J. Barns, "Sociological and Cultural issues affecting priestly vocations," *OSV Newsweekly* (November 2006), accessed on January 4, 2018, <https://www.osv.com/OSVNewsweekly/Story/TabId/2672/ArtMID/13567/ArticleID/8055/Sociological-and-cultural-issues-affecting-Priestly-Vocations.aspx>.

<sup>31</sup> *Ibid.*

### **1.5. Multi-Religious Context: Strengths and Weaknesses**

India is a complex country with a rich diversity of cultures, religions, castes, classes, and languages. There are five predominant religious groups in India, namely Hindus, Muslims, Christians, Buddhists, Sikhs, and Jains. Apart from these major religions there exist many sects and sub-sects in India. According to the 2011 Census, 79.8% of the total population is Hindu, 14.23% Muslim, and 2.3% Christian (27.8 million overall with Catholics at 14.9 million). Sikhs number 1.72%, Buddhists 0.7%, Jains 0.37%, other religions 0.66%, and others 0.24%.<sup>32</sup> The percentage of Christians in South India is larger than in North India, with the exception of a few states in northeastern India. Even though Christians are a small minority, they nevertheless make a great contribution to the country in the areas of education, health care and service, all of which are recognized by the government.<sup>33</sup>

This pluralism and diversity, however, sometimes causes deep conflicts and difficulties at all levels of Indian social life. Constitutionally, India is a secular state, but large-scale violence has periodically occurred in India since Independence. In recent decades, communal tensions and religion-based politics have become more prominent. Although India is generally known for religious pluralism, the Hindutva ideology propagates the belief that India belongs to Hindus, and that Christians and Muslims are “aliens.” Many proponents of this ideology portray violence against Muslims and Christians as a form of “self-defence” against “invaders.” Hindutva

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<sup>32</sup> All India Census Data 2011, accessed January 4, 2018, <http://www.census2011.co.in/religion.php>.

<sup>33</sup> Joe Mathias, “A New Pedagogy for Integral Human Formation of Candidates to Priesthood in India,” *Joskiran: Journal of Religion and Thought* 9, no. 2 (August 2012): 173.

ideology is at the core of Sangh Parivar (fundamentalist Hindu nationalists) politics and its expression in violence against religious minorities. Throughout the history of post-Independence India, both Muslim and Christian communities have faced repeated attacks from Hindu activists. As the Hindutva ideology has grown more powerful over the years, many Hindutva activists have participated in riots against minority communities.<sup>34</sup>

The violence has increased against Christians, especially against priests and religious in recent years, and is a recognized pattern today. Whether it be the hacking to death of Sr. Rani Maria in Indore, or Fr. Arul Doss in Orissa, the parading naked of Fr. Christudas in Dumka, attacks on prayer halls, or the burning of Bibles in Gujarat, the burning alive of Rev. Staines and his two young sons in Orissa, there is a pattern in the attacks against Christian communities in India. The persecution of Christians in Kandhamal, Orissa in 2007 and 2008 are still vivid in the eyes of Christians in India. The violence virtually amounted to a religious cleansing of Dalit and Tribal communities who were converted to Christianity.<sup>35</sup>

The pattern of violence is a relatively new political reality in India's communal conflict. It has its basis in the fundamentalist Hindu nationalists' intolerance of Christian names, culture, worship, lifestyle, and outlook. At the core of this hostility lies the belief that Christianity poses a threat to the fundamental social structures of caste by empowering Dalits and tribals through education and health care facilities.<sup>36</sup> In the

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<sup>34</sup>Ambrose Pinto, "The Challenges of Hindutva to Minorities, Christians and Dalits," *Vidyajyoti Journal of Theological Reflection* 79, no 5 (May 2015): 324-325.

<sup>35</sup> Michael, S.M., "Culture and Missionary Formation", *Vidyajyoti Journal of Theological Reflection*, 57, no 12 (December 1993): 719.

<sup>36</sup> Pinto, "The Challenges of Hindutva to Minorities," 334.

present-day electoral politics, marginalized communities such as the Dalits and Tribals are vote-bank to afford political control to the influential upper-caste Hindu groups. The Sangh Parivar recognize that in converting to Christianity, Dalits and Tribals become socially and educationally empowered and become conscious of their rights. Therefore, they aggressively oppose the evangelical work of the Christian missionaries, even, as noted, to the extent of using physical violence against priests, religious and lay people.<sup>37</sup>

In Asian Countries, and especially in India, vocations are realized within a multi-religious and multi-cultural environment. The majority of the young people who join, or aspire to join religious orders study in Christian schools, but since they live and learn with neighbours of different religions, they have already experienced the dialogue of life. The influence of priests and religious working in a multi-religious and multi-cultural context can motivate them to choose to live and work in a similar fashion and environment. At the same time, it is also possible that young people may grow up in a loose religious upbringing in which the basic tenets of faith are inadequately transmitted to them until they enter the houses of formation. Further, many of the vocations in India come from ethnically, linguistically, and religiously conflicted environments. These environments can affect young people adversely, teaching them to nurture fear and biases against each other.<sup>38</sup>

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<sup>37</sup> Michael, "Socio-Cultural Challenges in Formation Today."

<sup>38</sup> Quevedo, "The Asian Context of Vocation."

## 1.6. Christianity in India: Gifts and Challenges

The Thomas Christians of Kerala were a small minority who learned to live in peace with the larger community.<sup>39</sup> In 345 CE, the “Syrian” Christians who arrived from Persia to Malabar, India, interacted and amalgamated with the Indian Christian community. Gradually, everything ecclesiastical in India became essentially East-Syrian. By the fifth century the ecclesiastical ties between Persia and the Christians of India were regularized and strengthened, resulting in the use of Syriac as their ecclesiastical language as well as hierarchical dependency on the Persian Church.<sup>40</sup> For around fifteen centuries they lived their faith untroubled in their way of belief and worship, distinct from their Jain, Buddhist, Hindu, and later Muslim neighbours. They lived in harmony with their neighbours and surroundings.<sup>41</sup>

However, Christianity gained prominence in India only with the arrival of Vasco da Gama, the Portuguese explorer who came in search of ‘pepper and souls’ in 1498. Shortly after the Portuguese arrived, they began to observe that the Thomas Christians were different from themselves, with a Syriac rather than a Latin liturgy and married rather than celibate priests. Further, they traced their apostolic heritage to Thomas rather than Peter, and did not recognize the pope as the head of the Church. The Portuguese Franciscan missionaries tried to correct these perceived errors, but did not succeed. However, in Goa, the Portuguese established their major base for trade along with the largest Roman Catholic Diocese beyond Europe. Initially the missionaries were

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<sup>39</sup> Roger E. Hedlund, *Indian Christianity: An Alternate Reading* (Delhi: Christian World Imprints, 2016), 11-12.

<sup>40</sup> *Ibid.*, 14.

<sup>41</sup> Leonard Fernando and G. Gispert-Sauch, *Christianity in India: Two Thousand Years of Faith*, (Delhi: Penguin Books, 2004), 72.



Franciscans, Dominicans, Augustinians, and diocesan priests, but with the newly created Society of Jesus, the Jesuits became the most prominent missionaries in India under the authority of the pope and as the representative of the King of Portugal. Catholic Christianity continued to expand beyond Goa, especially in South India with the arrival of young Jesuit missionaries such as Francis Xavier, Roberto De Nobili, John De Britto and Joseph Beschi. Further, the Jesuits extended their missionary work to North India under the guidance of Rudolph Acquaviva and Jerome Xavier.<sup>42</sup>

After Independence, the Church in India grew rapidly. The Capuchins established mission centres in North India, the Jesuits among the Adivasi (tribals) belt in the Jharkhand region, and the Salesians of Don Bosco among the tribals of Northeast India.<sup>43</sup> The Dalits and tribals are the most exploited of society, both economically and politically. It was first the Lutherans and then the Catholic missionaries, notably the Jesuits from Belgium, and Fr. Constant Lievens in particular, who spread the Gospel among them by taking up their cause against oppressive economic forces in the society. Together, the Northeast and Jharkhand regions form 24.5% of all Christianity in India, and remain a centre of Roman Catholic vitality in North India.<sup>44</sup>

Today Christianity is found all over India, with major populations in parts of South India, the Konkan coast, and Northeast India. There are Christians, and especially Catholics, who belong to higher castes or classes, converts from the Dalits (the oppressed group), and Adivasis (the indigenous people). Around 80% of Christians, particularly in

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<sup>42</sup> Hedlund, *Indian Christianity*, 22-23.

<sup>43</sup> Fernando and Gispert-Sauch, *Christianity in India*, 203.

<sup>44</sup> *Ibid.*, 209-210.

northern India, are tribals and Dalits. India has three Catholic rites, with most Catholics belonging to the Latin Rite. The two Oriental rites—the Syro-Malabar and the Syro-Malankara—follow Syriac liturgical patterns. According to data from the Conference of Catholic Bishops of India (CBCI), India has 174 dioceses, of which 132 are Latin, 31 Syro-Malabar, and 11 Syro-Malankara.<sup>45</sup> With 27.8 million followers, Christianity is now India’s third-largest religion after Hinduism and Islam in a population of 1.3 billion people. Catholics number 14.9 million.<sup>46</sup>

As noted, though Catholics are a small minority, their presence is qualitative in terms of their service to society, particularly the poor and the marginalized.<sup>47</sup> The Catholic Bishops’ Conference of Asia (FABC) recognizes that the Church in India has moved from being a “receiving Church” to being a “sending Church.” This means that dioceses and religious congregations are now sending religious and priests as missionaries to other Asian countries and to all the other continents of the world.<sup>48</sup> The Church in India to a large extent has become successful in carrying out its evangelizing mission by way of the Triple Dialogue elaborated by the FABC, namely, dialogue with the poor (integral liberation and option for the poor), dialogue with cultures (inculturation), and dialogue with other religious and philosophical traditions (inter-religious dialogue).<sup>49</sup>

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<sup>45</sup> Conference of Bishops Conference, accessed January 4, 2018, <http://www.cbci.in/DiocesesofIndiaDisp.aspx>.

<sup>46</sup> All India Senses Data 2011, accessed January 4, 2018, <http://www.census2011.co.in/religion.php>.

<sup>47</sup> Mathias, “A New Pedagogy,” 173.

<sup>48</sup> “FABC at forty years: responding to the Challenges of Asia,” 26.

<sup>49</sup> *Ibid.*, 7.

Many educational institutions are creating excellent leaders and qualified individuals, both at a national and an international level. The Church in India contributes a great deal to the liberation of the people from poverty, oppression, and injustice, and to the freedom of those bogged down by pain and misery.<sup>50</sup> The Church leaders are continually working for the educational rights of minorities and the downtrodden in society, especially by supporting the Dalits and tribals in their struggles. By setting up many social action and legal cells in cities and villages, the Church works for the rights of the poor. Through orphanages, boarding houses, hospitals, dispensaries, leprosaria, rehabilitation centres, and homes for the aged, destitute, and those with disabilities the Church provides medical care and service to the poor and the marginalized.<sup>51</sup>

Despite all the contributions to the progress of the country, the Church in India is facing serious challenges arising both from outside the Church and from within. As noted, many priests, nuns and lay Christians have become the victims of communal hatred and violence. Anti-Christian laws are drawn up, Christians falsely accused of many crimes, churches desecrated, nuns sexually assaulted and even killed, and anti-Christian materials printed and distributed. In all this, the elected government either remains silent or indirectly supports the violence against Christians.<sup>52</sup>

Christianity has existed for twenty centuries in India and yet it is considered a foreign religion owing allegiance to a foreign power, because Christians' life style,

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<sup>50</sup> Benny James Karinattu, "The Prospects of Christian Mission in the light of present day challenges," accessed January 9, 2018, <https://bennykarinattu.wordpress.com/2013/11/14/the-prospects-of-christian-mission-in-the-light-of-present-day-challenges>.

<sup>51</sup> Ibid.

<sup>52</sup> Matthew M. Vallipalam, "Challenges of Initial Formation," *Sanyasa, Journal of Consecrated Life* 2, no.2 (2007): 135.

theological expression, and mode of worship deeply reflect the West. Further, Christians are also accused of destroying the culture of India by drawing people into a Western life style.<sup>53</sup> Christians, and especially priests and nuns, are also accused of forced conversions. Many Indian churches are still financially dependent on their European and American counterparts, and the foreign aid is spent mostly on construction of massive buildings and the purchase of prime properties in the cities. In contrast to the huts of Christians living around them, the best and the costliest buildings in every town belong to Christian Churches.<sup>54</sup> Thus, even though the majority of the Catholics of India are poor, the Church in India has given the impression of being a rich Church.<sup>55</sup> The massive institutions have not only made the Church very institutional, but also alienated the poor Christians from the institutional Church.<sup>56</sup> Further, though the Church in India is concerned for the poor and is engaged in many forms of charity and development work, it has by and large failed to address the roots of injustice that cause the poverty.<sup>57</sup>

Another important challenge before the Church in India today is the caste system within the Church itself. The Christian missionaries failed to bring the full message of the gospel of Jesus Christ by completely ignoring the sociological disorder. They paid more attention to converting people to Christianity than changing the social system. Sadly, the Indian churches have not only failed to confront the caste system, but the system has been

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<sup>53</sup> Vijaya Joji Babu Valle, "Becoming Indian: Towards an Indian Contextual Ecclesiology," *A Dissertation presented in partial fulfilment of the requirements for the Doctor's Degree in Theology*, Katholieke Universiteit Leuven (2010): 10.

<sup>54</sup> *Ibid.*, 15.

<sup>55</sup> Kurien Kunnupuram, *The Indian Church of the Future* (Mumbai, India: St Pauls Publications, 2007), 29.

<sup>56</sup> Joji Babu, "Becoming Indian," 16.

<sup>57</sup> Benny James Karinattu, "The Prospects of Christian Mission."

brought into the Church structures themselves.<sup>58</sup> Despite condemnations and statements against the caste system by Pope John Paul II and the CBCI, caste still remains a strong force in the Indian Church, and in many places, especially in South India, the Church and religious congregations are divided among themselves according to caste.<sup>59</sup> In North India however, where a majority of Christians are Adivasis (tribals) and Dalits, the biggest problem within the Church is the domination and control of the Church leadership by bishops, priests and religious from South India.<sup>60</sup> Finally the alienation of the people, especially the youth, from the institutional Church, the erosion of faith and morals, and the rise of materialism and consumerism are causes for deep concern in the Indian Church.<sup>61</sup>

Amidst all these challenges, the Church needs to take courageous steps to manifest to the world her priorities and values. The Church has the task of preparing young people to become agents and co-workers of the Church's mission of love and service. She also has the responsibility of forming men and women to be inculcated in the religious and cultural pluralism of India, to know the cultural history, religious beliefs, and traditions of other religions. The formation of clergy, religious and laity to creatively engage in inter-religious dialogue and to open to the insights of the truth, holiness and goodness of religions and cultures in India without in any way

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<sup>58</sup> Jebamalai Raja, "The Problem of Caste within the Church," *Journal of Dharma: Dharmaram Journal of Religions and Philosophies* 24, no. 1 (January-March 1999): 30.

<sup>59</sup> Joji Babu, "Becoming Indian," 168.

<sup>60</sup> *Ibid.*, 165.

<sup>61</sup> Paul Parathazham, *Christianity in India: Sociological Investigations* (Bangalore, India: Dharmaram Publications, 2013), 113.

compromising, syncretizing, or relativizing the authentic Christian faith, is the need of the hour.<sup>62</sup>

### **1.7. The Present State of Consecrated Life in India: Strengths and Weaknesses**

Consecrated life is very much present and rooted in the culture of India. The Indian religious and cultural currents, especially Hinduism, Buddhism and Jainism, are very appreciative of monastic life and the quest for a deep spiritual life. Hinduism and Buddhism encourage monastic life even from childhood. The rich religious traditions of India have always encouraged people to give up their pursuit of worldly pleasures in search of oneness with the divine (*nirvana*). The understanding of God being reflected in all created reality, which in turn becomes a means of encounter with the divine (*daiva-anubhava*) has led people to lives of love and service. Therefore, the religious and cultural settings of India have made the Indian Church a fertile soil for vocations to the priesthood and religious life. India has been very productive in religious vocations, and many congregations from other countries have come to India in search of vocations.<sup>63</sup> Their arrival has afforded not only more choices to young people in answering a call to consecrated life, but has brought to Indian Christianity various possibilities of following Jesus in radical and creative ways.<sup>64</sup>

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<sup>62</sup> S. M. Michael, "Socio-Cultural Challenges in Formation Today."

<sup>63</sup> Matthew Vattamattam, Understanding the Consecrated life from Eastern Perspectives, accessed January 9, 2018, [http://www.claret.org/sites/default/files/documentosbiblioteca/consecrated\\_life\\_from\\_the\\_pespective\\_of\\_the\\_eastern\\_cultures.pdf](http://www.claret.org/sites/default/files/documentosbiblioteca/consecrated_life_from_the_pespective_of_the_eastern_cultures.pdf).

<sup>64</sup> John Sankarathil, "Consecrated Life in India: The Asset of a Model, or a Challenge to Remodel," *Vidyajyoti Journal of Theological Reflection*, 71 (March 2007): 188.

Religious or priestly life was traditionally considered the primary path to holiness and the call to a higher and more perfect life. This was due in large part to the belief that holiness was something that was not within everyone's reach and therefore not a part of normal Christian life. It was believed that priests and religious, free from worldly concerns and distractions, were able to attain greater holiness than the laity. Furthermore, the holiness of the laity consisted in imitating the holiness of priests and religious.<sup>65</sup> The Second Vatican Council, however, made a momentous shift in this traditional understanding of holiness through its renewed understanding of the Church and its reconstruction of the distinction between the religious and the laity. Though this shift resulted in fewer vocations to consecrated life in many countries, in India, instead of decreasing, consecrated life continued to increase despite Christians being a small minority.<sup>66</sup>

It is very encouraging to note that Christian families, at least in some parts of India, still consider the call to consecrated life a blessing and encourage their children to commit themselves to this life. As a result, there are almost 125,000 priests and religious in India today.<sup>67</sup> According to the Conference of Religious India (CRI) statistics, three male religious congregations, namely the Jesuits, the Salesians of Don Bosco, and the Carmelites of Mary Immaculate are doing well in terms of numbers, while almost twenty-one clerical institutes have fewer than fifty members each. The brothers' institutes are generally smaller and the congregations fewer. As for the sisters, there are four

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<sup>65</sup> Kathleen F. Hart and Thomas N. Hart, "The Call to Holiness in Christian Marriage," *Spirituality today* 36, no. 1 (Spring 1984): 15, accessed November 16, 2017, <http://www.pathsoflove.com/articles/holiness-in-marriage-hart.html>.

<sup>66</sup> Sankarathil, "Consecrated Life in India," 188.

<sup>67</sup> Inigo Joachim, "Consecrated life in Asia Today," accessed January 9, 2018, <http://inigojoachim.com/consecrated-life-in-asia-today>.

congregations with over 2,500 members each, though approximately 54 congregations have a combined membership total of about 1,400.<sup>68</sup> Generally, however, the Church in India is experiencing a proliferation of vocations to the priestly and religious life. At the same time, this trend raises the question of whether this indicates a greater religious sense or the impact of socio-economic factors.<sup>69</sup>

The steady growth in consecrated life has resulted in greater involvement in social and frontier ministries in India.<sup>70</sup> It has given rise to sending priests and religious to serve not only in the developed countries of the West, such as in Europe and the United States, but in various developing parts of Asia, Africa, and Latin America. They are actively engaged in the “‘evangelizing’ or ‘new evangelizing’ mission of the universal Church.”<sup>71</sup> Another positive trend in religious life in India is an increasing number of members joining from minority cultures, language groups, tribes, and other groups. There is also a shift in the source of vocations—from the south and west to the east and north of India, where Christianity is new. There is no doubt that the multi-culturality has enriched the congregations at the same time as it poses some major challenges in their ministries, community life, formation, and administration.<sup>72</sup>

While acknowledging the gift of consecrated life to the universal Church and society at large, we cannot deny some of the challenges consecrated men and women face

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<sup>68</sup> Mathew M. Vallipalam, “Religious Vocations in India: A Sociological Analysis,” *The Living Word* 101, no. 2 (March-April 1995): 112-115.

<sup>69</sup> Joe Mannath, “The Cost of Discipleship: Our Life as Vowed Religious, Here and Now,” Keynote address delivered at the National Assembly of the Conference of Religious of India (Chennai, January 2000): 5

<sup>70</sup> Joachim, “Consecrated life in Asia Today.”

<sup>71</sup> Sankarathil, “Consecrated Life in India,” 188-189.

<sup>72</sup> Joachim. “Consecrated life in Asia Today.”



in India today. The priesthood and religious life have lost much of their credibility. This is due to several factors, among them the inability on the part of some priests and religious to listen to the contrary opinions of the laity with an open mind and heart, and to recognize their charisms in the Church. There is also a lack of humility and a willingness to go down to the poorest of the poor and serve them rather than remaining in one's comfort zones of security.<sup>73</sup>

The majority of Indian Catholics are poor, and thus the vow of poverty has a witness value in India. However, the elite life-styles, buildings with strong compound walls, and the rich institutions have not only become counter witnesses to the poor but have also prevented the poor Christian children from attending the religious institutions.<sup>74</sup> Today, many religious are caught up with the administration of schools, colleges, hospitals, and other social work. As a result, they find too little time to move away from their offices and spend time in prayer so that they might bear witness to a gospel lifestyle. Too much administrative work has left them with no time to interact with the people—to listen to their stories and experiences and to pray with and for them.<sup>75</sup> The widespread malaise of individualism, consumerism, and careerism has considerably weakened the spirit of commitment and availability among many religious.<sup>76</sup>

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<sup>73</sup> Orlando B. Quevedo, "Today's Challenges to priestly life and ministry" *FABC clergy seminar in Bangkok* (May 11, 2010), accessed December 7, 2017, <http://archdioceseofcotabatoneews.blogspot.com/2010/05/todays-challenges-to-priestly-life-and.html>.

<sup>74</sup> Joji Babu, "Becoming Indian," 16.

<sup>75</sup> Inigo Joachim, "Consecrated life in Asia Today."

<sup>76</sup> Mannath, "The Cost of Discipleship," 6.

Because many congregations are so eager for numbers, the central factors of proper discernment of vocational aptitude, the authentic desire of the young person, and freedom from family pressures are often ignored.<sup>77</sup> Consequently, the quality of religious life has suffered to a great extent. It has also posed many challenges to the formation of the candidates. The challenges of religious life today are also due to the diminished level of human and emotional maturity with which the candidate joins a congregation.<sup>78</sup> Many of our candidates today come from small nuclear families where they are pampered and protected by their parents and relatives. Therefore, when they join the religious order, they find it difficult to cope with hardships, discipline, failures, opposition, and physical and emotional stress. As a result, they easily become discouraged, and suffer from fear, inferiority/superiority complex or active/ passive aggression. There is also a low level of maturity among those in formation compared to their secular peers in terms of responsibility, hard work, and integrity. The environment of the formation houses seems to preserve a prolonged adolescence for many years. We very often see peer group identification and group loyalty taking precedence over one's own personal convictions.<sup>79</sup>

There is also a culture of mediocrity and a lack of depth.<sup>80</sup> Since the religious life in India guarantees future security, there is sometimes a tendency not to excel in the given field of studies. Sometimes, the secular studies are taken seriously but not the religious studies such as philosophy and theology. Fr. Adolfo Nicholas, the former

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<sup>77</sup> Ibid.

<sup>78</sup> Thomas D'sa, "Creative Contemplative Dimension in Religious / Priestly Formation from an Indian Perspective," *Vidyajyoti Journal of Theological Reflection* 71 (February 2007): 110.

<sup>79</sup> Mathias, "A New Pedagogy," 175.

<sup>80</sup> D'sa, "Creative Contemplative Dimension in Religious / Priestly Formation," 111.

general of the Society of Jesus, points out that one of the negative impacts of the modern world is superficiality. This superficiality has crept into our religious formation, resulting in a lack of rigor both spiritually and academically. Therefore, the challenge today is to move from mediocrity to excellence. The religious life in India also faces the challenge of finding formators who might serve as role models to our people in formation. Most of the formators, though well qualified in spirituality, psychology and counselling, are not able to form the candidates by personal example of having deeply experienced God and the challenges of the mission.<sup>81</sup> Therefore, one of the pressing needs today in Indian religious life is formators who can integrate their knowledge with their personal experience.

### **1.8. Vocational Crisis – the Need for a Paradigm Shift**

The various challenges of the priesthood and religious life offer opportunities to walk new roads, explore new possibilities, pose new questions, and respond with new strategies, as people are changing, objectives differ, and new needs are emerging. There is a need to redefine and remodel the life-style, ministries, vocation promotion, formation, and administration of the religious congregations in order to make them more relevant and appealing to this rapidly-changing world.<sup>82</sup> Although Asia is one of the major sources of vocations for the universal Church, this is not the entire story. In reality, there has been a decline in vocations both quantitatively (in certain areas) and qualitatively: because of the decline in numbers, religious orders have precipitated the

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<sup>81</sup> Ibid.

<sup>82</sup> Inigo Joachim, “Consecrated life in Asia Today.”

recruitment process, with the result that congregations are ending up with candidates who are far less qualified for the demands of religious life.<sup>83</sup> Indian formators face this dilemma on a large scale. Moreover, the way religious life is lived today has radically changed Catholic attitudes toward priests and religious in some parts of the country.

The Western world was the source of Christian life and its propagation for many centuries. Missionary priests and religious from the West travelled to various parts of Asia and Africa and spent their lives there, contributing to the education, health care, social development, and evangelization in the non-Christian areas.<sup>84</sup> However, in the Western world, the number of priests and religious has decreased over the years. The 2017 Pontifical Yearbook and the 2015 Statistical Yearbook of the Church (*Annuarium Statisticum Ecclesiae*) both reflect a continual decline in the number of priests and religious in Europe, North America, and Oceania compared to Africa and South-East Asia, where the numbers of priests and religious have increased.<sup>85</sup>

As for the Jesuits, Africa and South Asia have shown a steady increase in numbers over the past 25 years whereas in East Asia and Latin America, there has been a steady decline in numbers. The Jesuits of the United States and Europe have a much sharper decline, with about one-half the number of Jesuits as they had 25 years ago.<sup>86</sup>

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<sup>83</sup> It is precisely for this reason that Ignatius saw the importance of spiritual conversation. In the early days of the Society, they wrestled with the tension between increasing the numbers of candidates while discerning the readiness and spiritual maturity of the candidates.

<sup>84</sup> Sankarathil, "Consecrated life in India," 189.

<sup>85</sup> The Pontifical Yearbook 2017 and the "Annuarium Statisticum Ecclesiae" 2015, edited by the Central Office of Church Statistics of the Secretariat of State, April 6, 2017, accessed January 16, 2018, <https://press.vatican.va/content/salastampa/en/bollettino/pubblico/2017/04/06/170406e.html>.

<sup>86</sup> Thomas P. Gaunt, "By the Numbers: Jesuit Demography," Nineteen Sixty-four (CARA) ed. by Mark M. Gray, accessed January 16, 2018, <http://nineteensixty-four.blogspot.com/2015/01/by-numbers-jesuit-demography.html>.

Because many religious congregations in the West are facing a dearth of recruits, the average age of a religious is approximately 60 years and therefore, a number of religious institutes are facing organizational death.<sup>87</sup> Pope John Paul II acknowledges this crisis of vocations in the West, and in his Post-Synodal Apostolic Exhortation *Perfectae Caritatis*, states, “the problem of vocations is a real challenge which directly concerns the various institutes but also involves the whole Church.”<sup>88</sup>

According to John Sankarathil, the term “vocation crisis” means “the lack of sufficient priests and religious to continue the smooth functioning of the Church worldwide.”<sup>89</sup> Statistically speaking, as regards the Catholic population and vocations ratio, India thus far has no such crisis. In other words, there seem to be many young people still seeking a consecrated life. In sharp contrast to what has happened in Western Europe and North America, the number of religious in India has jumped from 35,648 in 1969, to 79,735 in 1994,<sup>90</sup> and stands at nearly 125,000 today.<sup>91</sup> In this sense, there has been no “vocation crisis” as such in India. However, we cannot ignore the influence of the modern world on young people discerning their vocation to priesthood and consecrated life in India. As noted, we already see a shift in the source of vocations from the South and West of India, where Christianity is old, has a strong presence, and is increasingly influenced by modern culture, to the North and North-East, where

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<sup>87</sup> Vallipalam, “Religious Vocations in India,” 117.

<sup>88</sup> John Paul II, Post Synodal Apostolic Exhortation, *Vita Consecrata*, no. 64, March 25, 1996, accessed January 15, 2018, [http://w2.vatican.va/content/john-paul-ii/en/apost\\_exhortations/documents/hf\\_jp-ii\\_exh\\_25031996\\_vita-consecrata.html](http://w2.vatican.va/content/john-paul-ii/en/apost_exhortations/documents/hf_jp-ii_exh_25031996_vita-consecrata.html).

<sup>89</sup> Sankarathil, “Consecrated life in India,” 189.

<sup>90</sup> Vallipalam, “Religious Vocations in India,” 115.

<sup>91</sup> Inigo Joachim, “Consecrated life in Asia Today.”

Christianity is relatively new. The growing trend of vocation crisis in the West and the shift in the source of vocations is a clear sign of changing trends in religious vocations even in India.

These trends are due to several factors. Some of the forces contributing to a lack of priests in Europe and the United States have begun to emerge in Asia and specifically, in India. The Indian economy, which has boomed for years, offers more career options. Many priests once came from large agricultural rural families. Now, however, families are moving to the cities, far from the tight-knit parishes that for generations kept Indian Catholics connected to their faith. And educated young Catholics are increasingly attracted to fields such as engineering and technology. Though many academic institutions are managed by priests and religious, the Catholic students of those institutions are not attracted to priestly or religious life due to the erosion of the credibility of priests and religious. Many parents do not speak about religious life, or encourage their children to pursue such a life. When offered options for the future, very few of the children show interest in the religious/priestly life. There is also a growing anti-clericalism and anti-religious feeling among many Christians, especially the youth. Finally, in many places, families simply have fewer children today than in the past.<sup>92</sup>

As noted above, India also faces a decline in the qualitative level of vocations to religious life and priesthood due to eagerness for numbers and early recruitments. While promoting vocations, recruiters tend to ignore questions of maturity, undue family pressure, and authentic desire for the religious life. As a result, a good number of

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<sup>92</sup> Ibid.

formees leave during their years of formation.<sup>93</sup> Quoting Karl Mannheim, Matthew Vallipalam explains, “The age between 17 and 21 is one of personal experimentation with life.”<sup>94</sup> Vallipalam further suggests that “young people at this stage are not steady and stable enough to choose a set of values and beliefs and as such are incapable of taking a mature decision regarding their life. In other words, they lack the psycho-social maturity that is essential for a life-long commitment and successful pastoral ministry.”<sup>95</sup> At the same time, factors such as poverty and unemployment, the pursuit of conveniences and comforts in life, better education facilities, higher status and prestige in society, and the desire to escape from the hardships of life can attract candidates to consecrated life.<sup>96</sup>

Therefore, vocation promoters and others responsible for vocations have a solemn responsibility to choose suitable candidates by discerning their level of maturity and their ability to examine their own motivations and to decide accordingly. As *Perfectae Caritatis* states, “Candidates should be suitably and carefully chosen.”<sup>97</sup> Therefore, on the one hand, a proportional, quantitative growth in vocations is necessary for the involvement of consecrated persons in the pastoral life of the Church. On the other, we cannot compromise with regard to the quality of the candidates when promoting

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<sup>93</sup> Mannath, “Discipleship,” 6.

<sup>94</sup> Vallipalam, “Religious Vocations in India,” 120.

<sup>95</sup> Ibid.

<sup>96</sup> Ibid., 121.

<sup>97</sup> Pope Paul VI, The decree on the Adaptation and renewal of religious life, *Perfectae Caritatis*, no. 24, October 28, 1965, accessed 25 January 2018, [http://www.vatican.va/archive/hist\\_councils/ii\\_vatican\\_council/documents/vat-ii\\_decree\\_19651028\\_perfectae-caritatis\\_en.html](http://www.vatican.va/archive/hist_councils/ii_vatican_council/documents/vat-ii_decree_19651028_perfectae-caritatis_en.html).

vocations. Therefore, the religious congregations have to find creative ways of addressing the crisis of vocations both in terms of quantity and quality.

## **1.9. Conclusion**

The socio-economic, cultural, and multi-religious context of India, as well as the reality of the Church and consecrated life, presents both challenges and new opportunities to reimagine consecrated life and vocation promotion today. The context of India also invites every consecrated person and every institute to take the mandate of *Perfectae Caritatis* seriously concerning its call to the Religious Congregations to a “constant return to the sources of all Christian life and to the original spirit of the institutes and their adaptation to the changed conditions of our time.”<sup>98</sup> In the present context of India, Ignatian “spiritual conversation,” which is intrinsically dialogical, contextual and mission oriented in nature, will be an important tool for Jesuits and others to help young people rightly discern and verify their life vocation according to the “signs of the times.” The following chapter will take up the textual and historical foundations of spiritual conversation in the life of Ignatius and the first companions, and the unfolding of this practice in the early Society.

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<sup>98</sup> Ibid, no. 2.



## Chapter Two

### Spiritual Conversation: An Ignatian Way of Proceeding

#### 2.0. Introduction

“Spiritual conversation” is a technical Ignatian concept. It is found in the foundational literature of the Society as well as in the letters composed during the chronological period these cover, and implies an apostolic method essential to the Ignatian charism.<sup>1</sup> Ignatius makes it very clear in the letter to his brother Martin in 1532 that his complete dedication in Paris is to his studies and many conversations.<sup>2</sup> However, through the use of adjectives such as pious, good, spiritual, edifying, proper, and so forth, he clarifies immediately that the conversations in which he is involved are not worldly.<sup>3</sup> Spiritual conversation was extremely significant for Ignatius. He recognized that it was not only an effective means for “helping souls,” but for attracting and selecting young men to join him in this ministry. Furthermore, he also prescribed “spiritual conversation” as one of the apostolic ministries of the Society of Jesus. Realizing the importance of spiritual conversation in the decision-making process, the 36<sup>th</sup> General Congregation (2016) reaffirmed the need for spiritual conversation in animating apostolic communal discernment.

In the context of vocation crisis in India today, it is very important to return to this vital Ignatian tradition in order to draw inspiration for the ministry of helping young people to discern their vocation. Therefore, in this chapter, I intend to bring out the

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<sup>1</sup> German Arana, “Spiritual Conversation: A Privileged Apostolic Instrument of the Society of Jesus,” *Review of Ignatian Spirituality* 36, no. 1 (2005): 22.

<sup>2</sup> *Epistolario*. I, 80; cited in *Ibid.*, 25.

<sup>3</sup> Arana, 25.

significance of “spiritual conversation” in the life and mission of Ignatius. I will do so by studying Ignatian primary sources, namely Ignatius’s personal experience of conversation with God and others (the *Autobiography*), his testimony of intimate conversation with the Trinity (*The Spiritual Diary*), his proposal of the dynamics of spiritual conversation (*The Spiritual Exercises*), and finally, his propagation of the practice of spiritual conversation (*The Constitutions and the Letters*). Part One briefly explores the Ignatian understanding of spiritual conversation. Part Two considers the spiritual conversation in Ignatian sources. Part Three examines the practice of spiritual conversation in the early society.

## **2.1. Understanding Spiritual Conversation**

The terms “to converse” or “conversation” suggest a close encounter or a communication between/among two or more persons that is characterized by interpersonal qualities such as familiarity and intimacy. It is also synonymous with “to dialogue,” which suggests the back-and-forth nature of communication.<sup>4</sup> Spiritual conversation is a form of dialogue between/among two or more people that involves sharing one’s personal experiences of finding God in daily life while paying attention to one’s desires, dreams, and emotions.<sup>5</sup> Further, through spiritual conversation, one seeks to identify what God is saying in every circumstance of life as narrated by someone within the conversation.<sup>6</sup> Thus, spiritual conversation makes it possible to detect the

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<sup>4</sup> Ibid., 23.

<sup>5</sup> Luz Marina Diaz, “Spiritual Conversation as the Practice of Revelation,” *The Way* 55, no. 2 (April 2016): 43.

<sup>6</sup> Luz Marina Diaz, “Spiritual Conversation as Religiously Educative,” *Religious Education* 112, no. 5 (October - December 2015): 477.

presence and action of God in the experiences shared. In turn, this helps one to discern, take responsible actions, and make sound decisions for individual and communal wellbeing in accordance with the divine-human encounter that takes place within the conversation.<sup>7</sup> The two key features of spiritual conversation are “deep listening and storytelling,”<sup>8</sup> or, as the GC 36 puts it, “active listening and intentional speaking.”<sup>9</sup>

## 2.2. Spiritual Conversation in Ignatian Sources

The root word “converse” in its two forms (*conversar* and *conversación*) appears 39 times in Ignatian literature (*Spiritual Exercises, Constitutions and Autobiography*) and in his letters 316 times.<sup>10</sup> Ignatius uses the Spanish verb *conversar* (to converse) and the noun *conversación* (conversation) in two different senses. The first sense is the general one, and it means “contact with persons.” The second sense is more precise, and indicates interacting with or “talking with” someone. Its simplest meaning in English is sincere talk with another person, the kind of comfortable, satisfying conversation whereby we truly get to know someone else.<sup>11</sup>

According to David Fleming, the word “conversar” can also mean “to be conversant with” something or someone—that is, to truly know them deeply. It denotes “to have

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<sup>7</sup> Diaz, “Spiritual Conversation as the Practice of Revelation,” 48.

<sup>8</sup> Ibid., 43.

<sup>9</sup> General Congregation 36, October 2 – November 12, 2016, decree 2, no. 5, accessed October 26, 2017, <http://jesuits.org/gc?PAGE=DTN-20170215020206>.

<sup>10</sup> Ignatio Echarte, *Concordancia Ignaciana* (Bilbao: Ediciones Mensajero, 1996). See also Arana, “Spiritual Conversation,” 22.

<sup>11</sup> Thomas H. Clancy, *The Conversational Word of God* (St Louis: The Institute of Jesuit Sources, 1978), 11.

dealings with.” To converse with someone is to know them and to be involved with their lives. Fleming comments further that “in the Ignatian scheme of things, to converse is one of our ways of loving. . . .Ignatius must have been a master of this kind of conversation. He seems to have had an extraordinary gift for friendship.”<sup>12</sup> Thomas Clancy remarks that “the two concepts of dealing with someone and conversing with someone overlap and in most cases can be used interchangeably since one of the most important things about spiritual conversations was learning what not to say and what to do before and after.”<sup>13</sup> It was this art of conversing deeply and meaningfully with the other that helped Ignatius and his companions to discern the will of God for themselves and for the apostolate.

### **2.2.1. Personal Experience of Conversation: The *Autobiography***

The *Autobiography* of Ignatius Loyola was written between 1553 and 1555, in the last years of Ignatius’s life.<sup>14</sup> The *Autobiography* was not written by Ignatius himself; however, at the behest of his companions, Ignatius dictated it to Luis Gonçaves da Câmara.<sup>15</sup> Although chronologically, the *Autobiography* is a posthumous work, we can find the beginnings of spiritual conversation in it. Its origins, the means it employed, and the purpose for which it was intended, suggest that the *Autobiography* not only narrates

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<sup>12</sup> David L. Fleming, *What is Ignatian Spirituality?* (Chicago: Loyola Press, 2008), 50-51.

<sup>13</sup> Clancy, *The Conversational Word of God*, 11.

<sup>14</sup> Joseph A. Munitiz and Philip Endean, trans., *Saint Ignatius of Loyola: Personal Writings* (London: Penguin Books, 2004), 4.

<sup>15</sup> *Ibid.*, 5. De Câmara writes in his prologue to the *Autobiography* that “our father (Ignatius) said that Master Nadal and others of the Society had many times asked him to do something, and that he had never made up his mind about it, but that, having recollected himself in his room, he had a great inclination to do it, and he had made his mind up completely.”

the history of conversion-conversation but itself is an authentic spiritual conversation.<sup>16</sup> It was indeed the fruit of the conversation between Ignatius and de Câmara. As Peter Hans Kolvenbach remarks, “by choosing carefully the words that inspire, Ignatius communicates his experience of familiarity with God, a God who is at the root of all the events of his life.”<sup>17</sup>

In the *Autobiography*, we notice a movement in the spiritual conversation. The conversation which Ignatius had begun with himself in Loyola moves to conversation with God in Manresa. In turn, his conversation with God provides him with the knowledge and material to converse with others and help them in their spiritual growth. Finally, the *Autobiography* reveals a shift in the focus of his desire for spiritual conversation, namely from self to the Lord and the mission. It is this shift that helped Ignatius to gather and sustain his first companions.

#### **2.2.1.1. Conversations with Self**

Ignatius was aware of the practice of spiritual conversation as it existed in the tradition of the Catholic Church and made regular use of it, most likely after his initial conversion experience at Loyola (for example, in the practice of confession). As a young knight, Ignatius had been badly injured in battle when a large French army attacked Pamplona in 1521. As the loyal soldier of a small band of the Spanish army, he had taken the lead to fight the lost battle. The cannonball that hit his right leg shattered not only his leg but also his dreams of earning glory and fame in the world. His bravery, however, was not in vain. The French army rewarded Ignatius by bringing him home to his

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<sup>16</sup> Cited in Dario Restrepo, “Conversación,” in *Diccionario De Espiritualidad Ignaciana*, ed. Jose Garcia de Castro, Madrid, 2007, 473. All translations from the Spanish to English are those of Cristobal Madero.

<sup>17</sup> Cited in Restrepo, “Conversación,” 473.

family's castle of Loyola without harming him. Despite one agonizing operation after another, Ignatius still had to spend nine months in bed to regain movement and flexibility in his wounded leg. During these seemingly interminable months, he asked for books on chivalry to pass the time. However, his sister-in-law gave him the only two available books: the *Vita Christi* (Life of Christ) by the Carthusian monk Ludolph of Saxony and the *Lives of the Saints* by Jacobus de Varazze.<sup>18</sup> From these books, he seems to have learnt the value of spiritual conversation, which slowly took root in his heart and opened an internal conversation with himself and with God.<sup>19</sup> As he began to read, he began a conversation with the texts. Reflecting on what he had been reading, he began to ask himself: What if I were to do what Saint Francis did, or what Saint Dominic did? In this way he began to converse with himself on many things he considered good, all the while proposing to himself the possibility of doing difficult and heroic things. Furthermore, the loneliness and silence that developed during his long convalescence opened his heart to a deep spirituality.

The readings caused Ignatius to reflect on his past, and gave rise to two types of thoughts and feelings. In other words, in the process of discernment, two new characters appeared in his internal conversation: the Good Spirit and the Bad Spirit.<sup>20</sup> On the one hand, he was enthralled with Jesus and the saints, by their utter freedom from power and prestige, public opinion, and possessions, but on the other, he continued to see himself as a strong and brave hero, the knight in shining armour who would win the lady of his

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<sup>18</sup> Candido de Dalmases, *Ignatius of Loyola: Founder of the Jesuits His Life and Works* (St. Louis, MO: The Institute of Jesuit Sources, 1985), 43.

<sup>19</sup> Restrepo, "Conversación," 473.

<sup>20</sup> *Ibid.*

dreams no matter the obstacles.<sup>21</sup> However, the constant conversation between the Good Spirit and the Bad Spirit taking place within him during and after his recuperation helped him to distinguish between the thoughts coming from God and those coming from the evil spirit. As a result, he developed an ardent desire to follow Christ in poverty and penance in the manner of the saints.<sup>22</sup>

### **2.2.1.2. From Conversation with Self to Conversation with God**

In Manresa the conversation shifts from himself to God. Ignatius, like other spiritual figures, is indebted to the tradition of the Church. However, it is also true that he was an innovator, as is clearly seen in the discernment of spirits. This is even more noticeable with regard to his conception of spiritual conversation, which was more acquired than innate; learned and moulded patiently rather than spontaneously, especially during and after the years of his conversion.<sup>23</sup> Or better yet, since he had no one to teach him in these matters, he entered by divine grace, in the school of God, who instructed him directly; “At this time [in Manresa] God was dealing with him in the same way as a school teacher deals with a child, teaching him.”<sup>24</sup>

Through this analogy, Ignatius revealed how God had been acting and wished to act in his life. He understood that God was clearly present and at work in his life. In the

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<sup>21</sup> “Autobiography,” nos. 7-8. All translations of the “Autobiography” are taken from Joseph A. Munitiz and Philip Endean, trans., Saint Ignatius of Loyola: *Personal Writings*, (London: Penguin Books, 1996).

<sup>22</sup> David Lonsdale, “Discernment of Spirits,” in *An Ignatian Spirituality Reader: Contemporary Writings on Ignatius of Loyola, the Spiritual Exercises, Discernment, and More*, ed. George W. Traub (Chicago: Loyola Press, 2008), 175.

<sup>23</sup> Restrepo, “Conversación,” 473.

<sup>24</sup> “Auto,” no. 27.

*Autobiography*, Ignatius mentions five illuminations as examples of the fruits of his conversation with God.<sup>25</sup>

In the first four illuminations, Christ is envisioned first as the Son of the eternal Father, then as the Creator of all things, then as sacramentally present in creation in the Eucharist, and finally as revealed and active in human form in the person of Jesus. These four illuminations, and especially the fifth illumination, which he experienced on the banks of the River Cardoner, created in him a genuine desire to help souls. This was the enlightenment he found so great “that everything seemed new to him.”<sup>26</sup> It was an event which not only brought about a spiritual awakening and an awareness of a new way of being, but also strengthened his spirituality for the rest of his life. The grace Ignatius received at Manresa through these five illuminations left him with such a profound sense of Christ’s heartfelt desire for the world that it became Ignatius’s earnest desire as well.<sup>27</sup> And this desire to help souls, which was born of Ignatius’s mystical experience at Manresa, found two principle outlets throughout his life, namely spiritual conversation and the corporal works of mercy such as helping the poor and the sick—a conversation through deeds.<sup>28</sup>

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<sup>25</sup> Charles J. Jackson, “Something that happened to me at Manresa: The Mystical Origin of the Ignatian Charism,” *Studies in the Spirituality of the Jesuits* 38, no. 2 (Summer 2006): 8.

<sup>26</sup> “Auto,” nos. 28-30; See Pedro Arrupe, “Trinitarian Inspiration of the Ignatian Charism,” *Studies in the Spirituality of the Jesuits* 33, no. 3 (May 2001): 6.

<sup>27</sup> Jackson, “Something that happened to me at Manresa,” 14.

<sup>28</sup> Clancy, *The Conversational Word of God*, 9.



### 2.2.1.3. From Conversation with God to Conversation with Others

The conversations Ignatius had with God led him to spiritual conversations with others. Juan Alfonso de Polanco, one of Ignatius's earliest biographers, wrote, "because these divine truths had a great effect in his soul he wanted to assist others by means of them. And he always had these desires to communicate to others what God had given him, finding by experience that not only did he not lose what he shared with others, but his store actually grew."<sup>29</sup> It is also evident from the *Autobiography* that Ignatius learned the value of spiritual conversation from the early days of his conversion in Loyola, while he had already decided to give his life to God. When he had no means available to begin the ministry of "helping souls" due to his confinement to bed, he simply began to speak to his friends and relatives who walked into his room about the things of God. And he discovered how effective it was since it benefitted their souls.<sup>30</sup>

Ignatius continued to cultivate spiritual conversation in Manresa and made it a regular habit in his life. In Manresa, as he did in Montserrat, he went in search of confessors and spiritual directors with whom he could have spiritual conversation and from whom he could seek advice about prayer and other spiritual practices. At the same time, many people began to seek him out as well, not because he knew much about spiritual things, but because he had a strong desire for God.<sup>31</sup> In this way, he began to adopt spiritual conversation as a deliberate strategy in his ministry of helping souls. He had begun to recognize that engaging people in relatively informal, spontaneous, one-on-

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<sup>29</sup> Ibid.

<sup>30</sup> Barton T. Geger, "Cura Personalis: Some Ignatian Inspirations," *Jesuit Higher Education* 3, no. 2 (January 2014): 15, accessed January 17, 2018, <https://epublications.regis.edu/cgi/viewcontent.cgi?article=1068&context=jhe>.

<sup>31</sup> "Auto," no. 21.

one conversations about God, faith and best practices in the spiritual life was a powerful means to edify both himself and others.<sup>32</sup> But in his enthusiasm to share his divine experiences and zeal to help souls, he had to confront the Inquisition, more than once, in order to continue to practice this ministry of spiritual conversation. Notably, in Salamanca, the Dominicans were doubtful of his orthodoxy and judged him and his companions guilty of heresy by associating them with the Illuminati.<sup>33</sup> However, his ability to converse with God and others enabled him to confront the Inquisition. Therefore, when questioned regarding the content of their preaching, Ignatius answered, “we do not preach but we do speak about things of God, with certain people in an informal way, such as after a meal with some people who invite us.”<sup>34</sup>

Ignatius continued to make use of every opportunity to engage in one-on-one spiritual conversation with spiritual directors, confessors for his own benefit, and, increasingly, with others to help them spiritually. When he revisited his own native town of Azpeitia in 1535, he preferred to live in a hospital so that he could engage those who came to see him in godly conversation. Though he preached in the parish church on Sundays and feast days, most of his ministry consisted of conversation and catechism.<sup>35</sup> Later that year, when he came to Venice, “he occupied himself in giving the Exercises and in other spiritual conversations” until he joined his companions at the beginning of

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<sup>32</sup> Ibid.

<sup>33</sup> The Illuminati, or “Alumbrados” in Spanish, were Catholics who claimed to be enlightened directly by the Holy Spirit and who therefore transcended the need for the moral norms and sacramental life of the institutional Church. For an account of the suspicions that Ignatius and his companions were under, especially Ignatius’s confessor Manuel Miona, see John E. Longhurst, *Luther’s Ghost in Spain* (Lawrence, Kan.: Coronado Press, 1964), 103-15.

<sup>34</sup> “Auto,” nos. 64-65.

<sup>35</sup> Clancy, *The Conversational Word of God*, 9.

1537.<sup>36</sup> As general of the Society of the Society of Jesus, besides administration, he involved himself in apostolates such as serving the poor, the sick, and prostitutes, and engaging in spiritual conversation.<sup>37</sup>

#### **2.2.1.4. From Self-Centered Conversation to Conversation Centered on the Lord and the Mission**

Ignatius made use of spiritual conversation not only to help souls but also to win over companions to help him in this mission. In 1521, Ignatius had begun his journey from Loyola to Jerusalem without any human companionship because of his staunch desire to have God alone as his refuge.<sup>38</sup> However, his firm intention to help souls by remaining in Jerusalem was thwarted by the Franciscan provincial, who had the authority from the Holy See to excommunicate anyone who didn't obey them.<sup>39</sup> In this process Ignatius learned to converse with the Church. Therefore, Ignatius returned to Barcelona from Jerusalem in the year 1524 with a threefold purpose: “to help souls, to study and to gather some companions.” Ignatius gradually became convinced of the fact that he could be of help to others and accomplish great things for God with the help of companions.<sup>40</sup> Through the means of spiritual conversation, he succeeded in gathering his first four companions—Calixto de Sa, Juan de Arteaga, and Lope de Cáceres, whom Ignatius encountered in Barcelona in 1525, and Jean Reynalde in Alcalá in 1526. However, this group did not last long due to lack of future mission plans. Moreover, their conversation

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<sup>36</sup> “Auto,” nos. 92-93.

<sup>37</sup> Clancy, *The Conversational Word of God*, 9.

<sup>38</sup> “Auto,” nos. 13, 35, 73.

<sup>39</sup> “Auto,” nos. 45, 46.

<sup>40</sup> “Auto,” no. 50.

was centered on Ignatius and in fact, they were known as “Iñiguistas.” However, Ignatius continued to persevere in his desire and toiled intensely to gather companions from the time he arrived in Paris on the 2nd of February, 1528.<sup>41</sup>

Given his initial failed attempts at constituting a permanent apostolic group, Ignatius, the master of spiritual conversation, was more cautious in selecting the companions in Paris. There, he became engaged in spiritual conversation with many young students and sought to motivate them to lead a virtuous life. At the same time, he was always on the lookout for young men who would respond generously to the “Call of the King” as he did in his life. And thus, through the instrumentality of spiritual conversation, Ignatius succeeded in gathering his first six companions, namely Pierre Favre, Francis Xavier, Diego Laínez, Alphonso Salmerón, Simon Rodriguez, and Nicolás Bobadilla, who formed the original nucleus of the Society of Jesus.<sup>42</sup> These seven were later joined by three Frenchmen, Claude Jay, Paschase Bröet, and Jean Codure, thus forming a group of ten companions on the same mission.<sup>43</sup>

This group, called “companions,” differed from the earlier group, the Iñiguistas, for whom Ignatius himself was the axis around which everything revolved. Although the newly constituted companions clearly relied upon Ignatius, who knew how to exercise leadership through conversations and fruitful relationships, the companions understood clearly that they were not following a human leader, or a “temporal king,” but rather an

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<sup>41</sup> “Auto,” no. 82.

<sup>42</sup> Ibid.

<sup>43</sup> Philippe Lecrivain, *Paris in the Time of Ignatius of Loyola* (Saint Louis, MO: The Institute of Jesuit Sources, 2011), 147-148.

“eternal king,” and that they were merely His companions (companions of Jesus).<sup>44</sup>

Here it would be profitable to examine how spiritual conversation helped Ignatius in discerning and selecting these companions in order to draw inspiration for vocation promotion and selection of suitable candidates for the Society of Jesus today. When Ignatius arrived at Sainte-Barbe in October 1529, he met Pierre Favre and Francis Xavier, who were friends and roommates. Juan de la Peña, their tutor and now the tutor of Ignatius, asked Ignatius to share the room with them. Whereas Favre was more silent, with scrupulous and depressive tendencies, Xavier was cheerful and energetic, and made up his mind quickly. Because Ignatius was finding the studies difficult at the beginning, Favre was asked by de la Peña to help him. They quickly got along well, and Ignatius gradually became Favre’s spiritual director. The process of conversation that would later be a feature of the tiny community of ten was thus initiated; each one gave what he had to the others.<sup>45</sup>

Favre recalled later that the “conversation on material things swiftly gave way to spiritual conversation; living together in the same apartment sharing the same table and the same common purse, in the end they were one in their desire and will and firm intention to choose a similar way of life.”<sup>46</sup> Favre also opened his conscience to his friend and master Ignatius and gradually learnt the examination of conscience and the practice of weekly confession and communion. However, despite his desires, Favre had to wait

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<sup>44</sup> José García de Castro Valdés, “Ignatius of Loyola and His First Companions,” in *A Companion to Ignatius of Loyola: Life, Writings, Spirituality, Influence*, ed. Robert A. Maryks (BRILL: Boston, 2014), 68.

<sup>45</sup> Javier Osuna, “Nine of My Friends in the Lord,” *Review of Ignatian Spirituality* 29, no.3 (1998): 48, accessed January 25, 2018, <http://www.sjweb.info/documents/cis/pdfenglish/199808905en.pdf>.

<sup>46</sup> *Ibid.*

for four years to make the Exercises in their fullness, until Ignatius felt he was ready. On the other hand, Ignatius's relationship with Xavier developed more slowly. Javier Osuna notes that although they became friends, "there was little spiritual resonance between them. Xavier did not take part in the spiritual conversations Ignatius and Favre were having . . . His dreams and ideals were different, and Ignatius had to work with him patiently." Gradually, God was conquering his heart by ordering his desires and disordered affections.<sup>47</sup> Thus, spiritual conversations, Ignatius's favourite means of gathering and forming companions, had begun to bear fruit. And so, Ignatius was able to say in the *Autobiography* "at this time he was conversing with Master Pierre Favre and Master Francis Xavier, whom he later won for the service of God by means of the Exercises."<sup>48</sup>

Ignatius won over Favre and Xavier through spiritual conversation, and continued to win other companions through this effective method of conversation. In 1533, two long-time and inseparable friends, Diego Laínez and Alfonso Salmerón, who had recently arrived in Paris, approached Ignatius for help in finding lodging. Laínez states that following on from that they developed "familiar conversation and friendship" with Ignatius. Both did the full Exercises in the same year, ending with the decision to join themselves to Ignatius's project of helping souls. Simão Rodrigues too became a companion by means of spiritual conversation, as he had found in these conversations the answers to his questions as to how he could better serve God. In this way, Ignatius, the

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<sup>47</sup> *Ibid.*, 62.

<sup>48</sup> "Auto," no. 82.

conversational apostle, quietly and slowly won over a group of “Friends in the Lord.”<sup>49</sup>

As Nadal states, Ignatius was able to do this because he “approached them with love and a desire for their well-being, while carefully observing their temperament and character.”<sup>50</sup> Therefore, Ignatius’s autobiography, as well as the witness of the Jesuits who lived with him, clearly demonstrates his intimate conversation with God and his ministry of spiritual conversation.

### **2.2.2. A Manual for Conversation: The *Spiritual Exercises***

The autobiography of Ignatius clearly shows us how his spiritual life developed around the idea of conversation. As Fleming explains, Ignatius developed his spiritual life “based on conversation with God in prayer. It is developed through conversation with others—spiritual directors, confessors, like-minded friends who share one’s ideals and way of life. It is expressed in conversation as ministry—sharing the gospel with others.”<sup>51</sup> And all these three conversations are embodied in the *Spiritual Exercises*. He states further that “in fact, the Exercises themselves are the product of years of conversation.”<sup>52</sup>

Ignatius developed the *Spiritual Exercises* from his own experience as a spiritual director of men and women seeking a deeper relationship with God. As a spiritual director, he would suggest ways to pray, scripture passages upon which to meditate, scenes to imagine, and ideas to ponder. Then he would talk with directees about what happened to them in prayer, and discern with them how God seemed to be leading

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<sup>49</sup> Osuna, “Nine of My Friends in the Lord,” 63.

<sup>50</sup> Clancy, *The Conversational Word of God*, 53.

<sup>51</sup> Fleming, *What is Ignatian Spirituality?* 51.

<sup>52</sup> *Ibid.*

them.<sup>53</sup> This reflected his belief that God converses directly and personally with the creature.<sup>54</sup> And having realized the significance of this important practice in his own life as well as in others' lives, Ignatius included it in the Spiritual Exercises. The *Autobiography* itself testifies to this fact, stating that "when he noticed some things in his soul and found them useful, he thought they might also be useful to others, and so he put them in writing."<sup>55</sup> Therefore the *Spiritual Exercises*, which is essentially a collection of these exercises, honed in conversation, is one of the influential books today with regard to developing one's relationship with God, others and the entire creation.

Étienne Grieu remarks that the "*Spiritual Exercises* in itself could be [interpreted] as a form of organized spiritual conversation" since it has an interactive aspect.<sup>56</sup> He states further, "this brings us to the point that spiritual conversation itself is an event with three participants: it involves not only the two interlocutors but is based on the awareness of a third actor, invisible but present, namely, the Spirit."<sup>57</sup> Similarly, Darío Restrepo states that Ignatius wrote this manual in the form of a multi-directional dialogue among several actors: between Ignatius himself through the text of the *Exercises* and the one who gives the exercises, between the giver of the exercises and the one who receives them, and between God and the exercitant. This is why the word[s] is at the

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<sup>53</sup> Ibid.

<sup>54</sup> SpEx. 15. All translations of the "Spiritual Exercises" are taken from Joseph A. Munitiz and Philip Endean, trans., Saint Ignatius of Loyola: *Personal Writings*, (London: Penguin Books, 1996).

<sup>55</sup> "Auto," no. 99.

<sup>56</sup> Étienne Grieu, "An Ignatian Way of Preaching the Gospel," *The Way* 47, no. 1-2 (January-April 2008): 167.

<sup>57</sup> Ibid.



center of the exercises, both in the exercitant and the director. Favre, the master of conversations, called the “conversations in the exercises” the fulfilment of this experience to exercise oneself spiritually.<sup>58</sup>

Restrepo further observes that like every manual, the *Spiritual Exercises* needs explanation and adaptation: the exercises are given and received. The text is not a book of personal reading; rather, the exercises are made and lived in dialogue and consist of a specific type of spiritual conversation in which the other is given the mode and order for proceeding.<sup>59</sup> The primary mode of making the Spiritual Exercises is the directed retreat, in which the retreatant converses with the director under the inspiration of the Spirit. Thus, while God speaks to every person heart to heart, that word needs to be shared in spiritual conversation. In the sharing, that word is clarified and freed of self-deception.<sup>60</sup>

#### **2.2.2.1. Annotations: Rules for Ignatian Conversation in Spiritual Exercises**

At the beginning of the Spiritual Exercises, Ignatius gives twenty annotations (Sp. Ex 1-20) as rules for “conversing in the Exercises.” Annotation 15 is considered the golden rule of Ignatian conversation. It states that the one who gives the Exercises “should leave the Creator to [converse] directly with the creature, and the creature with the Creator and Lord.”<sup>61</sup> Concerning this annotation, Restrepo states that the one who gives the Exercises needs “to know how to converse with people in such a way that they

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<sup>58</sup> Restrepo, “Conversación,” 473.

<sup>59</sup> Ibid., 474.

<sup>60</sup> Drew Christiansen, “Heart and Soul: The Role of Spiritual Conversation in Pastoral Care,” *America* 207, no. 3 (July 2002), accessed January 28, 2018, <https://www.americamagazine.org/issue/5147/article/heart-and-soul>.

<sup>61</sup> SpEx. 15.

can come to direct dialogue with God, and to know how to bring the neighbour to God without interfering with [God's] dealings with him/her.”<sup>62</sup> This is why Ignatius asks the exercitant in this spiritual experience to have a “conversion to the word” prior to a “conversion to the person.”<sup>63</sup>

Ignatius takes the “word” seriously, especially the word of God, and demands that it be used with truth, necessity, and reverence.<sup>64</sup> Therefore, in the first place, he takes the exercitant through a “general examination of the word” (with regard to vain oath, idle words, and gossip) and a process of purification from the slavery of sin (with regard to error, disorder, and non-integration). Then, as Restrepo expresses it, he will measure this word—in as much as it is an imitation of the Other word—against its original model of the incarnate Word:

It will seek its integration (order) in the Word that precedes, teaches, interpellates, and expects an answer that will be but an echo of this eternal Word. In order to do this, Ignatius prays with the meaning of each word (Sp. Ex 249). Finally, this echo-word, illuminated and released through a painful and eloquent silence, will proclaim the good news of the Lord, who returns in glory.<sup>65</sup>

In the Spiritual Exercises, it is clear that Ignatius draws his way of conversing from his ways of praying and vice versa because there is a close interrelation between the two that is characteristic of the Contemplation to Attain Love.<sup>66</sup>

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<sup>62</sup> Restrepo, “Conversación,” 474.

<sup>63</sup> Ibid.

<sup>64</sup> SpEx. 38.

<sup>65</sup> Ibid.

<sup>66</sup> Ibid.

### **2.2.2.2. The Colloquy: A Holy Conversation**

The Colloquy is one of the forms of a heartfelt, free-flowing conversation prominent in the Exercises. Colloquies are described in the terminology of personal relations with others, “as a friend speaks to his friend [...] communicating his thoughts and wanting counsel for them.”<sup>67</sup> The Spiritual Exercises are full of colloquies. At the end of most meditations in the Exercises, Ignatius recommends that we converse with Mary, Jesus, and God the Father. As Kevin O’Brien states, “colloquy is an intimate conversation between the person [making the Spiritual Exercises] and God the Father, or with Jesus, or with the Holy Spirit. Ignatius also includes intimate conversations with Mary, the Mother of Jesus or one of the saints.”<sup>68</sup> O’Brien goes on to suggest that “whatever the context, be ‘real,’ speaking from the heart. As in any meaningful conversation, make sure to leave times of silence for listening.”<sup>69</sup>

### **2.2.2.3. Contemplation on the Incarnation: Conversation within the Trinity**

In the Spiritual Exercises, Ignatius presents the Contemplation on the Incarnation as a model for conversation within the Trinity and their conversation with human beings. In this contemplation, the exercitant is asked to listen with the imagination to what the Father, Son and Holy Spirit are saying among themselves as they look down on the mess being made of our world prior to the Incarnation. Moved by the suffering of humanity, the divine persons decide to send one of the three of them to the world.<sup>70</sup> When all is

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<sup>67</sup> SpEx. 53-54.

<sup>68</sup> Kevin O’Brien, *The Ignatian Adventure: Experiencing the Spiritual Exercises of Saint Ignatius in Daily Life* (Chicago: Loyola Press, 2011), 95.

<sup>69</sup> Ibid.

<sup>70</sup> SpEx. 102-109.

ready, God sends a messenger to Mary to ask her to agree to be the virgin mother of the Messiah. The exercitant is asked to listen to the conversation that takes place between Mary and the angel Gabriel.<sup>71</sup>

Further, Ignatius invites the retreatant to listen to what everyone says, from the persons of the Trinity down to the greatest sinners, and to “reflect [*refletir*] afterwards, to take advantage of their words.”<sup>72</sup> Here, *refletir* means the reflective process that opens the word of God to personal discovery.<sup>73</sup> This contemplation creates the capacity in the person who contemplates for the relationship with the “Other” and with others, for his/her conversations with them, for the apostolic action, all based on love, because “love has to put more in the works than in words.”<sup>74</sup> In this way, the Exercises nurture a conversation with God and enable the individual to engage in more fruitful conversations with others in ministry.<sup>75</sup>

#### **2.2.2.4. Contemplation on the Love of God: Conversation through Deeds**

The final contemplation in the *Exercises* is the Contemplation on the Love of God (SpEx. 230–237). In this contemplation, Ignatius asks the retreatants to review the different ways in which God has communicated God’s love during the various weeks of the retreat. Having experienced God, who always desires to communicate with human

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<sup>71</sup> Ibid.

<sup>72</sup> SpEx. 107.

<sup>73</sup> Michael Ivens, *Understanding the Spiritual Exercises* (Gracewing, 1998), 93; *refletir* is a neologism coined by Ignatius to indicate the dynamic movement of the refraction of the Word that transforms one and the reflection that moves outward, in a desire to do something, to bear fruit—the affective response. Thanks to Fernando Barreto, SJ, for this explanation.

<sup>74</sup> Restrepo, “Conversación,” 475.

<sup>75</sup> Fleming, *What is Ignatian Spirituality?* 51.

beings, not only through words but through deeds, Ignatius wants the retreatants to note that love is expressed more in deeds than in words. Then, in the second point, he says that people in love share what each has with the other, communicating (*comunicar*) their love for each other in numerous ways that speak out love. What Ignatius stresses here is that “love is all about communicating. If there is no communicating there is no love.”<sup>76</sup>

Having reminded us how lovers communicate their love for each other, Ignatius presents the different ways God communicates God’s love to us. He asks the retreatants to ponder God’s gift to them in creation, God’s presence in those gifts, God’s labour or activity in them, and, most importantly, God’s self-gift as the Divine Giver, so as to better respond in gratitude to God’s gifts. Thus, after reviewing the different ways God has communicated love in our life, Ignatius asks the retreatants to communicate their love to God through the prayer response of the “Take and Receive.”<sup>77</sup> Through this prayer, retreatants communicate to God the desire to share what they have with God. Just as the love between two persons is marked by giving and receiving, likewise, the love we share with God enjoys a certain mutuality.

### **2.2.3. Conversation as the Ignatian Way of Proceeding: The Constitutions**

The first companions of Ignatius who gathered in Rome had entrusted the task of developing the *Constitutions* of the Society of Jesus to Ignatius and Jean Codure on March 4, 1541. However, with the death of Codure, the burden of composing the *Constitutions* fell on the shoulders of Ignatius. Therefore, most of the texts of the *Constitutions* were composed by Ignatius himself, since he did not have a secretary until

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<sup>76</sup> David L. Fleming, *Lessons From Ignatius Loyola* (St. Louis, MO: Institute of Jesuit Sources, 2009), 29.

<sup>77</sup> *Ibid.*, 31.

1547, at which time he acquired the assistance of Polanco. While preparing for the writing of the *Constitutions*, Polanco obtained some of Ignatius's working papers on various points, which Ignatius would use in his work of composition. Though most of the substance of these working papers was used, some of it was not. According to *Monumenta Historica*, some of these unused texts contain "a good treatise on spiritual conversation."<sup>78</sup>

Like the *Spiritual Exercises*, the *Constitutions* are the fruit of a triple spiritual conversation—with God, with oneself, and with others. As the *Autobiography* indicates, while drafting the *Constitutions*, Ignatius said Mass each day and presented to God the particular point he was treating and prayed over it.<sup>79</sup> At the same time, the conversations he had with his first companions influenced him, as in the Deliberation of 1539, to outline the directives of the new institute. In fact, the Society was born of a conversation—the deliberation of the first Fathers.

### **2.2.3.1. Deliberation of 1539: Conversation that Gave Birth to the Society of Jesus**

The 1539 Deliberation was a crucial event in the history of the Society of Jesus that transformed the little "community of friends" into a religious society.<sup>80</sup> When going to Jerusalem was no longer feasible, the first ten companions offered themselves to Pope Paul III for the universal mission of Christ. The pope accepted their oblation and thought of having them all in Rome itself since there was great harvest there. The companions too

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<sup>78</sup> Cited in Clancy, *The Conversational Word of God*, 14.

<sup>79</sup> "Auto," nos. 100-101.

<sup>80</sup> The 1539 Deliberation, *Deliberatio Primorum Patrum*, is written in Latin. It is not clear who among the first companions wrote the documents. See John Futrell, *Making an Apostolic Community of Love, The Role of the Superior According to St. Ignatius of Loyola* (St Louis: The Institute of Jesuit Sources, 1970), 187.

were thinking of working together in Rome. However, in the beginning months of 1539, when the pope indicated his intention of sending them separately rather than as a group, the question of the future survival of the group came into being. They knew that many of the bonds which had kept the group united so far would be broken with separation and dispersion anywhere in the world. Therefore, the ten companions gathered together daily from mid-lent 1539 until June 24<sup>th</sup> of that year for a series of deliberations on the future of the group.<sup>81</sup>

The Deliberation consists of two interwoven aspects: the content and the method. With regard to content, they discussed the question of group unity in the midst of dispersion for mission. After their discussion, heeding what they determined to be God's will, they decided to maintain their union despite the distance that might separate them. This led to a consideration of the need for a vow of obedience to one among them in order to more expeditiously carry out the will of God and the commands of the pope. After much deliberation on the pros and cons of obedience, they adopted a vow of obedience for the greater fulfillment of God's will, for the surer preservation of their unity, and for the good care of all their individual needs. Preserving a similar procedure, they made further decisions about many other questions. They concluded their deliberations with joy and union of hearts.<sup>82</sup>

In this important communal discernment of the first Fathers, what stands out is the methodology they used, namely, conversation with God and conversation with others.

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<sup>81</sup> Osuna, *Friends in the Lord*, 92.

<sup>82</sup> Jules J. Toner, "The Deliberation that Started the Jesuits: A Commentary on the *Deliberatio Primorum Patrum*, Newly Translated with a Historical Introduction, *Studies in the Spirituality of Jesuits*, 6 (1974): 190.

From the very beginning, the ten companions were united in their hearts and minds to seek God's will with regard to their vocation. However, owing to their diverse nationalities, cultures, temperaments, and perspectives, they were very much divided in their opinions concerning the form of common life they would adopt. Moreover, Ignatian teaching on discernment demanded indifference to any motivation for decision making other than the love of God, and single-hearted desire for God's greater glory in self and in others. Therefore, first of all, they decided to dedicate themselves to prayer, Masses, and meditations, and entrust their concerns to the Lord for the sake of purifying their hearts and after that, for finding light on God's will in the matter at hand.<sup>83</sup>

Second, after praying over the questions of concern during the day, each shared the fruit of prayer or personal reflection in the group at night. The hope was that the sharing might provide an opportunity for each to present to the others with simplicity and honesty what he had perceived as movements of the Spirit, or the fruit of his personal reflection on the point in question. On the other hand, listening respectfully to others, without contradicting the spiritual movements that the other has felt interiorly, can produce a spiritual echo or spiritual movements in the listener, giving rise to a fresh way of perceiving things. In this way, they arrived at a common decision that was accepted unanimously.<sup>84</sup> Thus, spiritual conversation became an essential tool for animating the communal discernment of the first Fathers of the Society.

The "conversation of the word" which Ignatius had with God and his companions thus became the "conversation of life." The *Constitutions* represent the continuation of

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<sup>83</sup> Ibid., 185-186.

<sup>84</sup> Ibid., 187.



that conversation, which was constitutive of the Society.<sup>85</sup> The conversation in the *Constitutions* has a triple apostolic function, namely, “helping souls,” seeking and recruiting candidates for the Society, and for missioning in the Society.

### **2.2.3.2. Conversation as an Apostolic Means of “Helping Souls”**

Conversation was a central part of Ignatius’s ministry of helping souls. As noted, the *Autobiography* presents many examples of the helping of souls by the Spiritual Exercises and also through spiritual conversation, preaching, and teaching of the young. Further, Ignatius prescribes this apostolic action, namely the help of souls, to the members of the Society. According to the Formula of the Institute, the aim of the society is “to strive especially for the defence and propagation of the faith and for the progress of souls in Christian life and doctrine” (FI, 1).<sup>86</sup> Further, the Formula lists the apostolic activities proper to the Society. These are

public preaching, lectures, and any other ministration whatsoever of the word of God, and further by means of the Spiritual Exercises, the education of children and unlettered persons in Christianity, and the spiritual consolation of Christ’s faithful through hearing confessions and administering the other sacraments. Moreover, he should show himself ready to reconcile the estranged, compassionately assist and serve those who are in prisons or hospitals, and indeed to perform any other works of charity.<sup>87</sup>

Though in the Ignatian perspective, spiritual conversation is the basic foundation of all apostolic action, Ignatius does not mention it in the Formula of the Institute. According to German Arana, because “this was the first juridical document that synthetically defines, presents, and approves the Institute of the Society, Ignatius consciously avoided the

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<sup>85</sup> Restrepo, “Conversación,” 476.

<sup>86</sup> John W. Padberg, *The Constitutions of the Society of Jesus and their Complementary Norms* (Saint Louis, MO: The Institute of Jesuit Sources, 1996), 3.

<sup>87</sup> *Ibid.*, 4.

inclusion of an expression, extremely significant to him, but not very known in the descriptive canonical language of the diverse ministries.”<sup>88</sup> However, Arana asserts that “it is clear that the diverse elements of the apostolic repertoire of the Formula are in many passages linked to the exercise of conversation.”<sup>89</sup> Further, in the broader Ignatian vision of the apostolic action of the Society, spiritual conversation is associated with confessions and the Spiritual Exercises. Moreover, the Formula is only a summary of the Society’s apostolic way of proceeding that is elaborated later in the *Constitutions*. For example, scholastics are admonished not to assume pastoral ministries such as conversations, confessions, and other activities with one’s fellowmen that impede their studies.<sup>90</sup> Thus, it seems Ignatius presumed the legitimacy of spiritual conversation as an apostolic ministry.

The *Epistolario* mentions the following as ministries proper to the Jesuits: spiritual conversation; the administration of the sacraments, especially confession and the Eucharist; the practice of the Spiritual Exercises; preaching; theological teaching and catechesis; and assisting the poor and needy—mainly in prisons and hospitals.<sup>91</sup> The apostolic means mentioned here are the same as in the Formula, except for the addition of spiritual conversation, which is, according to Arana, probably the biggest novelty in the Ignatian conception of helping souls.<sup>92</sup>

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<sup>88</sup> Arana, “Spiritual Conversation,” 26.

<sup>89</sup> *Ibid.*, 26.

<sup>90</sup> Const. 362. All translations of the “Constitutions” are taken from John W. Padberg, *The Constitutions of the Society of Jesus and their Complementary Norms* (Saint Louis, MO: The Institute of Jesuit Sources, 1996).

<sup>91</sup> Cited in Arana, “Spiritual Conversation,” 27.

<sup>92</sup> *Ibid.*, 28.

### **2.2.3.3. Spiritual Conversation as a Means to Search and Select Candidates for the Society**

After speaking about the supernatural means of preservation and development of the Society in Part X of the *Constitutions*, Ignatius speaks about the natural or human means (Const. 812-813). And he suggests that the human means “ought to be sought with diligence, especially well-grounded and solid learning, and a method of proposing it to the people by means of sermons, lectures, and the art of dealing and conversing with others.”<sup>93</sup> Ignatius wanted candidates suited to being apostolic workers, that is, young men of some education who were alert and pleasing personalities. He therefore instructed the Jesuits to be on the lookout for likely recruits for the Society through conversation.<sup>94</sup>

At the same time, in 1540, when the Society was founded and approved by Pope Paul III, people of various ages and occupations were attracted by the apostolic zeal and enthusiasm of the first companions and wished to join them. This flourishing of interest in the Society, however, presented Ignatius with another set of concerns. Because Ignatius had decided to accept a certain number of young candidates who might offer some hope of becoming good workers in the “vineyard of our Lord,”<sup>95</sup> he and his companions needed to develop an adequate means of selecting these candidates. Therefore, it became necessary for the Society to discern wisely and to select persons with the capacity to understand clearly what kind of life they were choosing, and who would be able to find happiness and peace in this life. It was also necessary for the

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<sup>93</sup> Const. 814.

<sup>94</sup> Clancy, *The Conversational Word of God*, 15.

<sup>95</sup> Andre de Jaer, *Together for Mission: A Spiritual Reading of the Constitutions of the Society of Jesus* (Saint Luis, MO: The Institute of Jesuit Sources, 2001), 23.

Society to form persons who would be dedicated to the service of God and to the spiritual welfare of others.<sup>96</sup> For this reason, Ignatius suggests that every candidate for the Society must be examined by means of a conversation.<sup>97</sup>

The General Examen, which precedes the *Constitutions* and forms part of it, deals with a series of questions that are asked of the candidate who wishes to join the order. These questions are aimed at gaining better knowledge of the candidate who wishes to join the Society. The *Constitutions* suggests that the Jesuit who engages in conversation with the candidate needs to pose questions about the candidate's age, health, obligations such as debts, or other contractual relations, his studies, qualifications, moral character, and personal motives, as well as the external influences that may have led him to seek admission. Further, candidates need to be asked about their parents with regard to religion, character, and degree of dependence on the candidate (whether emotional, financial, or otherwise). Since any notable bodily or mental defect, serious indebtedness or other obligation, previous membership in another religious order even for a day (indicating instability in vocation), disqualifies one for admission, the Jesuits need to have knowledge of the person before recommending admittance into the Society. The *Constitutions* clearly states that any undue influence and personal motives of the candidate need to be examined before admitting him to the Society.

The immediate objective of the questioning is to make a vocational discernment that continues during the two years of novitiate. Along with the vocational discernment, Ignatius also suggests conversation in order to determine whether the candidate possesses

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<sup>96</sup> Ibid., 42.

<sup>97</sup> Const. 142.

a certain natural aptitude for carrying out conversation, since Ignatius expected everyone in the society to aid his neighbour with spiritual conversation. Therefore, one of the questions put to the candidate is how well disposed he is to “good readings and good conversations.”<sup>98</sup> These conversations with the candidate are very important for the Society in order to sound the depths of the candidate’s love for Jesus Christ, his regular prayer habits, and his religious practices. Further it also helps us to know his level of self-knowledge, intellectual capacity for higher education, sense of sociability and availability, his familiarity with the Jesuits, physical health, concern for the poor, desire to live the vows of poverty, chastity, and obedience, and finally, his zeal for being a Jesuit.

These conversations differ fundamentally from those of the Exercises in terms of objective and underlying assumptions: whereas the conversations of the *Constitutions* are designed to determine the aptitude and requisite character for vocation, the conversations of the Exercises more often presume vocation and seek to help the candidate to further discern the will of God for his life. Moreover in the conversations of the *Constitutions*, the aspirant engages more immediately with the human element in the conversation, whereas in the Exercises, the conversation takes place directly between God and the creature (though presupposing the close guidance of the director).

#### **2.2.3.4. Account of Conscience: A Deeper Spiritual Conversation for “Missioning”**

In the *Constitutions*, the need for spiritual conversation continually appears in a specific way and becomes deeper through the “account of conscience” between the

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<sup>98</sup> Const. 46.

superior and the subject.<sup>99</sup> The account of conscience is vital in the stage of formation and in the moments of receiving and giving a new mission. Frank, loyal, honest, and trusting conversation is a requirement without which there cannot be mutual knowledge between the Jesuit and the superior who sends him on a mission. According to Ignatius, this is the key to sending the appropriate person to the particular mission. The account of conscience, which exists as binding only in the Society, is essential to the effectiveness and fruit of the apostolic ministries.<sup>100</sup>

In this spiritual conversation, the “interior” and the “exterior” are two constant interlocutors. Three fundamental concepts, among others, go from one extreme to the other in the Society’s *Constitutions*: the “purity of intention” (internal) and the “mission” (external), which, in combination, make possible the “help of neighbours.” In the Ignatian perspective, the “exterior constitution” is not and should not be more than the ripe fruit of the “inner law of charity and love that the Holy Spirit writes in the hearts” of those to be sent to the mission. This inner law of charity translates into practice in the preparatory conversation between the superior and the “missionary” prior to the missioning.<sup>101</sup> For Ignatius, the conversations of the candidate must be “good,” but those of the already admitted must be “pious or spiritual.”<sup>102</sup> This brief analysis of the spiritual conversation elucidates its central role in the life and mission of the Society.

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<sup>99</sup> Const. 95.

<sup>100</sup> Restrepo, “Conversación,” 477.

<sup>101</sup> Ibid.

<sup>102</sup> Const. 46, 247, 437, 648.

### **2.3. Practice of Spiritual Conversation in the Early Society**

Ignatius was the master of spiritual conversation. According to Nadal, Ignatius often spoke about such conversations and how to engage in them.<sup>103</sup> Further, Nadal states that “his burning zeal for souls and his gift of discernment enabled him to win over everyone he met. He got to know persons so well that he worked wonders with them. It was as if he could peer into a [person’s] soul; and when he spoke, [people] had to admit he knew them better than they knew themselves.”<sup>104</sup> Through this ministry of spiritual conversation, Ignatius was not only able to discern and recruit his first nine companions, but was able to discern the will of God for the Society of Jesus while composing the *Constitutions*. When Ignatius was elected as the general of the Society of Jesus, his primary mission was its governance. He carried out this mission entrusted to him by his early companions through the three-fold spiritual conversation, namely, with self, God, and others. He conversed with the divine persons while composing the *Constitutions* to discern the will of God for the Society, and conversed with his own companions through letters guiding them in how to carry on the mission of conversation in their apostolate.

#### **2.3.1. Ignatius’s Conversation with the Trinity: *Spiritual Diary***

The conversation with the Trinity permeates the entire Ignatian itinerary, from Loyola to Rome, where it crystallizes with his mystical diary and is visibly transformed into the conversation with the neighbor. This mystical dialogue is present, implicitly or explicitly, in the *Spiritual Diary*, the *Autobiography*, the *Spiritual Exercises* and the

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<sup>103</sup> John W. O’Malley, *The First Jesuits* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1993), 111.

<sup>104</sup> Clancy, *The Conversation Word of God*, 53.

*Constitutions*. However, it is the *Diary* that gives central place to the Trinity.<sup>105</sup> Indeed, as Pedro Arrupe notes,

the *Diary* shows how much the process of converting the original intuitions of the Cardoner and La Storta into institutional principles—which are nothing but the *Constitutions*—also does this in a Trinitarian light. Without this exceptional document, we could never guess what lies behind that modest phrase in the *Autobiography*: “all his life long, he had this sense of feeling a great devotion when praying to the Most Holy Trinity.”<sup>106</sup>

It is the *Diary* to which we must turn to fully appreciate the nature of the Trinitarian confirmation imparted to Ignatius with regard to a monumental problem besetting him at that time as the leader of the Society.<sup>107</sup>

Ignatius, through Jesus (as intercessor), asks the Trinity about the poverty of the Churches of the Society of Jesus.<sup>108</sup> In the illuminations he receives from the Trinity during his deliberations, he is confirmed in his election to follow his intuition with regard to the radical nature of this apostolic poverty.<sup>109</sup> Here it is profitable to consider the context of the *Spiritual Diary*, or journal, of Ignatius to see how the conversation between Ignatius and the Holy Trinity unfolded.

In 1541, the early companions entrusted the composition of the *Constitutions* to Ignatius and Codure. The latter died within months. As Superior General, Ignatius was heavily engaged in the administrative work and the expansion of the Society, while at the same time suffering from poor health. However, in 1544, Ignatius took up the

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<sup>105</sup> Restrepo, “Conversación,” 475.

<sup>106</sup> Arrupe, “Trinitarian Inspiration,” 25; *Auto*, 28.

<sup>107</sup> *Ibid.*, 27.

<sup>108</sup> Restrepo, “Conversación,” 475.

<sup>109</sup> Arrupe, 30.



composition of the *Constitutions* more actively and began to examine the kind of poverty most appropriate for the Society. The central issue was whether a fixed income should be allowed to the churches under the care of the Jesuits, however strictly, for the upkeep of the churches. He himself had been party to the decision taken by the early companions in 1541 allowing such an income. But now, Ignatius was uncomfortable with that proposal. He was of the opinion that the Society should observe the vow of poverty more austere, without tempering it in any manner.<sup>110</sup> Therefore, Ignatius desired to seek the will of God by making a spiritual discernment on poverty. Thus, he began a discernment process for forty days, from February 2 to March 12, recording day by day “what went on in his soul.”<sup>111</sup> These recordings of his intimate conversations with the divine persons are known as the *Spiritual Diary* of Ignatius.

Though Ignatius had a vision of the three divine persons at Manresa, there are only hints in the *Exercises* about the devotional importance of the Trinity. The one notable exception is the contemplation on the Incarnation, in which the exercitant is asked to contemplate the conversation among the three divine persons as they gaze down upon the world and its inhabitants. Further, in the course of the contemplation, they are asked to think of the words and actions of the divine persons and make a colloquy with them.<sup>112</sup> Ignatius’s *Diary*, on the other hand, is full of visions of the Trinity. Simon Decloux points out that of the sixteen passages in the *Diary* that Ignatius marked as

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<sup>110</sup> Brian O’Leary, The Mysticism of Ignatius of Loyola, *Review of Ignatian Spirituality* 38, no. 3 (2007): 89.

<sup>111</sup> “Auto.” no 100.

<sup>112</sup> SpEx. 102, 106-108, 109.

especially important, twelve concern visions of the Trinity.<sup>113</sup> For instance, in the entry for February 19, 1544, Ignatius writes that during Mass he experienced

very many lights and spiritual memories concerning the Most Holy Trinity which served as a great illumination to my mind, so much so that I thought I could never learn so much by hard study, and later, as I examined the matter more closely, I felt and understood, I thought, more than if I had studied all my life.<sup>114</sup>

He describes quite explicitly how he felt and saw the divine persons, speaking of brightness, light, fire, and so forth. Such experiences were often accompanied by many tears and feelings of warmth and pressure akin to a sense of being filled with love. These consolations he experienced in his encounter with the Trinity confirmed his decisions regarding the poverty of the churches under the care of the Jesuits, and other significant matters.

The outcome Ignatius was seeking in his discernment was not given to him in self-authenticating illumination—in the language of the Exercises, “first-time experience.” In the *Spiritual Exercises*, Ignatius gives three modes or times of seeking God’s will. The first mode consists of a spiritual experience given directly by God—a Pauline conversion, or apostolic vocation—which is known as a “first-time experience.” The second mode involves the experience of consolations and desolations as a means of making a sound election. The third mode consists of two possibilities. First, one can draw up a list of the pros and cons that concern the matter at issue; after prayer and particular attention to the purity of one’s motivation, one can weigh the importance of the

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<sup>113</sup> Simon Decloux, *Commentaries on the Letters and Spiritual Diary of St. Ignatius Loyola* (Rome: Centrum Ignatianum Spiritualitatis, 1982), 104.

<sup>114</sup> William Young, *The Spiritual Diary of St Ignatius* (Rome: Centrum Ignatianum Spiritualitatis, 1979), 25.

respective sides. Secondly, a number of considerations may help one withdraw to a certain distance from the problem and thus study it more objectively.<sup>115</sup>

Since Ignatius did not have a Pauline illumination (the first mode), he initially sought the third mode of seeking God's will in its varied forms. It is quite clear from the *Diary* that Ignatius tried this method by composing a separate document noting the pros and cons as he saw them in regard to the poverty issue. However, although he tried to make use of his reasoning powers through prayerfully considering the pros and cons of the argument, this method did not produce a result that was satisfying to him. So, he eventually turned to the second mode of making a sound election, namely to the experience of consolations and desolations.<sup>116</sup> Ignatius's *Diary* is full of the consolations and desolations he experienced during his encounter with the divine Persons, notably (as he also relates in the *Autobiography*), the experience of consolations he had of the Trinity during Mass and while writing the *Constitutions*, in the process of making decisions with regard to the text.<sup>117</sup>

### **2.3.2. St Ignatius's Instructions about Conversing: *The Letters***

Ignatius's own ministry was primarily that of spiritual conversation. When he was not talking with others, he was writing letters to those who sought his advice or whose spiritual progress he sought to foster. He wrote letters to people of different walks of life on various topics and themes. He also wrote letters to Jesuits on varied interests. One such interest was to motivate and help his fellow Jesuits to engage in spiritual

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<sup>115</sup> Joseph Munitiz, *The Spiritual Diary of Ignatius Loyola*, accessed February 5, 2018, <https://ignatiancamino.files.wordpress.com/2013/01/spiritual-diary-of-ignatius.pdf>.

<sup>116</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>117</sup> "Auto," no. 100.

conversation. Therefore, he wrote letters giving them instructions regarding the way of proceeding in relating to others. They are rules about conversation. The importance he accorded the ministry of spiritual conversation is seen in the instructions he gave for this purpose. Ignatius, an accomplished and experienced conversationalist, shared the fruit of his experiences that had proven useful to him in these instructions.<sup>118</sup> Though these instructions are spread throughout his writings, three specific instructions are found in two of letters. The first one is the letter to Salmerón and Broët, who were sent to Ireland by Pope Paul III in 1541 because of the heretical demands of Henry VIII. The second letter is written in 1546 to the Fathers sent to the Council of Trent. In these letters, Ignatius communicates the objective, internal disposition, and rules for discernment within the conversation.

#### **2.3.2.1. The Objective of the Conversation**

The objective of the conversation, Ignatius writes, is “to win someone over, and engage him in greater service of God our Lord.”<sup>119</sup> Here Ignatius is reiterating one of the purposes of spiritual conversation in the *Constitutions*, namely, to watch for candidates suited to be apostolic workers. It is also a typical case of Ignatian congruence between end and means. By using spiritual conversation as means, the person involved in conversation passionately seeks the other person’s good and commits himself for his/her growth and all that pertains to it. The only intention of the conversationalist needs to be that of transforming every human encounter, at all levels, into an event of grace.<sup>120</sup>

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<sup>118</sup> Arana, “Spiritual Conversation,” 27.

<sup>119</sup> “Fathers Salmerón and Broët,” *Letters of St Ignatius of Loyola*, trans. William J. Young (Chicago: Loyola University Press, 1959), 51-52, 51.

<sup>120</sup> Arana, “Spiritual Conversation,” 40.

### **2.3.2.2. Internal Disposition**

A fruitful conversation requires an appropriate disposition. It is an exercise that requires effort to be able to carry out a positive way of conversing. Therefore, Ignatius writes,

Do not forget that, if one is of a lively disposition and deals with another who is like him, there is very great danger of their failing to come to an agreement if they are not of one spirit. And therefore, if one knows that one is of such a lively disposition, he ought to approach another of similar traits well prepared by self-examination and determined to be patient and not to get out of sorts with him, especially if he knows him to be in poor health.<sup>121</sup>

Here, as in the Exercises, Ignatius speaks about the inner freedom, openness and balance that are needed on the part of the conversationalist. In other words, it is Ignatian “indifference” that describes the maturity of freedom that allows him beforehand not to incline to one option rather than another. Indifference allows his preference to be shaped by the single criterion of what will enhance his ability to love God and to embody that love for others in the concrete context. From the Ignatian perspective, a man who is closed in his feelings and ideas and lives in the defence of his ego will never become a good conversationalist. Further we see Ignatius instructing the Jesuits to have the fundamental attitude of human communion, namely, the attitude of empathy.<sup>122</sup>

### **2.3.2.3. Method of Conversation**

In conversation, one can either gain much or lose everything. Since as Jesuits they cannot avoid such dealings, Ignatius instructs them to go well prepared for it. He suggests to them to speak slowly and speak little, with consideration and affection, and only after having first listened quietly, so that they may understand the meanings, inclinations, and

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<sup>121</sup> Young, *Letters of St Ignatius of Loyola*, 51.

<sup>122</sup> Arana, “Spiritual Conversation,” 41.

desires of those who speak. They will thus know better when to speak and when to be silent. Further, he instructs them to express their views without showing attachment to their own opinion, without taking sides with any, and with the greatest possible calmness and humility, so that they avoid causing dissatisfaction to anyone. In this way, the Jesuit creates a space for the other to reflect more deeply on his/her own process of reasoning, and is thus able to provide a more adequate response to the other. Finally, if some point of human or divine science is under discussion and the other has something to say, it will be of great help to be unmindful of one's leisure or lack of time, that is, of one's own convenience. Rather, the Jesuits should accommodate themselves to the convenience of the one with whom they are to deal, in order to influence him/her to God.<sup>123</sup>

#### **2.3.2.4. Rules for Discernment within the Conversation**

Finally, Ignatius gives instructions on the rules for discernment within the conversation. As in all other Ignatian ways of proceeding, conversation is also imbedded in discernment. The rules for conversation that Ignatius gives here are the rules of discernment of the first and second weeks of the Exercises in a condensed form. Basically, they give a description of the general strategy of conversation, which consists in the adoption of the enemy's strategy while inverting the "end" (rules of the second week of the Exercises), and the proper pedagogic behaviour to be observed in situations of consolation or desolation (rules of the first week of the Exercises and Annotation 7).<sup>124</sup>

Thus, he instructs Salmerón and Broët:

Whenever we wish to win someone over and engage him in the greater service of God our Lord, we should use the same strategy for good which the enemy

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<sup>123</sup> "The Fathers at the Council of Trent," *Letters of St Ignatius of Loyola*, trans. William J. Young (Chicago: Loyola University Press, 1959), 93-96. 94-95.

<sup>124</sup> *Ibid.*, 43.

employs to draw a good soul to evil. He enters through the other's door and comes out his own. He enters with the other by not opposing his ways but by praising them. He acts familiarly with the soul, suggesting good and holy thoughts which bring peace to the good soul. Later he tries, little by little, to come out his own door, always suggesting some error or illusion under the appearance of good, but which will always be evil. So, we with good purpose can praise or agree with another concerning some particular good thing, dissembling whatever else may be wrong. After thus gaining his confidence, we shall have better success. In this sense we go in with him his way but come out our own. We should ingratiate ourselves with those who are sad or tempted, speak at length, and show great satisfaction and cheerfulness, both interior and exterior, so as to draw them to the opposite of what they feel, for their greater edification and consolation.<sup>125</sup>

Through this instruction, Ignatius also advises his fellow Jesuits to adapt their conversations to the person. He justifies this method of relating in conversation by citing the passage from St. Paul: "I became all things to all men so as to win all to Christ" (1 Cor 9:22).

#### **2.3.2.5. Conversation through Deeds rather than Merely Words**

While in Trent, the Jesuits are instructed to seek to advance the greater glory of God by preaching, hearing confessions, lecturing, and teaching young people. Further they are to visit the poor in hospitals, and exhort their fellow men and women according to their own talents, that all may pray for the Council. They are to give the Exercises (to all, those of the first week) and engage in other conversations, examining well what is said. They are exhorted to frequent participation in confession, communion, and celebration of Mass, and the performance of other works of piety. Here, too, they are admonished not to speak long. On the other hand, if it helps others in the growth of their spiritual life, the companions are urged to speak to them longer, clearly, and with affection.<sup>126</sup>

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<sup>125</sup> Young, *Letters of St. Ignatius of Loyola*, 51.

<sup>126</sup> *Ibid.*, 95-96.

### **2.3.2.6. Communal Spiritual Conversation for Their Own Greater Help**

For their greater help, Ignatius instructs them to meet at night to talk about what was done during the day and to plan the following day. They are to decide by vote the matters for consideration. Every night, one of them must ask the others what he has done wrong, without responding to what is said, unless one is asked. The following night, another assumes this role and thus, each one in turn, so that all might be helped with charity and good example. Each day, they are to make resolutions and to twice make the examen.<sup>127</sup>

These rules of conversation with others, in addition to the spirit that animates them, are an obvious sign of the deep human knowledge and the fine psychological and spiritual observations of Ignatius. We can recognize in them many rules and annotations from the Spiritual Exercises transposed to the dominion of human relations and to the service of the church. For the mission of Trent, Ignatius was more concerned with the work of “establishing relations” and the ministries with the poor than the formal dogmatic definitions. As Arana states, “Ignatius was aware that only the relationship of love that centered on the other’s good, facilitates convictions and feelings that makes the other person grow.”<sup>128</sup> Moreover, when a person is touched by altruism manifested in relating, s/he is prepared to open his/her interior secrets and thus transcend to his/her divine vocation. Finally, the enumerations in these two letters provide us enough material to recognize the magnitude and importance Ignatius attaches to the “Spiritual conversation,” which always has a specific purpose—seeking the greatest glory of God.

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<sup>127</sup> Ibid., 96.

<sup>128</sup> Arana, “Spiritual Conversation,” 43.



### 2.3.3. The Practice of Spiritual Conversation by the Early Companions

The first Jesuits excelled in spiritual conversation. Pierre Favre, one of the first companions of Ignatius, had a special talent and an extraordinary charm in spiritual conversation. There was not a single person who met him who was not totally changed by the encounter. As Ignatius often said, “Pierre could draw water from a rock.”<sup>129</sup> Francis Xavier too stood out in spiritual conversation, through which he was able to draw people to God in India and Japan. According to Peter Canisius, Xavier was successful in his preaching of the gospel because of “his ability to touch the souls even of great sinners. He was able to win little by little people’s confidence and friendship and gradually could demand more from them, namely to adopt a way of life closer to the path of justice.”<sup>130</sup>

The early Jesuit writings, namely the two dialogues of Nadal written in the 1560s, Juan de Polanco’s *Chronicon*, and Peter Canisius’s letter to Claudio Aquaviva, provide ample evidence and examples of the ministry of conversation in the early Society.<sup>131</sup> Notably, in his sixth exhortation to the Jesuits, Nadal saw spiritual conversation as integral to Jesuit ministry, and provided models for such conversations in the early Society.<sup>132</sup> The ministry of conversation in the early Society fell into two categories, namely the communal spiritual conversation and the private spiritual conversation.

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<sup>129</sup> Ibid., 53.

<sup>130</sup> Ibid., 63.

<sup>131</sup> Ibid.

<sup>132</sup> Clancy, *The Conversational Word of God*, 52.

### **2.3.3.1. Private Spiritual Conversation**

Private spiritual conversation was more characteristic of the early Jesuits in their ministry of “helping the neighbour.” It was known by the expression “going fishing,” and was used by Nadal in his exhortations and by Polanco in his circular letters to the Society. In the Jesuit context, it was a reference to Jesus’s disciples, who became fishers of men and women. It was practiced by going out into the market place, prisons, ships in the dock, and other places, not to preach to a group but to approach individuals.<sup>133</sup> According to Ignatius, “what preachers and lecturers speak from on high, we ought to suggest to individuals quietly.” As Nadal explained, it is “in this latter ministry there is greater liberty and effectiveness since one can fit the words to the disposition and reaction of the individual.”<sup>134</sup>

### **2.3.3.2. Communal Spiritual Conversation**

Communal spiritual conversations consisted of those that arose spontaneously among the Jesuits themselves and with others, in which no specific agenda was operative besides mutual encouragement in the things of God. According to O’Malley, such conversations have come down from the Renaissance, and were modelled after Erasmus’s dialogue entitled “The Godly Feast.” However, he believes that the early Jesuits were likely influenced more directly by the models found in the New Testament. O’Malley cites Luke’s Gospel, chapter 24, verses 13-25 as an example of such conversation: “the disciple’s hearts burned warmly within them as they conversed with Jesus along the way

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<sup>133</sup> O’Malley, *The First Jesuits*, 112.

<sup>134</sup> *Ibid.*

to Emmaus.” He notes that the passage was a model for their communal spiritual conversation.<sup>135</sup>

The early Jesuits carried out this type of conversation wherever they went by organizing a group of persons who frequented their churches. They followed the procedure of reading a spiritual book by one of the members and afterwards conversing among themselves on spiritual topics in order draw fruit from the reading. Nadal testifies to this fact in his sixth exhortation to the Jesuits by stating “we started something like this at Messina in Sicily when we started the college there.”<sup>136</sup> He also recommends to the Jesuits the practice of such communal spiritual conversations among themselves or with others to reap a rich harvest for Christ.<sup>137</sup>

#### **2.4. Conclusion**

Having explored spiritual conversation in the founding documents of the Society of Jesus, we begin to understand that spiritual conversation was not only at the heart of Ignatius’s mission but a tried and trusted method of discernment, both individually and communally. It was through the instrumentality of spiritual conversation that the first companions were able to make the communal discernment that gave birth to the Society of Jesus. But most important for our purposes, it was through spiritual conversation that Ignatius was able to gather his first companions by selecting suitable candidates to join him and then helping them to discern their vocation.

Thus, having reflected upon the apostolic effectiveness of spiritual conversation

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<sup>135</sup> O’Malley, *The First Jesuits*, 112.

<sup>136</sup> Clancy, *The Conversation Word of God*, 56.

<sup>137</sup> *Ibid.*

in the life of Ignatius and the early Society by examining the *Autobiography*, *Spiritual Diary*, *Spiritual Exercises*, *Constitutions*, and the *Letters*, I move on to the application of this tried and trusted method for the context of India. The next chapter reviews the various dimensions of Ignatian spiritual conversation with an eye towards adaptation to vocational promotion and discernment in India.

## Chapter Three

### Spiritual Conversation in Vocational Discernment in India

#### 3.0. Introduction

Vocations are a gift from God. It is Jesus who actively chooses the laborers to work in the vineyard just as he chose the disciples. However, we are called to cooperate with God's initiative, and to use all means available to cultivate them. Prayer is a powerful tool which God has placed in our hands. And this is what Jesus himself asked us to do: "therefore ask the Lord of the harvest to send out laborers into his harvest" (Mt 9:38). At the same time, other human means too are crucial in promoting vocations in the present context of the world, notably in India, where cultural, social, familial, and ecclesiastical factors do not portray the consecrated life as a fulfilling option for young people. In this regard, Peter-Hans Kolvenbach addresses the entire Society with these words: "vocations are a gift of God, but a gift conditioned upon our efforts to raise them up and discover them."<sup>1</sup> He notes further that "[Jesuits] should also recognize that the Lord calls us to be more active and 'aggressive,' to make use of all the means and resources necessary to collaborate with grace in the raising up of vocations, following the example of St. Ignatius and continuing the tradition of the Society."<sup>2</sup> In brief, vocation promotion is a collaborative endeavour between divine initiative and human means.

Responding to Kolvenbach's call, the Jesuits in India have engaged themselves in vocation promotion by developing various methods to attract young people to the Society such as *Come and See* programmes, promotional materials and activities produced by

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<sup>1</sup> Letter 97/12, dated September 29, 1997, Regarding Vocation Promotion, accessed on February 15, 2018, <http://onlineministries.creighton.edu/CollaborativeMinistry/GC35/PHK-Vocation.pdf>.

<sup>2</sup> Ibid.

apostolates and provinces, and the formal assignment of Jesuits to the apostolate of vocation promotion. These methods have been quite effective in the past and have produced positive results. However, given the scope of the contemporary challenges, the greater opportunities afforded the youth, and the crisis of vocations, vibrant and dynamic means of vocation promotion call for creative adaptation. In this regard, a greater emphasis on spiritual conversation, a preferred Ignatian way of seeking and selecting candidates in the early Society, is vitally necessary at this time. The pleasure and ease with which Ignatius initiated conversation with those he met, and helped them to discern their vocation, is very relevant in today's context of Jesuit mission. Consequently, this chapter explores how the Ignatian method of spiritual conversation may be used as a tool for vocational promotion and discernment in India by considering 1) key characteristics of spiritual conversation, 2) the different levels of spiritual conversation, and finally, 3) the apostolic effectiveness of spiritual conversation for the Indian context.

### **3.1. Properties of Spiritual Conversation in Vocational Promotion and Discernment**

Fr Arturo Sosa, in his letter to the whole Society on discernment in common, mentions spiritual conversation as one of the essential properties of communal discernment.<sup>3</sup> However, in the process of vocation promotion and discernment, spiritual conversation itself has many properties. Relying on the fundamental sources of the Society such as the *Constitutions* and *Letters*, I wish to describe here some of the principle properties of spiritual conversation articulated in Ignatius's life as attested by the earliest sources, namely his teachings in the *Constitutions* and his instructions in the

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<sup>3</sup> Letter 2017/11, dated September 27, 2017, Regarding Discernment in Common.

*Letters*, and their significance in the present context of vocational promotion and discernment in India. The following are some of the main characteristics of spiritual conversation in vocational discernment. The sound spiritual conversation intended for vocational promotion and discernment requires the following:

### **3.1.1. Desire to Help Souls**

It is clear from the Ignatian tradition that the focus of spiritual conversation is to help souls. Ignatius's life and ministry testifies to the fact that his engagement in the ministry of spiritual conversation was driven by the desire for the greater good of his neighbour.<sup>4</sup> Further, as demonstrated in the previous chapter, he concretized his desire to help souls by becoming a priest and gathering the companions through the means of spiritual conversation, and later, through the *Spiritual Exercises*, which is an intense form of spiritual conversation. Ignatius was indeed a man of great desires, and he expected every Jesuit to likewise be a man of desires.<sup>5</sup> Thus, the desire to help souls lies at the heart of Jesuit vocation. In his letter to the Fathers and Scholastics at Coimbra, Ignatius writes, "But more than anything else, I should wish to awaken in you the pure love of Jesus Christ, the desire for his honour and for the salvation of souls whom He has redeemed."<sup>6</sup> Ignatius understood that holy desires energize our service for others. Therefore, in the *Spiritual Exercises*, Ignatius suggests that we ask God for what we desire at the beginning of every period of prayer.

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<sup>4</sup> Edward Kinerk, "Eliciting Great Desires: Their Place in the Spirituality of the Society of Jesus," *Studies in the Spirituality of Jesuits* 16, no. 5 (November 1984): 6.

<sup>5</sup> Const. 101.

<sup>6</sup> "The Fathers and Scholastics at Coimbra," *Letters of St Ignatius of Loyola*, trans., William J. Young (Chicago: Loyola University Press, 1959), 120-130, 124.

The desire to help souls led Ignatius to engage in spiritual conversation with the early companions and eventually help them to discern their vocation. Similarly, there is a need for a strong desire to help souls or “at least the desire to desire” among the Jesuits in India, as they recognize that helping souls in today’s context is also helping young people to discern their purpose of life. And this desire to seek the greater good of the person or helping souls can serve to motivate the Jesuits to take time away from their other daily activities and administrative work to engage in a fruitful spiritual conversation with young people in schools, colleges and initial formation houses, helping them eventually to discern or confirm their vocation.

### **3.1.2. Inclusive yet Selective**

Though initially Ignatius began the spiritual conversations with people who came to him seeking spiritual help, he later looked for persons with whom he could engage in deeper conversations with the intention of helping them through a process of vocational discernment. For instance, in Paris, while Ignatius gave himself intensely to spiritual conversation with everyone he met, he specifically sought out gifted students who might join him in the ministry, and succeeded in attracting Francis Xavier and Pierre Favre, his roommates.<sup>7</sup> In this regard, we see a creative tension between the desire to extend the spiritual conversation to everyone and the need to select a few for deeper conversation in order to help them make a vocational discernment.

Ignatius, therefore, insisted that the Jesuits needed to identify the person or persons with whom they wished to engage in a deeper spiritual conversation in order to

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<sup>7</sup> Geger, “Cura Personalis: Some Ignatian Inspirations,” 16.



reap greater apostolic fruit.<sup>8</sup> Since the aim of the spiritual conversation within vocational promotion and discernment is to assist others to perceive and respond to what God is communicating to them, potential candidates need to be chosen carefully and engaged both intellectually and affectively in a deeper conversation.<sup>9</sup> It is therefore crucial that the Jesuits know how to choose the persons who could be led to vocational discernment. Ignatius himself learned the importance of carefully selecting persons for a deeper spiritual conversation from his own experience of initial failure at recruiting companions in Spain.

Having desired companions who were capable of responding to the invitation of Christ, Ignatius had initially selected four men among the many who came to seek him for spiritual guidance.<sup>10</sup> He gave them the Exercises, which was a very important part of his apostolic activity, without attempting to influence them more in the direction of “poverty or any vow than to their opposite, not to one state or way of life than to another.”<sup>11</sup> In this, Ignatius put into practice what he had written in the Exercises, that “the retreat giver should not incline to one side rather than the other; but standing in the middle, like a scale, should allow the Creator to work directly on his creature and the creature with his Creator and Lord.”<sup>12</sup> Thus, on the one hand Ignatius hoped that Christ

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<sup>8</sup> “Those Sent to the Missions,” *Letters of St. Ignatius of Loyola*, trans. William J. Young (Chicago: Loyola University Press, 1959), 267-269, 268.

<sup>9</sup> SpEx. 3.

<sup>10</sup> These four included Calixto de Sa, Juan de Arteaga, Lope de Cáceres, and Jean Reynalde. See Chapter Two of this study, page 50.

<sup>11</sup> SpEx. 15.

<sup>12</sup> *Ibid.*

would invite these young men to imitate Him. On the other hand, they felt the call, and attracted by Ignatius's life-style, chose to follow him. Later, however, they went their separate ways, since they had no concrete plans or designs for the future. As a consequence, Ignatius was more cautious in choosing his first companions in Paris, seeking those whom he could eventually lead through the Exercises and then, to election.<sup>13</sup>

In the context of India, a judicious selection of young men for a deeper spiritual conversation is crucial given the large number of young Catholic students in our institutions and the fact that we cannot enter into a deep conversation with everyone. As teachers, pastors, and administrators, the Jesuits in India are in an optimal position to know the young students well who are under their care. Using this initial knowledge of the students, the Jesuits can identify the young men with whom they could potentially engage in a deeper conversation, subsequently leading them through an initial discernment process such as examination of conscience, and encourage them to regular Eucharist and Confession. This would be of great help in promoting good vocations to the Society.

### **3.1.3. The Universal Good**

In the *Constitutions*, Ignatius suggests various criteria for choosing, which are applicable to all the apostolates of the Society of Jesus. One such criterion for choosing persons and places in the Jesuit apostolate is the greater universal good. According to this principle: "the more universal the good is, the more is it divine. Hence preference ought to be given to persons and places which, once benefited themselves, are a cause of

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<sup>13</sup> Javier Osuna, *Friends in the Lord*, trans., Nicholas King, The Way Series 3 (1974), 33.

extending the good to many others who are under their influence or take guidance from them.”<sup>14</sup> Further, Ignatius echoes this principle with regard to choosing people for spiritual conversation in his instruction to those sent to the missions, stating that “with regard to the neighbour we must be careful with whom we deal. They should be persons from whom we can expect greater fruit since we cannot deal with all.”<sup>15</sup> As noted earlier, Ignatius had the gift of knowing people well through a short interaction. The initial knowledge of the person helped him to choose among those who came to him a few possible candidates who could bear greater fruit in their life by joining him in his mission.

With regard to the contemporary context of India, however, the Jesuits need to keep in mind that selecting people for deeper conversation does not necessarily mean choosing only from the elite class and caste, or from one’s own clan or language group. Though Ignatius and the early Jesuits engaged in conversation with influential people, they never set up social barriers to the admission of candidates. As Clancy notes, some of Ignatius’s best recruits were from the lowest ranks of the society, the poor, ex-soldiers, and peasants, although the richest sources of vocations were the families of middle-class artisans, merchants, and professional men.<sup>16</sup> In this way, the Jesuits served the greater universal good both by selecting candidates from all walks of life, and taking care to discern wisely their aptitude for vocation. In brief, the criterion for choosing people for a

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<sup>14</sup> Const. 622.

<sup>15</sup> “Those Sent to the Missions,” *Letters of St. Ignatius of Loyola*, 268.

<sup>16</sup> Clancy, *Conversational Word of God*, 25.

deeper conversation is not social or economic background but rather the universal good and the reaping of the richest harvest.

#### **3.1.4. Adaptability**

After making a choice of the persons for a deeper spiritual conversation, the next step is to enter into the actual conversation. In today's context of globalization and modernization, the advice given by Ignatius with regard to this is very practical and relevant. Ignatius said that "whenever we wish to win someone over and engage him in the greater service of God our Lord," we should employ the method which he called "entering by their door so as to come out by our door."<sup>17</sup> It is perhaps one of the most important characteristics of Ignatian spiritual conversation. In this regard, as Nadal points out, Ignatius, who was a master of conversation, taught not only by word but by example. Nadal states that "even though the person in question was a hardened sinner, Ignatius found something in him to love."<sup>18</sup> Ignatius was able to start a conversation and give it a spiritual turn. It was visible in the case of his early companions Favre and Francis Xavier. Ignatius had perceived from his initial experience that engaging in deeper conversation with them would reap greater fruit.<sup>19</sup> Therefore, he enters into conversation with them through the sharing of material goods and sometimes even doing some acts of kindness (particularly toward Xavier). Polanco recalls Ignatius's words with regard to Xavier: "this

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<sup>17</sup> Ibid.

<sup>18</sup> Kevin Burke, Eileen Burke-Sullivan & Phyllis Zagano, *In the Ignatian Tradition* (Collegeville, Minn.: Liturgical Press, 2009), 31.

<sup>19</sup> Osuna, *Friends in the Lord*, 49.

man was the toughest material he had ever worked with,”<sup>20</sup> and yet, Ignatius was able to win over his heart and friendship.

Further, Ignatius also cared about the way the Jesuits engaged themselves in the ministry of conversation. He instructed Salmerón and Broët to look first to the disposition of the person with whom they engaged in conversation and accommodate themselves to that person.<sup>21</sup> He told the Jesuits participating in the Council of Trent to adjust their tone according to those with whom they were engaging in conversation. Further, he said that the first thing they should do is to concentrate their heart and soul on loving the person they want to help.<sup>22</sup> This exemplifies Ignatius’s advice to them concerning the disposition to listen to the other, and to show openness and respect in conversation. Hence it is the special quality that is required in the Jesuit who is involved in conversation to quietly and slowly win over his neighbour, by dealing with him gently and by lighting the flame of service in his heart. In this method, Ignatius is not endorsing guile or duplicity. Rather, he earnestly encourages his fellow Jesuits to “go in by their door,” being fully aware of the vulnerability and imagination necessary for that kind of conversation. Therefore, this Ignatian method requires honesty both with oneself and those we engage in deeper spiritual conversation. It requires self-reflection and attentiveness to the movements of the Spirit in one’s own life. It also requires more listening (and less speaking) to those with whom we engage in conversation, thereby discovering their strengths as well as their challenges in order to engage them in their own space and time.

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<sup>20</sup> Javier Osuna, “Nine of My Friends in the Lord,” *Review of Ignatian Spirituality* 29, no. 3 (1998): 48.

<sup>21</sup> “Fathers Salmerón and Broët,” *Letters of St Ignatius of Loyola*, trans. William J. Young (Chicago: Loyola University Press, 1959), 51-52, 51.

<sup>22</sup> *Ibid.*

The youth of India today are very much influenced by modern technology and culture due to the access they have to information coming from different parts of the world. The access to internet, television, and other forms of entertainment has highly stimulated them to the wide variety of goods it offers them. Their surfing of the web and communication via social media has influenced their fashions, tastes, and lifestyles. They live in an audio-visual world, which means that their interactions are taking place at the level of images and pictures. In this context, though they are looking for connectedness, they are becoming increasingly isolated. Therefore, in order to attract the youth of today, the Jesuits (and other religious orders) must recognize their need for relationship and connection. In this way, they will begin the conversation with topics that interest the young people such as sports, politics, science or even movies, and gradually take them to the spiritual realm and help them to discover the true meaning and purpose of their life.

### **3.1.5. Knowledge of the Person**

Knowledge of the person is an essential characteristic of Ignatian spiritual conversation. In fact, the purpose of spiritual conversation in vocational promotion and discernment is to acquire the personal and direct knowledge of the person with whom we engage in conversation in order to guide him to discern the meaning and purpose of his life. Ignatius was able to help the early Jesuits to discern their vocation from the knowledge he acquired from them through spiritual conversation. Therefore, he advised the early Jesuits to engage in spiritual conversation so that they may have “an exact knowledge of the disposition and character of the men involved, and to consider beforehand all the possibilities, especially in matters of importance.”<sup>23</sup> It is not an

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<sup>23</sup> “The Fathers Sent to Germany,” *Letters of St Ignatius of Loyola*, trans. William J. Young (Chicago: Loyola University Press, 1959), 212-214, 213.

investigation; rather, spiritual conversation by its very nature gravitates toward the particular needs and concerns of the individual for his/her own fulfillment. For this reason, Ignatius suggests that the Jesuits need to fight the temptation to react before listening fully and reflecting in order to truly hear what is being said and to learn about the person instead of formulating a response while the interlocutor is still speaking.

Today, given the socio-economic, familial, cultural, and religious complexities of India, engaging in spiritual conversation is very important in order to know the disposition, motivation and character of the persons in their process of discernment. Such conversation would be immensely helpful both to our candidates and the Society. Therefore, the knowledge acquired through spiritual conversation helps us, on the one hand, to guide the person to discern the purpose of his life. On the other hand, it helps us to know the maturity level and general dispositions of the person as well as his authentic desire for the religious life. As noted earlier, in the context of India, it is easy to recruit vocations at an early age. But this poses inherent difficulties, as the age between 17 and 21 years is one of identity formation and personal experimentation with life. Young people at this stage are not steady and stable enough to choose a set of values and beliefs, and as such are incapable of making a mature decision regarding their life direction. In other words, they lack the psycho-social maturity that is essential for a life-long commitment and successful pastoral ministry. In my view, they are looking for guidance and help in discerning their vocation. They need sensitive religious leaders who read the signs of the times and can understand the conflicts and concerns the young people face in choosing a life vocation.

In addition, as noted, factors such as poverty and unemployment, the pursuit of conveniences and comforts in life, better education facilities, higher status and prestige in society, and the desire to escape from the hardships of life, can attract candidates to consecrated life. Therefore, it is very important to know potential candidates directly and personally in order to guide them and help them to discern their vocation accordingly in the light of the knowledge acquired through spiritual conversation.

### **3.1.6. Interior Freedom or Ignatian “Indifference”**

Spiritual conversation in vocational promotion and selection of candidates to the Society is at the service of the search for the will of God. Ignatian “indifference” is a precondition to such a search. It is not for its own sake but for choosing what is more conducive to reaching the end. The person who engages in spiritual conversation with others always seeks passionately the good of the other person, by helping him/her in discerning the purpose for which s/he is created. The spiritual conversation is never about who is right and who is wrong, but about the good that emerges out of the conversation. Therefore, those responsible for recruitment should be aware of their own self-interests and be free to assume whatever is the greater good. According to Karl Rahner, “The true essence of indifference is its elevation into the decision to do more [for the Greater Glory of God].”<sup>24</sup>

It is the great passion for others’ good that renders one sufficiently free to seek the truth that transcends them. Therefore, Ignatius clearly instructed his companions in the letters on dealing with others that they should be free of intellectual and affective

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<sup>24</sup> Varghese Malpan, *A Comparative Study of the Bhagavad Gita and the Spiritual Exercises of Saint Ignatius of Loyola on the Process of Spiritual Liberation* (Rome: Editrice Pontificia Università Gregoriana, 1992), 261.



attachments so that they could engage in a constructive conversation leading to the greater good of the other.<sup>25</sup> One wants only what will be of greater service to God. Whatever would be of greater service becomes the motivation for one's choices. Therefore, total detachment from one's self-interests allows one to engage in a constructive spiritual conversation that gives the other person freedom to make sound decisions.

In his book *The Call to Discernment in Troubled Times*, Dean Brackley states that indifference, or inner freedom, is “the capacity to sense and then embrace what is best, even when that goes against our inclinations.” The most significant misunderstanding about indifference is that it means lack of passion or apathy. Not so, writes Brackley; rather, “It means being so passionately and single-mindedly committed, so completely in love, that we are willing to sacrifice anything, including our lives, for the ultimate goal.”<sup>26</sup> According to the Principle and Foundation, this ultimate goal is to “praise, reverence, and serve God Our Lord. . .”<sup>27</sup> If the conversation is to be truly fruitful, a deep sense of self denial that leads to others' growth is necessary because fruitful conversations are born in an atmosphere of true inner freedom. Adhering to one's self-importance does not lead to the end for which the spiritual conversation is intended. We have seen this in the life of Ignatius. When the conversation was centered on him in his early stages of gathering the companions, the group did not last long. It is only when the

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<sup>25</sup> “Fathers Salmerón and Broët,” *Letters of St Ignatius of Loyola*, Young, 51.

<sup>26</sup> Dean Brackley, *The Call to Discernment in Troubled Times: New Perspectives on the Transformative Wisdom of Ignatius of Loyola* (New York: The Crossroad Publishing Company), 12.

<sup>27</sup> SpEx. 23.

conversation shifted from himself to the friends in the Lord and the mission was he able to sustain the group of companions.

In vocational promotion and discernment, Ignatian indifference is a crucial element in remaining open to the will of God. It also allows us to facilitate a direct conversation between God and the person we are engaging in spiritual conversation. Vocation promotion is meant to help a young man or woman to discern sincerely where God is guiding him/her and to enable the individual to make that choice and live it with a Gospel spirit. If we do not have the spirit of inner freedom we may be putting the main emphasis on amassing candidates for our order rather than helping them to make the right decision. This is often the case in India given the increase in the number of congregations, as well as the growth in the number of apostolates in the religious orders. This problem is exacerbated by a general lack of willingness on the part of the religious congregations to collaborate with the laity in the mission of the church. If vocation promotion is sincere, we will be able to present other vocations positively, including marriage, as equally legitimate ways of responding to God's love, and never imply that marriage is lower, or less of a call. We need to promote vocations to priesthood and religious life to carry on the mission of Christ in the world, but not by demeaning marriage or the lay state. Therefore, Ignatian indifference is essential in vocational promotion and discernment through spiritual conversation.

### **3.2. A Model for Spiritual Conversation in Vocational Promotion and Discernment**

The properties of Ignatian spiritual conversation in vocational promotion and discernment reveal to us its double apostolic character. On the one hand, the spiritual

conversation allows us to approach and enter into the universe of the other person, for whom we desire all good, and to acquire direct and personal knowledge of him. On the other hand, this knowledge acquired through spiritual conversation helps us to establish a relationship with the other that could be profitable to him or could help us to detect the presence and action of God in his life and offer suggestions regarding his life choices. Taking the cue from this double apostolic character of Ignatian spiritual conversation found in its properties, we can draw up a model of spiritual conversation that could be fruitfully applied in vocational promotion and discernment today in the context of India. This model has three levels. The first level is personal sharing, which includes storytelling or intentional speaking and active listening. The second level consists of noticing the movement of spirits occurring in the conversation, and the third level entails the invitation to respond adequately to the movements that are noticed in the sharing.

### **3.2.1. Personal Sharing**

Spiritual conversation begins with the continual and intentional dialogue with self, God, and others. In this dialogue, sharing of one's personal stories and active listening are key factors.

#### **3.2.1.1. Storytelling or Intentional Speaking**

Story telling is an important aspect of spiritual conversation. According to Luz Marina Diaz, "we form our lives and give them meaning by sharing our diverse cultural, personal, communal, familial and faith stories. At the same time, we are formed by the stories we have heard from our parents, at school, in our faith communities and from our friends."<sup>28</sup> These stories offer us insight into individual's lives. They reflect how one

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<sup>28</sup> Luz Marina Diaz, "Spiritual Conversation as the Practice of Revelation," *The Way* 55, no. 2 (April 2016), 46.

understands and lives one's life and comes to believe what is true. They also reveal how God is already working in one's life. The story of a person also makes the listener aware of who the individual is—his/her world view, what is most important to him/her, what troubles his/her heart, and how s/he understands or copes with what is going on in his/her heart.

Every single person has a story to tell and every story is part of God's story. Stephen Crites states that human stories are essentially religious in nature, not because their content is overtly religious, but because the underlying truths expressed in them are so profound that they may be considered more than just mundane stories.<sup>29</sup> According to William Bausch, there are four types of personal stories which can be considered religious, even if religious vocabulary or phrasing is not used for the narration.<sup>30</sup> These include stories that signify self-discovery, stories that reveal life's mystery, stories that signify mystical experiences, and stories that signify conversion experience. Further, it is the process of sharing these personal stories that helps one to discover one's identity and to pose questions of ultimate concern. Thus, through sharing these stories in spiritual conversation, one enters into an intimate relationship with God. These stories shared in the spiritual conversation may be personal or communal. But they have a single purpose, which is to help the speaker recognize God in his/her own story, to identify what God is

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<sup>29</sup> Stephen Crites, "The Narrative Quality of Experience," *Journal of the American Academy of Religion* 39, no. 3 (1971), 295.

<sup>30</sup> William J. Bausch, *Storytelling: Imagination and Faith* (Mystic, Connecticut: Twenty-Third Publications), 193.

saying, and finally to respond adequately in a way that could be of help to oneself and to others.<sup>31</sup>

Listening to the stories of young people is the first step in the spiritual conversation aimed at vocational promotion and discernment. As noted earlier, everyone has a story to tell, and the youth of India are not an exception to this universal phenomenon. Their life stories are rooted in their joys and struggles with the socio-economic, cultural and multi-religious realities of the society. On the one hand, the narration of their stories gives them an opportunity to discern the presence of God in their lives, and on the other hand, it helps the listener to have knowledge of the person narrating the story. Angela Reed states that “telling our own stories about how we have interpreted God’s presence and activity in our lives is invaluable for creating a culture of spiritual discernment.”<sup>32</sup> This is because the narration of the speaker’s personal stories of God’s faithfulness helps the listener to interpret God’s presence in the life of the speaker. Together, speaker and listener confirm what they sense God is communicating to the speaker. Based on these insights, the speaker then takes significant steps toward a decision.

We see this dynamic in the life of Jesus and his disciples on the way to Emmaus. The disciples narrate their stories to Jesus. Through these stories Jesus teaches them to understand God’s ways and to recognize God’s call and will for them. Through the presence of the Holy Spirit, God continues to draw us into an intimate relationship with Godself and invites us to share in the discernment process with one another, just as Jesus

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<sup>31</sup> Marina Diaz, “Spiritual Conversation as the Practice of Revelation,” 44.

<sup>32</sup> Angela Reed, *Spiritual Discernment in Congregation*, *Vision* (2016), 51.

did with the disciples on the road to Emmaus. Through the sharing of our stories, we enter into relationship with others, who in turn help us to discern the will of God for our lives. In vocational promotion, it is also very important that the Jesuit who listens to the stories of the young people share the story of his own vocation, so that he might inspire the other to reflect on his/her vocation.

### **3.2.1.2. Deep and Active Listening**

The central element of any conversation is deep and active listening. Active listening involves paying attention to more than one level of the expression of the other. It involves listening not only to what the other person is saying, but also to what they mean to say, and to what they might be experiencing interiorly. In spiritual conversation, deep and active listening will facilitate the acquiring of knowledge of the person with whom we engage in conversation. Deep listening involves being present to, attentive to, and connected with the person who shares the story. According to Marina Diaz, deep listening is “being aware of and in tune with the presence of God in our midst.”<sup>33</sup> Moreover, we can see simultaneously the dynamic of a three- directional awareness at work in deep listening, namely awareness of oneself, of the person with whom we engage in deep conversation, and of the presence of God in our midst. It is this three-directional awareness that helps us to notice the movement of the spirit in the story of the other as well as in ourselves as we listen to these stories. As I listen to the other, I allow the spirit to uncover hidden places within myself, and recognize God’s transformative and healing presence within the conversation itself.

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<sup>33</sup> Diaz, “Spiritual Conversation as the Practice of Revelation,” 44.

Ignatius, the master of conversation, knew the art of listening. He was able to attract young, motivated companions because of his ability to listen to them actively and deeply. Being aware of the need for active listening in spiritual conversations, especially those which are directed towards vocational promotion and discernment, Ignatius instructed his companions, “be slow to speak and only after having first listened quietly so that you may understand the meaning, learning and desires of those who speak. You will thus know better when to speak and when to be silent.”<sup>34</sup> This golden rule of Ignatian conversation is very practical and relevant in today’s context given that we live in a culture of noise characterized by more talking and less listening and understanding. This Ignatian advice for listening challenges us to cultivate a threefold listening in spiritual conversation aimed at vocational promotion and discernment, namely listening to God, self, and others. It is through this threefold listening process that we can facilitate the understanding of others’ internal knowledge and help them to discern their vocation. Further, in Ignatian spiritual conversation, we find many contemporary components of deep and active listening that are essential in today’s Indian context of vocational promotion and discernment such as empathy, self-control, silence, watching non-verbal details and listening not only to what the person is saying but what he is experiencing in life.

### **3.2.2. Noticing the Movement: What is God Communicating?**

The second step in spiritual conversation aimed at vocational promotion and discernment is noticing the movement of the spirit within oneself and the other as the story is being narrated. “Movements” (*mociones* in Spanish - Sp. Ex 313) here refers to

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<sup>34</sup> Young, *Letters of St Ignatius of Loyola*, 94.

the working of God in each of us. They are deep desires of our soul through which God communicates to us the path to which God invites us. Hans Zollner states that according to Ignatius, the “movements” are the inner emotions that “arise quite spontaneously, i.e. feelings and thoughts, likes and dislikes towards intentions, things, persons, institutions.”<sup>35</sup> The task of the person who engages the other in spiritual conversation is to perceive these movements of the spirit through deep and attentive listening in order to identify these movements and help the individual to discern how and where God is leading him/her.

Noticing the movements is crucial in spiritual conversation aimed at vocational promotion and discernment. It is through noticing the movements (*sentir*) that we can recognize what God is communicating to us in our life. Marina Diaz notes that the noticing of the movements was very important to Ignatius because “God cannot be found except through those things and in those things that people feel and live.”<sup>36</sup> We have seen that one of the ways Ignatius discerned his own vocation, from the days of his convalescence after the battle of Pamplona to the moment of founding the Society of Jesus and even beyond, was by getting in touch with his own feelings in terms of what he called “consolation” and “desolation.” For instance, as he daydreamed on his hospital bed about what he would do when he got back to the court and about the lady of his dreams, he felt empty and dry after an initial experience of happiness. He called this “desolation.” On the other hand, when he meditated on the words of Jesus and the life of the saints, he felt challenged but also deeply satisfied. He called this “consolation.” Based on the

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<sup>35</sup> Hans Zollner, “Making Life-Decisions According to the Ignatian Method of Discernment (Criteria),” *Review of Ignatian Spirituality*, 110 (November 2005): 108-109.

<sup>36</sup> Diaz, “Spiritual Conversation as the Practice of Revelation,” 45.



experience of consolation and desolation, Ignatius discerned his vocation. Further, he made use of this method of noticing the movements while making major decisions. He also guided his early companions to discern their own vocation by helping them to get in touch with their inner movements.

Today, in India, we find many young people who, on the one hand, are gifted and motivated but lack the desire to be priests or religious, and on the other hand, those who have the desire to become priests and religious but lack clear motivation. Therefore, it is very important that the Jesuits recognize such young people and enter into conversation with them by listening to their deep desires and stories, and further, to help them to recognize what God is communicating to them in their life by identifying the movements that arise from the good spirit and the evil spirit. The good spirit is that which brings us closer to God and to the purpose for which we are created. As Ignatius notes, the characteristic of the good spirit is to cause consolation.<sup>37</sup> A person who is more inclined towards religious vocation displays certain signs of consolation, including greater love of God and neighbour; increased desire to live a life of commitment to the good of others; closeness to God even in difficult times; harmony with oneself, others, God, and all creation; and a deep sense of contentment and inner joy. But at the same time, we may also notice in the person the influences of the evil spirit causing desolation.<sup>38</sup> The signs of desolation can include lack of motivation, lack of desire, egoism, individualism, anxiety, fear of failure, negative ambitions, false comfort, restlessness, and temptations. These feelings take one away from God and one's life's purpose. Therefore, the listener must

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<sup>37</sup> SpEx. 316.

<sup>38</sup> SpEx. 317.

pay attention to what movements are dominant in the speaker's life in order to help the person to discern the path of life to which God is calling him/her through these signs.

In the context of India, where vocation promotion is carried out among young people who lack the ability to articulate their God experience largely due to a lack of vocabulary, it is important that we as vocation promoters notice these movements in their life not only in what they say but what they experience. We also need to accompany them in noticing the movements in their own life through simple Ignatian methods. In the initial spiritual conversations, they could be introduced to some simple methods of prayer and healthy images of God. Prayer is absolutely necessary in the discernment process in order for one to be open to the Spirit, who guides and directs us to notice and understand the various movements within us. Further, we could also teach the young people with whom we engage in spiritual conversation, "The General Examen" in the Ignatian tradition, which is a way of getting in touch with one's inner movements on a daily basis in terms of consolation and desolation. This would help them to learn to pay attention to the movements of the good spirit and the evil spirit in their life and discern the path of life to which God is calling them. It would also be helpful for these materials to be given in some written form so that the students could easily follow them.

### **3.2.3. Fostering the Movement of the Good Spirit: Towards Making an Authentic Decision**

Ignatius wanted the Jesuits to always keep in mind the apostolic end of any ministry. The apostolic end of spiritual conversation aimed at vocational promotion and discernment is to promote suitable candidates to the Society of Jesus who are able to carry out the mission of Jesus in the world. Therefore, after having listened to the God

experiences of young people in their stories, and identifying what God might be communicating to them through those stories by way of paying attention to the movement of the spirits in their life, on the third level, we invite them to take decisive action based on the movement of the spirits. For Ignatius, consolation was the criterion for making major decisions in life. In life decisions, consolation is also the criterion for determining whether one is called to a particular way of life.<sup>39</sup> In the spiritual conversation aimed at vocational promotion and discernment, we need to notice the signs of consolation that suggest one's inclinations towards priestly or religious vocation. However, once we notice in a person the signs of religious vocation in our initial spiritual conversation, we need to further help them to strengthen those movements of the good spirit by also presenting to them alternative ways of life, for instance, marriage, and invite them to notice the movements of the spirit in their prayers in order to identify what attracts them more fully, gives them prolonged joy, deep contentment, and confidence. If their experience of God reflects a genuine spiritual consolation and the decision is made on that basis, certainly that will be a good decision.

This life decision must ultimately be made by the particular individual based on the movements of the good spirit. This decision will be later confirmed and affirmed by the novice director through a deeper spiritual conversation, which is integrated in the Spiritual Exercises and regular personal accompaniment. The Jesuit who initiates the process of discerning vocation through spiritual conversation needs to help the potential candidate to nurture the movement of the good spirit that he has noticed in him during the conversation so that he may make a decision to follow Christ in the way that is best for

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<sup>39</sup> Hans Zollner, "Making Life-Decisions According to the Ignatian Method of Discernment," 109.

his life. This is done through a continual spiritual conversation with the potential candidate, both through words and deeds. Ignatius himself has set an example for this in his gathering of the first companions. We know that once Ignatius identified the potential candidates who could join him in carrying out the mission of Christ, he helped them to make decisions by continually nurturing the movements of the good spirit he noticed in them through spiritual conversation that lasted for years. He did this not only in words but in deeds; as he himself has written in the Spiritual Exercises: “Love ought to manifest itself in deeds rather than in words.”<sup>40</sup>

In the context of India, we can foster the movements of the good spirit and help the potential candidates to make a decision by way of encouragement, spiritual direction and accompaniment, inviting them to our religious communities, discernment retreats, “Come and See” experiences, and mission activities. In addition, we might occasionally visit their families, pray with them, or join them at dinners. Young people are likely to become inspired to make a decision to join a religious order by seeing the life and mission of the religious. In the context of India, since the parents also play a major role in this important life-decision, the parents need to be engaged explicitly about vocation promotion. As Barton Geger states, it is very important to alert the parents of our intentions, respond to their questions and anxieties, and help them think beyond themselves to the needs of the people of God.<sup>41</sup> Finally, we can also foster the movements of the good spirit by the sound examples of our actions, both in the institutions and formation houses.

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<sup>40</sup> SpEx. 230.

<sup>41</sup> Barton T. Geger, “Bending the Knee to Baal: St Ignatius on Jesuit Vocation Promotion,” *Studies in the Spirituality of Jesuits* 48, no. 4 (2016): 40.

### **3.3. The Apostolic Effectiveness of Spiritual Conversation in India**

The Center for Applied Research in the Apostolate's (CARA) survey of 2017 reports that four out of five men ordained to the priesthood in the United States were encouraged to consider the priesthood by someone else, most often a priest, a teacher, a friend, or another parishioner. The report also says that the ordinands first considered a vocation to the priesthood, on average, at the age of 16. The religious ordinands reported that they knew the members of their religious institute an average of six years before entering.<sup>42</sup> Following the release of the survey, Cardinal Joseph W. Tobin of Newark, said, "That statistic should motivate all the faithful to be sensitive to the work of the Holy Spirit, who may wish to use them to extend the invitation to ordained ministry."<sup>43</sup> As noted in the first chapter, India has a very large youth population. Given the number of apostolates in which the Jesuits are involved among the youth, there are ever-greater possibilities of influencing them, motivating them, and helping them to discern their vocation. Therefore, there is a need for all those in contact with the youth, both in colleges and other areas of youth ministry, to dispel the tension between generations or between professors and students, and to establish a strong personal contact with the young. One-on-one spiritual conversation with students would be a great tool for the Jesuits to establish a spiritual rapport with the young people and thus, attract them to priesthood or religious life.

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<sup>42</sup> Michael J. Kramarek and Mary L. Gautier, *The Class of 2017: Survey of Ordinands to Priesthood*, CARA, Washington DC (April 2017): 2-4, accessed February 15, 2018, <http://www.usccb.org/beliefs-and-teachings/vocations/ordination-class/upload/ordination-class-2017-cara-report.pdf>.

<sup>43</sup> *Ordination Class of 2017: Encounter, Encouragement, Active Parish Life, Are Key Factors in Discernment Process, Answering the Call*, accessed February 16, 2018, <http://www.usccb.org/news/2017/17-085.cfm>.

In the context of diminishing vocations today, it is not enough that the person formally assigned to promoting vocations take the responsibility for it. Rather, every consecrated person who keeps his/her vocation alive and bears witness to it before others needs to take responsibility for promoting vocations. Therefore the focus is not on the one who engages the young person in conversation, nor even on seeking to limit the scope of options to one particular choice, but on God, who invites the individual to collaborate with God in the divine mission. Further they are also responsible for the new candidates in formation, who knock on the doors of religious communities, ready to fall in love with the possible option for consecrated life and yet continue to discern their vocation. Therefore, Ignatius desires that during the probation period, the candidate should be assisted through the close and brotherly dealings of the other Jesuits of the community, while living under the same roof and sharing life with a common purpose.<sup>44</sup>

The witness of priests and religious united to the Lord, joyful in their ministry, and united in brotherhood among themselves, has a strong vocational appeal for young people. As Pope John Paul II states in his Apostolic Exhortation *Pastores Dabo Vobis*, “the very life of priests, their unconditional dedication to God’s flock, their witness of loving service to the Lord and to his Church – a witness marked by free acceptance of the cross in the spirit of hope and Easter joy – their fraternal unity and zeal for the evangelization of the world are the first and most convincing [factors] in the growth of vocations.”<sup>45</sup> However, engaging with the young people in schools, colleges, or

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<sup>44</sup> Const. 18, 21.

<sup>45</sup> *Pastores Dabo Vobis*, 40. John Paul II, *Post-Synodal Exhortation* (Boston: Pauline Books & Media, 1992), 31.

novitiates, where a priest may be a teacher and mentor, or taking part in conversations to deepen their understanding of religious life (for which they may have already begun a process of vocational discernment), is very important in today's context of vocational promotion and discernment.

Ignatius believed that all are born with certain abilities and aptitude for conversing with others. Polanco also affirmed this fact, stating, "This ability is surely more a natural gift than something to be learned. If a man does not have the natural knack to deal with [people] he will generally not be a suitable candidate for the Society unless this weakness is copiously compensated by divine grace."<sup>46</sup> Therefore, GC 36 strongly recommends that the Jesuits return to their source and foundation in order to improve their capacity to converse spiritually.<sup>47</sup> Given that Ignatius expected every Jesuit to possess this gift of relating to people, spiritual conversation is an important tool at the disposal of every Jesuit in carrying out the mission of helping young people to discern their vocation to priesthood and consecrated life effectively.

In today's modern world, it is true that the use of technologies such as advertisements, promotional materials and videos can initiate a process of attracting and persuading the youth to choose religious life. However, it has been demonstrated by research on communication that the interpersonal interaction has a far stronger effect on shaping opinions than mass media outlets. This phenomenon is explained by a theory known as the two-step flow model of communication.<sup>48</sup> According to this theory, the

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<sup>46</sup> Clancy, *The Conversational Word of God*, 15.

<sup>47</sup> GC 36, d. 1, no. 12.

<sup>48</sup> The two-step flow model was formulated in 1948 by Paul Lazarsfeld, Bernard Berelson, and Hazel Gaudet in the book *The People's Choice*. This theory of mass communication was further developed by

majority of people do not form opinions or make decisions on important issues based on reading about the issues in a newspaper, hearing about them on the radio, or watching them in a video. While the presentations in the modern media do create an attraction towards the issue raised or advertised, the decision is made only after the interpersonal communication with more informed members of their social environment such as family, friends, and professional or religious associates, who have also been exposed to the media presentation.<sup>49</sup> In other words people are more influenced by their friends or acquaintances who share their own experiences; this is true even with regard to religious vocations. Therefore, spiritual conversation becomes a useful tool to share one's own vocation story and help the other to clarify and discern the spiritual movements within and make an informed decision based on their confirmation.

Furthermore, as I have noted in the first chapter, the growing interior emptiness due to the effects of globalization, the lack of substantial familial and social values and appropriate affective care, makes the young people more vulnerable. This explains the need for a simple and effective method that builds up their confidence and trust, provides them security within a group, and tries to answer their questions. The personal and loving encounter with a real person rather than merely the sloganeering of the mass media will be a great help in this regard. This personal encounter is facilitated through the spiritual conversation.

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Lazarsfeld together with Elihu Katz in the book *Personal Influence* in 1955. See also Clancy, *The Conversational Word of God*, 47.

<sup>49</sup> Elihu Katz, "The Two-Step Flow of Communication: An Up-To-Date Report on an Hypothesis," *University of Pennsylvania Scholarly Commons*, accessed February 21, 2018, <https://pdfs.semanticscholar.org/f43d/59d68e66aa3ffe1137177582217a66e41ca1.pdf>.



### **3.4. Conclusion**

God speaks to individuals in the depths of their being. These wordless communications correspond with one's deepest desires. However, in today's context, it is difficult for individuals to articulate fully to themselves, much less to others, what God is communicating to them in their depths. They need someone to help them to identify what God might be saying to them by listening to their stories and recognizing the movements of the spirit. A Jesuit therefore, who is expected to possess the qualities of a good conversationalist, helps the individuals to recognize the will of God for their lives. Thus, through spiritual conversation, every Jesuit not only fulfills the mission to which he is called—to help souls—but also helps in promoting good and gifted vocations to the Society.

## **General Conclusions**

The Indian youth of today, including Christian youth, are deeply impacted by the values and culture of the modern world, a phenomenon which has adversely affected the Church of India in general and vocations to the priesthood and consecrated life in particular. This study has demonstrated that with the growing influence of globalization, including the breakdown of traditional family structures, the isolating effects of modern technology, and the individualism and self-centeredness at the heart of global culture, the Jesuits in India are more than ever in need of the resource of spiritual conversation for effective vocational promotion and discernment.

Though at present, the Church in India is enjoying a springtime of vocations to the priestly and religious life, we cannot ignore the challenges posed by the present culture to the young people discerning their vocation and also to those who are in formation. To a great extent, the culture has challenged a lifelong commitment to any way of life, especially to religious life. Furthermore, in many cases, the motivation for priesthood and consecrated life is rooted in the desire for social and economic security and the ambition for upward social mobility. The study has argued that, given the gravity of today's challenges to vocational promotion and discernment in the Society of Jesus, it is important for the Jesuits of India to return to the Jesuit sources, to the tried and trusted ways of listening to God's presence and Spirit within others through spiritual conversation in order to effectively carry out the task of helping young men to rightly discern their life vocation.

In this spirit of ongoing faithfulness to the Jesuit sources and their adaptation according to the signs of the times, the members of the GC 36 turned their attention to

spiritual conversation, calling for greater care of it in apostolic discernment. The Congregation asserted that “given the magnitude and complexity of contemporary challenges to the mission, and the declining numbers to the Society of Jesus, discernment is more than ever critical for apostolic effectiveness,” and spiritual conversation is an essential tool for animating the apostolic communal discernment.<sup>1</sup> Though the GC 36 stresses the need for spiritual conversation in communal discernment, I have emphasized its importance both in the initial discernment of vocation and in the context of the novitiate, which is a critical stage of formation in Jesuit life. The fundamental concern of this study, therefore, has been to identify the concrete dimensions of the spiritual conversation which enable sound individual discernment, and how such a crucial tool of discernment is related to the present context of vocation promotion and formation in India.

The first chapter of the study consisted of an overview of the gifts and tensions inherent within the historical reality of India, including its multi-religious, socio-economic, and religio-political context, and considered the cultural impact of globalization on religious vocations. It demonstrated that the current reality presents both challenges and new opportunities to reimagine consecrated life and vocation promotion today. The second chapter traced the development of spiritual conversation within Jesuit sources, namely the *Autobiography*, the *Spiritual Exercises*, the *Constitutions*, the *Spiritual Diary*, and the *Letters*, demonstrating that for Ignatius and the first companions, spiritual conversation was not only an effective means for “helping souls,” but for attracting and selecting young men to join the mission. It was through the instrumentality

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<sup>1</sup> GC 36, d.2, no. 5.

of spiritual conversation that the first companions were able to make the communal discernment that gave birth to the Society of Jesus. But more than that, it was through spiritual conversation that Ignatius was able to gather his first companions by selecting suitable candidates to join him and then helping them to discern their vocation.

The third chapter argued that although it is Jesus who actively chooses the laborers to work in the vineyard, we are called to cooperate with God's initiative, and to use all means available to cultivate vocations. Vocation promotion is thus a collaborative endeavour between divine initiative and human means. The chapter explored how the various dimensions of Ignatian spiritual conversation may be applied in the present context of India. In light of the challenges and opportunities inherent within the Indian reality, the study argued that Ignatian "spiritual conversation," which is intrinsically dialogical, contextual, and mission oriented in nature, will be an important tool for Jesuits to help young people to discern and verify their life vocation according to the "signs of the times." To that end, the chapter proposed a model of spiritual conversation that may be fruitfully applied in vocational promotion and discernment today in the context of India. This model has three levels. The first consists of personal sharing, which includes storytelling or intentional speaking and active listening. The second level involves noticing the movement of spirits occurring in the conversation. On the third level, the listener invites the speaker to respond adequately to the movements of the good spirit that are noticed in the sharing. A Jesuit, therefore, who is expected to possess the qualities of a good conversationalist, helps the individuals to recognize the will of God for their lives.

Pope Francis has many times highlighted the need for a “culture of encounter,” by which he indicates the crucial importance of relationship and truly listening to the other.<sup>2</sup> Affirming the need to move beyond the modalities of virtual communication, which have left the youth isolated and lonely, Jesuits are called to recognize that it is the personal and loving encounter with a real person, rather than merely the sloganeering of the mass media, that will be of great help in vocational promotion and discernment. The spiritual conversation embodies such an encounter.

As Jesuits today reach all parts of the world, they need to make use of the opportunity of engaging the people of God in spiritual conversation in many different ways and for different purposes. My hope is that this study will help the Jesuits to further recognize the effectiveness of spiritual conversation in addressing both the vocation crisis and the selection of capable, motivated candidates to the Society of Jesus in India. The study reflects the hopeful assumption that by proposing spiritual conversation as an important tool of individual discernment, we may be able to sustain a vibrant religious life in India.

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<sup>2</sup> Pope Francis, “For a Culture of Encounter,” *L’Osservatore Romano*, no. 38 (23 September 2016), accessed April 8, 2018, [https://w2.vatican.va/content/francesco/en/cotidie/2016/documents/papa-francesco-cotidie\\_20160913\\_for-a-culture-of-encounter.html](https://w2.vatican.va/content/francesco/en/cotidie/2016/documents/papa-francesco-cotidie_20160913_for-a-culture-of-encounter.html).

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