The Dynamics of Conversion of Ignatius of Loyola as a Contribution to the Novice Formation in the Context of Vietnam

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THE DYNAMICS OF CONVERSION OF IGNATIUS OF LOYOLA AS A
CONTRIBUTION TO THE NOVICE FORMATION IN THE CONTEXT OF VIETNAM

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ABSTRACT

THE DYNAMICS OF CONVERSION OF IGNATIUS OF LOYOLA AS A CONTRIBUTION TO THE NOVICE FORMATION IN THE CONTEXT OF VIETNAM

Tang Van Nguyen, SJ

Understanding the meaning of conversion as a new way of reorientation of oneself towards God and others can empower the Jesuit novice toward the fulfillment of his vocation. For Christians and especially for Jesuit novices, understanding conversion is celebrating and actualizing conversion to God in daily life and always choosing Jesus Christ as the principle and foundation of personal transformation.

Understanding conversion as authentic self-transformation can support interreligious dialogue between Christians and other religious traditions in Vietnam. Authentic conversion leads a person to realize the forgiving and compassionate presence of transcendent Reality. Respectful interreligious dialogue also challenges one’s own conversion. As children of one common Mother, religious traditions, such as Buddhism, Confucianism, Taoism, Caodaism, Ancestral worship, and Christianity all of which are commonly found in Vietnam, can live together and share their responsibility in caring for the common home. Even as these traditions have different understandings of conversion, they share the same end of service to the common good and a better life. Their similar commitments to the common good motivate everyone to seek a transformation of society. This understanding of conversion strengthens each person according to his or her tradition to embrace a multilateral perspective of authentic conversion. Such an understanding of conversion also opens to the various levels of reconciliation with transcendent Reality, with oneself as intrapersonal transformation, with people of other cultures as social transformation, and with nature as ecological reconciliation.

This study starts with the crises and opportunities in religious life in the context of Vietnam. This leads one to explore conversion in some spiritual movements of Christianity. In light of these various views of conversion, the novices are led into the dynamics of conversion of Ignatian spirituality. Finally, it moves towards spiritual conversion for Jesuit novices in Vietnam.
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INTRODUCTION

Motivation, Scope, Significance, Methodology

All human beings possess an intrinsic restlessness that empowers them to move beyond themselves to reach for the transcendent in the search for meaning in life. In this process, they transform both themselves and their community. Most often, such a transformation does not occur in one instant or one specific event, but it progresses through many stages. The dynamics of the conversion of Saint Ignatius of Loyola have always been a source of interest for my own formation and transformation as well as for the Jesuit novices whom I have accompanied.

The recent Thirty-Sixth General Congregation has audaciously called all members of the Society of Jesus to the importance of the ongoing process of personal and communal conversion preparing for a renewal of the Society of Jesus. “The question that confronts the Society today is,” the Congregation declares, “why the Exercises do not change us as deeply as we would hope. What elements in our lives, works, or lifestyles hinder our ability to let God’s gracious mercy transform us?” Subsequently, the renewal of the Society today necessitates a profound conversion both at the personal and communal levels. In fact, in the letter addressed to the whole Society promulgating the decrees of the 36th General Congregation, the newly elected Superior General Arturo Sosa emphatically announced that, "the success of the Congregation lies in the fruit of our personal conversion, in the necessary changes in the lifestyle of our communities, and in the willingness to be sent to the peripheries or frontiers of the contemporary world to

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1 General Congregation 36 of the Society of Jesus, Decree 1, no. 18.
share the joy of the gospel.” Responding to such a call, this thesis aims to study how such a dynamic of conversion can be contextualized in the Vietnam Province of the Society of Jesus.

Like the Society of Jesus, Christianity has faced its own crises in Vietnam. The percentage of Vietnamese Catholics still hovers around seven percent of the total population from 1960 until 2019. This percentage indicates a weakness or inertia in Christian evangelization. Many Catholics live only according to “commandments,” or strict rules. Most of them attend Sunday mass out of fear of eternal condemnation. They belong to the Church out of either divine punishments or earthly benefits, instead of God’s love. Currently, materialism has greatly influenced the Vietnamese Church. As a result, knowledge of Christ remains rather shallow or merely theoretical. In addition, communism seems to sow a manipulative culture among Vietnamese Catholics. They become apathetic to their neighbors’ basic human needs. Gradually, people lose their sense of identity and create a competitive network of authority, wealth, and reputation.

The current crisis urgently calls for a profound conversion among religious communities to live as a witness to the values of the Gospel. Leading an authentic religious life is the counterculture that requires radical conversion both individually and communally.

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4 A report in 2018 from the Committee on Consecrated Life of Vietnam Conference of Catholic Bishops about statistics of Vietnamese Catholics.

Regarding clerics and religious persons, in 2019 Vietnam, there are 307 Congregations, Societies of Apostolic Life, Secular Institutes, and Associations present in 27 dioceses. Their members work in a variety of fields, such as hospitals, centers for HIV patients, leprosy centers, nursing homes and infirmaries for disabled persons, orphanages, social works, and pro-life and marriage centers. Some members, however, got some “diseases,” such as excessive activity, mental and spiritual laziness, functionalism or careerism in religious life, “spiritual Alzheimers,” worldly profit, and seeking success. Beside many exemplary religious persons, large numbers of other religious have not lived out their prophetic, self-emptying service and evangelical commitments. They have lost their sense of belonging. Regarding religious motivation, some novices enter the religious life to fulfill a parent's expectations. Others desire to satisfy a hunger for achievement and to escape poverty. Some have a fear of the opposite sex. Some look for peace and security. Consequently, there is a great need for conversion at the individual and communal levels in the Church of Vietnam.

Based on Ignatius’s conversion, this investigation will encourage Jesuits in Vietnam to engage in their own process of conversion. Especially, within the formation program, novices are called to begin their ongoing conversion away from their old self to

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7 One of fifteen “diseases” pope Francis mentioned on Monday, 22 December 2014 was “spiritual Alzheimers.” That is a symptom of the progressive decline of spiritual faculties.

8 Adolfo Nicolas, SJ, “A Spiritual Journey Through the Asia of the 1990s,” Federation of Asian Bishops’ Conferences’ Papers, no. 57c (July 1990), 3-4.

a new and ordered life. This conversion process orients them to a new culture centered on God, so to serve others more authentically.

The novitiate serves as the foundational stage of formation, as the initial steps for the novices’ entire life to come. Namely, from this essential formation in conversion of heart, novices can continue their ongoing conversion in the following periods of formation until the end of their life. Conversion is necessary not only for Jesuits, but also for all religious persons in all periods of formation, and for anyone who is looking to better and fulfill their life. I am convinced that understanding the meaning of conversion as a new way of reorientation of oneself towards God and others can empower the Jesuit novice toward the fulfillment of his vocation.

This investigation employs an interdisciplinary approach including social analysis, scriptural study, and historical and textual interpretation. In particular, this paper follows the incarnational methodology of the operation of the *Spiritual Exercises (SE)*. Namely, it starts with the problems or crises in religious life in the context of Vietnam. At the same time, the crises include opportunities to discover human desire towards something greater, God in people’s lives. One can find this mix of crisis and opportunity leading to conversion in some periods of the history of spirituality. In light of these various views of conversion, the novices are led into the dynamics of conversion of Ignatian spirituality. This conversion means that our human-self becomes less and our divine-self increases according to the dynamics of the principles (SE 23) and the “Contemplation to Gain love” (SE 230-237).\(^\text{10}\) This involves the movement from self-

centeredness to God-centeredness. This study of conversion will hopefully serve as a contribution to novice formation in the context of Vietnam. This thesis is organized in a funneling structure that begins with the larger context of Christian spirituality, then narrows down to Ignatian spirituality, and finally focuses on the conversion of novices in the context of Vietnam.

Nothing is older than a dramatic conversion, and nothing is newer than personal conversion in Christ's love. On the one hand, the call to conversion is an ancient reality. Peoples of all religious traditions are constantly engaging in conversion. Furthermore, the divine life has been manifested since the beginning of humankind drawing people to a fundamental conversion. On the other hand, personal conversion is always new because human life involves the journey towards God as the ultimate end. Thus, ongoing conversion is an essential constituent in making us more fully human and more divine in Jesus Christ (Eph 4:13).

The dynamics of conversion of Ignatian spirituality in this investigation are like yeast that is mixed with flour until the whole dough is leavened (Mt 13:33). Ignatian conversion strengthens the formation of Jesuit novices for apostolic ends. By engaging in Ignatian conversion, religious persons in consecrated life, as well as laypeople, can be transformed into intimate companions of Jesus Christ. Engaging in their prophetic conversion, the novices seek to discern their way of life in the light of the Holy Spirit for greater glory of the Father. Similarly, the prophetic conversion of Ignatius might help the leaders of the Vietnamese government to return to the Truth, the Good, and the Beautiful, which are immanent in their consciences. As the bishop of the Kontum diocese, Michael Hoàng Đức Oanh, has said: “Please, all the leaders need to return, to live conversion from
evil to serve the Vietnamese, to serve their own people.”¹¹ Finally, Ignatian conversion can help people of other religions or all those who look for a fulfilled life to seek ultimate Reality.

This investigation is divided into four chapters with the incarnational approach of the *Spiritual Exercises* in the paradigm of a funnel. Namely, conversion is examined from the concrete anthropological context in Vietnam. From this tension of crises and opportunities, conversion is enlightened theologically by the history of spirituality. Then, conversion is explored through the lens of Ignatian discernment and the movements of spirits. Finally, Ignatian dynamics of conversion are applied to the formation of novices in Vietnam.

Chapter I focuses on the problems, crises, and opportunities of religious life in Vietnam. This involves pointing out the issues that lead to disordered motivations of novices coming from their cultural context. Chapter II explores the understanding of spiritual conversion in the Bible and in some movements in the history of Christian spirituality, including martyrdom, asceticism, monasticism, pilgrimage, and the lifestyle of mendicants. From this historical background, the dynamics of spiritual conversion in chapter III center on Ignatian spirituality through the lens of spiritual discernment regarding the inner movements of spirits. On the basis of anthropological experience and theological interpretation, chapter IV discusses the implications of Ignatian conversion for the formation of novices in Vietnam. This is the process of transformation of the whole person towards Jesus Christ in his kenotic love for others’ salvation.

CHAPTER ONE
ONGOING CONVERSION OF THE CATHOLIC CHURCH IN VIETNAM
Crises and Opportunities

Introduction

The Catholic Church in Vietnam is called to live a prophetic mission in her nation imbued with a multi-religious culture such as Buddhism, Confucianism, Taoism, and influenced by a communist regime. This prophetic mission was manifested through around 130,000 Vietnamese Catholics¹ who died for the faith during 300 years of bloody persecution under the reigns of feudal kings from the 17th to 19th centuries.² The Church continues to witness Christian values in the context of opportunities and challenges towards other religions and under the communist government. In general, through a prophetic missionary life, the Church has permeated and integrated herself into the soul and body of Vietnam as a nation. Besides, Vietnam is both like the womb or sacred space that brings Christians into a conversion process so that Vietnamese Christians can live out their vocation of children of God. Vietnam is also a community that is given to the Church to serve as citizens and members of God’s people.³ In short, rooted in a prophetic tradition of the Church as well as germinated in communism, the Catholic Church in Vietnam, especially people in religious orders are facing crises as well as opportunities in

her growth. This chapter examines the existing state of affairs for the crises and the opportunities as well as the underlying reasons for them.

1. Status Quo and the Reasons for the Crises

1.1. Status of the Crises

The Vietnamese Church is neither frozen in her context nor regards herself as a project that has been completed, but continually immerses herself in all the ups and downs of the nation. Brought to Vietnam in 1523 CE, the Vietnamese Church has slowly embodied the merciful love of God in her homeland. In all, the Vietnamese Church is called to realize her status and the causes of crises that involve the structure of life, identity, life direction, and vocation of her children, including the youth and members of religious orders.

Most recently, the Vietnamese Church from the Open Economy policy of the communist government in 1986 has struggled through various crises of identity among the youth, especially, in the midst of urbanization and the cyberspace revolution. As a child raised in a rural parish in the northern part of Vietnam, I have witnessed many structural changes among Catholic families and parishes. Ancient customs in the villages and familial traditions are no longer taken as norms.

In recent years and even now, new cultures of the open market economy and industrialized life have come to rural villages in which many Catholic youth feel obsessed and possessed by those cultures. The appearances of factories and industrial zones have on the one hand helped rural people to escape from their poverty. On the

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4 Chinh Quang Đỗ, SJ, Dòng Tên Trong Xã Hội Đại Việt 1615-1773, 10.
other hand, the new economic prosperity has shaken their faith-convictions and turned over their former way of life. As a result, many Catholics are not well equipped with enough knowledge to cope with the new economic culture. In addition, their faith and their relationship with Jesus have not been well developed in such a way that they could encounter Christ in a more direct and personal manner. Such a lack of depth in faith has disoriented many youth and led to a lifestyle manipulated by power of money and consumerism.⁵

When faith life and attraction to money and power are unbalanced, it is easy for rural Catholics to be overwhelmed by the pressure and demands of the market economy, thus, risking loss of their Catholic vision. Particularly, in many rural parishes, fewer youth and their laboring aged parents have joined parish activities such as choirs and catechists. The parish activities are not strong enough to attract youth, and the parish priests often do not invest their hearts and initiatives to accompany the youth and to support them. Often parents do not give an example of faith-life, and the youth do not feel satisfied with the out of date activities in parishes. They can become apathetic to their neighbors’ needs and complacent in their own spiritual needs. They often grow up without adequate personal care from responsible parents and a healthy society.⁶ Instead, they only care about their material needs and feel satisfied with their consumeristic life.

Thus, the new culture of economic urbanization slowly destroys the structure of familial life in terms of the common good and deconstructs pastoral relationships involving values

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of faith. Consequently, the Vietnamese Church in rural areas is faced with her children’s moral coldness, spiritual aridity, and loss of a sense of holiness. These crises challenge the youth’s maturity of faith and their life directions as well as potential religious vocations.

The social media have negatively influenced Catholic youth’s faith life and participation in the liturgy. Bishop Joseph Vũ Văn Thiên of the diocese of Haiphong warned his diocesan youth against bad habits in attending mass. Instead of fully participating in the Eucharist, many young Christians have used cellphones to take pictures and turned the mass into a social performance. They viewed the faith celebration as a social event. This use of cellphones in liturgical celebrations reflects an inner hunger and emptiness of faith. In daily life, parents’ attachments to social media have weakened their responsibility toward their children’s human, psychological, academic, and spiritual life. Even when families stay home together, each member has their own concern with their cellphone. Instead of mastering our social media to be useful instruments for human development and a healthy means for evangelization, many youth have let their Christian selves be eroded by bad internet websites. They have become addicted to cellphones, all of which have negatively affected their Christian and religious identity. Gradually, youth have lost their sense of holiness, faith, love, and hope. Their hearts have become stony in their faith life and apathetic towards their neighbors’ basic needs. Thus, the usage of social media without mature responsibility and healthy life orientation can lead to other social evils. This situation has challenged the Vietnamese Church to confront the youths’

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individualism or crises of Catholic identity, as well as their orientation toward their life’s vocation.

Second, the Vietnamese Church has faced crises in Christian identity in terms of evangelization. In 1960, the percentage of Vietnamese Catholics was 6.93%. From 1960 to 2008, the percentage of Vietnamese Catholics has been unable to rise even to 1%. According to the Catholic Hierarchy Catalog 2013, there were 6.87% Catholics. Until 2016, the percentage of Catholics still remains around 7% of the total population. This unchanged percentage shows a weak result in evangelization. Furthermore, within the percentage of self-claimed Catholics, many live simply according to the “commandments,” or strict rules. Many attend Sunday masses to avoid being eternally condemned. They belong to the Church out of either fear, punishment, or earthly benefits, instead of eternal love.

As the economy improves, Vietnamese Catholics have certainly enjoyed a new level of prosperity. However, the level of catechesis or religious education has not reflected the newly found economic changes. The knowledge of Christ can be either shallow. Faith in God remains superficial, not yet reaching a personal encounter with

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Jesus Christ. Living catholic faith becomes out of the ordinary. Therefore, it is easy for many youth to lose their faith when they leave their rural families and work in factories. Evangelization is not effective when young people lack a strong conviction in God. Under the control of communism which has often imposed its atheistic strategies on all social systems, many Vietnamese Catholics have been manipulated in their faith life and followed a “culture of lies.” Consequently, they often become apathetic to their neighbors’ basic needs. They lose their sense of Christian identity and live a life based on wealth and self-centeredness. This situation continues to confront the Vietnamese Church.

Next, a crisis of evangelization manifests itself in the lives of clerics and religious persons in terms of motivation and life direction. In 2019, there are 310 religious Congregations, Societies of Apostolic Life, Secular Institutes, and Associations present in 27 dioceses, in which there are 34,355 sisters and brothers and 1,866 religious priests. Looking at the report from 2012 to 2017, the Committee of Consecrated Life of the Catholic Bishops’ Conference of Vietnam (CBCV), showed that the numbers of religious persons have increased. In 2012, the numbers of religious persons were about 18,120, but

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in 2017 this number rose to 31,490. It is so optimistic for us to look at this growing number, but the outreach from religious congregations is still too limited. Concretely, there are 265 among 310 religious congregations in the Saigon diocese. But the Hanoi diocese has 35, in Hưng Hóa, there are 22, Thanh Hóa has 2, in Qui Nhơn, there are 9, and Vĩnh Long has 11. In general, the majority of religious congregations have not yet gone out to the periphery or the frontier areas for evangelization for a variety of reasons. Certainly, under the context of communism, those religious congregations can open their kindergartens and work in a variety of fields, such as hospitals, medical centers for HIV patients, leprosy centers, nursing homes, infirmary houses for disabled persons, orphanages, social work centers, and prolife and marriage centers. Those congregations have managed to engage in different aspects of Vietnamese society that are manipulated by the communist regime.

Third, the formators of religious congregations have faced with the challenges of sexual abuse and religious “diseases” that exist in some of the young religious in the current context of Vietnam. These problems have prompted the Consecrated Life Committee of CBCV to hold two seminars in Saigon on the ongoing challenges in religious formation. The first seminar occurred from May 29-30, 2019, and the second from November 19-22, 2019. There were around 450 participants, including superiors, consultors, formators, and permanently vowed persons. In the second seminar, Sr. M.

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16 Fr. Thomas Trung Quang Vũ, SJ, the Secretary of the Committee on Consecrated Life of the Catholic Bishops’ Conference of Vietnam, Episcopal Vicar for Religious of Saigon Archdiocese, had an interview with Vatican News on the religious life in Vietnam. This news was published on May 15, 2019.
Thecla Trần Thị Giông, CND, as former provincial, with her 25 years of teaching counseling psychology and theology in scholasticates for men and women, reported that ninety percent of young religious come from poor families, and from the poor countryside of Vietnam. The majority of them have experienced sexual abuse, some happened before entrance into religious life, and many cases occurred when they did pastoral ministry.¹⁷

Regarding some “religious diseases” in the young religious, Sr. M. Thecla Trần Thị Giông, continued to explore the challenges of the human aspects of religious formation. The young ones have grown up in a communist society that rarely appreciates moral and religious values. Communism overemphasizes economy, money, and the profane values of individualism. Young religious tend to demand self-satisfaction in their individualism rather than commitment to common values. Furthermore, they are hungry for self-respect and self-esteem. In fact, they desire to be helped in their formation, but the young religious do not want to assist others because they feel ashamed and inferior to others in community, and they think that they are mature enough.¹⁸ Clearly, this situation of young religious not only challenges the formators of their religious congregations but also the entire Vietnamese Church.

Other “illnesses” facing young religious are gaps between generations, and formation based on coercion or force. As the Secretary of the Committee on Consecrated


Life of the Catholic Bishops’ Conference of Vietnam, the Episcopal Vicar for Religious of the Saigon Archdiocese, Fr. Thomas Vũ Quang Trung, SJ, presented some of the main challenges in religious life in Vietnam. First of all, there is a gap in mutual understanding and heart to heart communication between formators and the young religious for whom they are responsible. The young’s way of proceeding deviates from their orders’ life visions, and ways of seeing, judging, and acting. The younger generation often complains about the older formators and holds that they are out of date. For the formators, they consider the young formatees as immature burdens to the religious orders. The young ones are ascribed to be the products of social communism and self-centered persons. Thus, finding one another’s positive points in harmony and mutual respect remains a challenge. Secondly, Fr. Trung commented that many religious congregations still operate according to medieval ways that prefer to overuse rules, authority, and punishments to form young religious. There is less listening, sympathy, and dialogue between the formators and formatees. This style of operations has led to serious tensions in community life and made many members feel alien or lost their vocation.\footnote{Fr. Thomas Trung Quang Vũ, SJ, The Report about Activities of Religious Congregations until 2019, accessed May 15, 2019.}

Overall, these inner “diseases” still affect religious men and women in Vietnam with excessive activities, or careerism in religious life, a type of “spiritual Alzheimers,”\footnote{One of fifteen “diseases” Pope Francis mentioned on Monday, 22 December 2014 was “spiritual Alzheimers.” That is a symptom of the progressive decline of spiritual faculties.} aiming for worldly profit. In that case, those “diseases” have infected the older religious
persons who have not dared to live out their prophetic, self-emptying evangelical commitments filled with service.

Moreover, some young religious enter religious life to fulfill their parents’ desires. Others desire to satisfy a hunger for achievement and to escape poverty as well as the fear of the opposite sex. Some seek peace and security in a religious life. Consequently, there is a great need for conversion both at an individual and communal level in the Church in Vietnam.

Fourth, the crises of life direction and life vocation have happened in civil society, as well as in a spiritual context.

On the civil level, right after the movement of Land Reformation in 1954, many Catholics in the northern area left their parishes and families to find a better life in the southern part of Vietnam. Then, after the reunification in 1975, many boat people became refugees running away from the communist regime. They took the risky journey to drift to other countries and sought real freedom. The United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) estimates that around 400,000 boat people died at sea during the unification movement. Nearly 1.5 million Vietnamese settled in the United States, 300,000 in France, 250,000 in Canada, and 245,000 in Australia. The hope of a better life made them take risks while they felt the misery of leaving their motherland.

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23 Tan and Nguyen, *En Route to the United Kingdom*, 34.
In addition, Anti-trafficking NGOs declare that many women suffer from sexual abuse and human trafficking. Between 2005 and 2010, around 133,298 Vietnamese women migrated due to marriage to South Korean or Taiwanese men. In October 2019, the news of the death of 39 Vietnamese youth in a truck container in Southeastern England shook the whole world. These situations confront all Vietnamese, including the Catholic Church and the victims who have left their families and homeland for a new life. Pope Francis in his homily at the mass in Bangkok stadium lamented, “I think of children, women as victims of prostitution and human trafficking, humiliated in their essential human dignity, of young people enslaved by drug addiction and a lack of meaning that makes them depressed and destroys their dreams.” This spirit should motivate the Church and all humans to an authentic conversion process.

On the spiritual level, Fr. Toma Vũ Quang Trung, SJ, the Secretary of the Committee on Consecrated Life of CBCV, notes that some religious persons consider their consecrated life a career, the three vows as burdens and obstacles for their social development. They assimilate their life of vocation with rigorous external disciplines and habits, rather than authentic commitments that arise from an inner call from God. On the contrary, some formators of some religious congregations have manipulated their subjects according to their own secular plans rather than helped their formatees discern God’s will. For some formators, they have turned the formatees to be their “own

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24 Tan and Nguyen, 35.

children” in order to fulfill their own dreams, and in order to reinforce their power.\textsuperscript{26} Such formators assimilate their ministry with selfish functions that serve their disordered self and function as managers of a civil company.

In short, the Church in Vietnam has confronted the crises of life orientations of the youths and inner struggles of religious life. Thus, there is a great need for the conversion both at the individual and the communal level. In order to engage in a conversion process, each person is called to confront the crises they may experience, which may inspire them to orient themselves towards higher values.

1.2. Identifying some possible sources for the current crises

Crises of identity, life direction, and vocation derive from individual and communal causes. First, at an individual level, many youth are threatened by modernity and the unbalanced claims of one-sided rationality.\textsuperscript{27} That is, they seek to solve their problems by their subjective reason, using it as their ultimate standard, and they doubt the inner voice of God. Pope Francis talked with Japanese youth and noticed that many Catholic youths live in fear and spiritual poverty as slaves to loneliness. Alienation and withdrawal from love push youth into crises of identity and life direction. Francis observes that “we grow dehumanized, we lose our faces and names, and we become just

\textsuperscript{26} Fr. Toma Trung Quang Vũ, SJ, the Secretary of the Committee on Consecrated Life of the Catholic Bishops’ Conference of Vietnam (CBCV), shared the current situation of consecrated life in Vietnam. This interview was published on May 15, 2019, accessed January 20, 2020, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Lc98XAQMmZo.

\textsuperscript{27} Adolfo Nicolas, SJ, “A Spiritual Journey Through the Asia of the 1990s,” Federation of Asian Bishops’ Conferences’ Papers, no. 57c (July 1990), 3.
another object.” Similarly, this situation also happens in Vietnam. Many youths are not accompanied in their spiritual and socio-psychological lives. Consequently, their so-called free growth can lead them to deviate in their life orientation. They can fall into an abandoned lifestyle and degrade their potentials for a better life. That situation may make many youth victims of a disordered society and manipulate by other authoritative persons either in their families or by religious congregations.

Second, in the social realm, communism imposes upon and washes the youth's brain. For communism, human life aims at only materiality, and religion is the opium that comforts the suffering. As a result, its focus on materialistic life, and its culture of lies deteriorates the spirit of youth. Besides, the communist regime propagandizes a culture that upholds productivity. If someone cannot produce an economic product, cannot work or earn money, they are considered a “secondary citizen” and a person who is not valuable. This phenomenon leads to negative attitudes towards others. This negative lifestyle spreads and becomes a “throwaway” culture in which the powerful regard other people as unwanted items in dustbins. In general, communism forces people into life crises and alienates them from authentic values and the meaning of life. Thus, many youths can fall into daily struggles for identity and life direction.

In a familial context, many parents do not know how to educate their children. Children’s education sometimes falls into extremes. Some parents are busy earning money to nourish their children’s physical needs, but, they forget to care for children’s


29 Pope Francis, Laudato Si, nos. 16. 22.
psychological, emotional, and spiritual needs. On the other hand, some parents force their children to follow their own desires and dreams. Children become social products or pawns in their parents’ projects. Parents rarely think that their children are a special gift from God and do not look them as subjects on a journey to realize their full potential. Moreover, some parents overprotect their children and indulge them in the wrong ways, which harms children rather than helps them to grow up. These extremes may lead youth to crises of identity or confuse their direction of life.

Third, there is a negative understanding of spiritual and secular life. In the mindset of many Vietnamese Christians, a consecrated life is more precious and valuable than marriage or a vocation to the single life. Both Catholics and people of other religious traditions often hold that religious life is superior. They highly respect religious persons, and people believe that the religious have a deeper relationship with God or the Transcendent. In the familial realm, parents feel honored in public life or greatly blessed by God because of a religious person in their family. Therefore, many Vietnamese parents desire that their children lead a religious life. This dream can become a burden leading to crises of the young person’s life in vocation.

In conclusion, the Vietnamese Church has undergone many struggles. Through these crises, the Church can be purified to conform to Jesus Christ's passion and resurrection. However, behind these crises or shadows are the opportunities or the lights

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30 Fr. Toma Trung Quang Vũ, SJ, the Secretary of the Committee on Consecrated Life of the Catholic Bishops’ Conference of Vietnam (CBCV), shared the current situation of consecrated life in Vietnam 2014-2016.

31 Fr. Toma Trung Quang Vũ, SJ, the Secretary of the Committee on Consecrated Life of the Catholic Bishops’ Conference of Vietnam (CBCV), shared the current situation of consecrated life in Vietnam. This interview was published on May 15, 2019, accessed January, 20, 2020, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Lc98XAQmZo.
of the conversion process. “Crisis” is not the last word, but it can open to the world of conversion towards centeredness on God.

2. Looking forward to Opportunities for Conversion

2.1. Deep conversion through proverbs

The Catholic Church in Vietnam is rooted in the fertile soil of Vietnam and embraces the rich cultural treasure of all generations. By her engagement, the Church tries to be present as a catalyst to promote a change of her homeland. Moreover, the Church is inspired in her ongoing conversion with the human values of Vietnamese culture and religious traditions. Particularly, the Church’s conversion is strengthened through Vietnam’s rich treasure of proverbs as wisdom crystallized from generations and as a way to enlighten future generations in their ongoing conversion towards a greater reality, ultimate Transcendence.

First, in agricultural life, the river is considered as the source of life, where the Vietnamese gather to nurture their life through cultivating rice and fishing as well as to transmit their values to the next generation. Rivers or ponds in front of the Church or the pagoda are regarded as sacred spaces for implementing a conversion, where a person receives the purification of mother earth. In the river, villagers come to get water for daily activities, to bathe, or to “purify” themselves. The utility of river water slowly shapes the mindset of villagers, becoming a common way of life, of reaction, of vision. The Vietnamese proverb resonates that “có tội thì lội xuống sông” (when we commit sins, we enter into the river for our purification). This proverb emphasizes the purifying role of nature, the river, water, and mother earth. More deeply, the proverb also reminds us that one is a sinner who cannot remove one’s own sins or shortcomings. In order to wash out
ones’ sins, a sinner needs to immerse oneself in the currents of the river. Immersion in the river points to the act of removing the old self and obtaining a harmony between “Thiên” (Mr. Heaven) - “Địa” (Mother Earth) - “Nhân” (Humanity), the theo-anthropo-cosmic way to turn over a new leaf. Culturally and spiritually, the Vietnamese believe in divine providence: “Thiên phủ địa tài,” Heaven covers and the earth supports. This affirms the existence of a creator and divine providence.

Second, in the way of life, the Vietnamese appreciate the process of an ongoing conversion: “một lời nói đổi, sám hối bảy ngày” (a lie requires a seven-day penance). This proverb emphasizes a temporal fulfillment of conversion in a lifelong process. It is a reminder of rigorous penance and reflects a desire for a better life in relation to others in community. In order to dismiss a lie and live in harmony with others in community, one needs to live out one’s lifelong conversion. This view of life supports the Church’s ongoing conversion in orienting her children towards the authentic truth. Thus, the image of the river, along with various Vietnamese proverbs reflects the innate desire for self-purification among the Vietnamese, which could be easily translated into an evangelical seed of baptism. Such wisdom can be used as a catalyst for the ongoing conversion of the Church.

Third, communal harmony begins with a personal conversion by which self-blame is the beginning of a journey towards a communal renewal. Such an attitude is said in the proverb “tiền trách kỳ hậu trách nhân” (blame self first). This proverb deepens

33 Phan, Mission and Catechesis, 140.
one’s conversion beyond external rituals and relates the individual to communal renewal. The self is the inner depth of the human subject from which one is aware of what personhood is in and through one’s ongoing conversion.\textsuperscript{34} The human self is not a frozen self or absolute perfection, but is on a journey to reach to a more authentic and mature form. However, in the process of growing, we are distracted and disordered by different things. Therefore, we are always invited to turn back to ourselves in a new beginning for a better life. Perhaps, a self-conversion in Vietnamese cultural life resembles a confession of “mea culpa” (my fault) in Christian liturgical celebrations. For Christians, conversion needs to be fulfilled in the grace and mercy of God.

In short, conversion in the Vietnamese Catholic Church is reinforced by the fertile soil of proverbs as a rich accumulation of life experience through generations. Proverbs of conversion become opportunities for deepening an ongoing conversion in the Church. These proverbs can be considered as the door for a mutual encounter of conversion between nature and grace.

\textbf{2.2. Considering social media as opportunities towards Christian values}

The Vietnamese Church’s conversion is inspired by the growth of social media. The growth of social media in cities and outskirt areas in Vietnam has brought opportunities for changing the lives of individuals and communities towards Christian values. Media’s positive contributions are not in doubt. First, social media can help people to enrich their knowledge of the world. Second, for Christians, mass media can be used as a useful means to propagandize Christian values. Third, the network of

\textsuperscript{34} Thomas C. Anderson, \textit{Commentary on Marcel’s Mystery of Being} (Michigan: Marquette University Press, 2006), 28-29.
communications in cyberspace can promote heart to heart encounters and solidarity among persons.

First, social media can help people to enrich their knowledge of the external world and enrich the vision of their lives. In the individual realm, people can attain knowledge about the external world from different sources. Staying at home, we can learn from various websites. If we want to discover something, we can access Google. Similarly, bishop Peter Nguyễn Văn Khảm said that Radio Veritas Asia (RVA) in Manila has helped Vietnamese Christians to get the right news about the world and the universal Church. Even under the monopoly of communist newspapers, Vietnamese Catholics can access the internet to distinguish true from fake news.\(^\text{35}\) On the communal level, social media helps the Church to educate people and promote a culture of life, or to assist one another.\(^\text{36}\) With the help of social media, Catholics, Buddhists, and ancestral worshippers can enrich the ways of celebrating their faith and inspire one another in social commitments.

Second, social media can change the way of life of individuals and the mentality of communities. Promoting sound human and family values through media is an effective way to transform individuals and society. Participation in mass media can motivate people to change their vision of life, their interests, attitudes, and psychology.\(^\text{37}\) Many


livestream programs can modify our way of proceedings when we watch natural disasters and accidents, or people suffering all over the world. Furthermore, for Vietnamese Christians, mass media can also affect one’s life orientation, a means of evangelization and nurturing the faith. Recently, the multitude of available sources for religious-spiritual traditions has attracted many young people to religious life. Bishop Peter Nguyên Văn Đệ, SBD, has noted the great contributions of RVA to propagandize Christian values and to nurture Vietnamese Christians’ faith under the control of communism. Faith sharing from RVA has become spiritual food to nurture people’s faith and to inspire many people to understand Christian values.38

Third, social media can inspire people to encounter one another. This face to face encounter leads us to healing, sharing, and encouraging. From one’s own home, one can have an interconnected gathering in order to extend one’s vision to the wider world.39 Furthermore, media can also prompt people to have the heart to heart encounters supporting mature intimate relationships. From the perspective of Christian spirituality, mass media are considered as a kind of metaphysical gateway which transports us into an "other" realm beyond our normal life, even to the divine presence.40 That is the encounter


of faith sharing. Human encounters through social media can be raised towards and oriented by a divine encounter. Media can create an intimate encounter to promote people towards greater values.

In short, mass media have contributed a great deal to enrich people’s true knowledge of the external world and even their self-knowledge. Media can bring people to an inner change of heart and enrich their vision of life. Overall, for Vietnamese Christians, social media can be positive opportunities to evangelize Christian values. Cyberspace needs to be enlightened by moral values grounded in various ancestral cults and other religious traditions such as Buddhism, Confucianism or Taoism.

2.3. Deep conversion through Vietnamese customs and religious traditions

A native history has been woven from the crises and opportunities, which make up the vivid tradition and evoke the deep conversion of the whole nation. First, the deep conversion of the Vietnamese is motivated by their desire for the Divine source. Second, a deep conversion is expressed in the vivid customs of natural gods, domestic cults, or ancestral cults. Third, a deep conversion of the Catholic Church is strengthened while continuing to bring a victory over evil to its fulfillment of Jesus Christ. Fourth, some religious traditions contribute to a much deeper conversion of the Church. Finally, the openness and generosity of Vietnamese people facilitate a deep conversion in the Catholic Church in Vietnam.

First, the deep conversion of the Vietnamese is motivated by their desire for a divine source. This quest towards the transcendent derives from both divine and human elements. According to a traditional legend, Vietnam was formed when King Lạc Long Quân as Lạc Dragon Lord or "Dragon Lord of the Seas" married Princess Âu Cơ as the
immortal Goddess of the Mountains. They are considered the Vietnamese people's primary parents who gave birth to 100 children from whom 50 children migrated to the sea, and the rest went to the mountain. As the children of the Dragon-Fairy, the Vietnamese are proud of their divine origin. This myth expresses their dream of the original union and ultimate desire to belong to a greater reality beyond their earthly life. This myth reflects their restless quest towards their divine origin and also confirms a Vietnamese identity-marker for their origins among other neighboring countries. This myth of the formation of the nation orients the deep desires of the Vietnamese people to return to their original source. It also enlightens their consciousness to honor traditional values and contribute through historical appreciation and personal transformation.

Second, a deep conversion is expressed in and through the vivid customs of natural gods, domestic cults, and ancestral cults. In traditional Vietnam, “Táo Quân,” the lord of the kitchen (灶君) is assigned by Mr. Heaven (Supreme God) to take care of all households in harmony. Before the Lunar New Year celebration, “Táo Quân” returns to heaven to report on the affairs of all families. Thus, the feast day of Táo Quân’s departure to heaven is a special time for the Vietnamese to cleanse their houses, to review their moral life during the whole year, and to give offerings to Mr. Heaven. Besides, many rural villages have cults of “Thành Hoàng” (dynastic spirit protectors) as models of loyal service that provide correct teaching and sincere learning while protecting the

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41 The legend of Lạc Long Quân and Âu Cơ is recorded in the Lĩnh Nam Chích Quái and the Đại Việt Sử Ký Toàn Thư.


villages and training villagers in a career or a job. Villagers manifest their conversions of heart to the dynastic spirit protectors by repenting for their sins or shortcomings and promising to follow their Guardian’s exemplary life. Furthermore, at the ancestral memorial feasts (Giỗ tổ), all children stand in front of the ancestral tablet on the altar to express their deep gratitude towards their ancestors, to repent for their disordered life, and to promise to glorify their ancestors in a new life.

Third, a deep conversion of the Catholic Church in Vietnam is strengthened while continuing to bring a victory over evil to its fulfillment in Jesus Christ. Particularly, “Tế Đàn Nam Giao,” The Nam Giao Sacrifice, a tradition of Daoist sacrifices, is the summit and total conversion of the whole nation, including the King and all his subjects. Historically, the first recorded sacrifice to Heaven in Vietnam happened under the reign of king Lý Anh Tông (1138-1175 CE). In 1400 CE, Hồ Quý Ly instituted an annual sacrifice to Heaven on behalf of the kingdom. On the morning of the Lunar New Year’s day, the king, as the representative of the people and nation before Heaven, prays, prostrates himself in silence, then celebrates the solemn sacrifice of Nam Giao to Heaven, Earth, the spirits, and his imperial ancestors. In celebration of solemn sacrifices, the king repents of his own sins and all shortcomings, also calls all mandarins, the royal court, and all subjects for conversion. At the same time, the king as the son of God (thiên tử) receives the mandate of Heaven (mệnh trời) for the nation and asks for peace, good

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45 Phan, Mission and Catechesis, 26.
46 Tran, Gods, Heroes, and Ancestors, 82.
48 Phan, Mission and Catechesis, 24-25, 92.
harvest, and prosperity of all subjects. This tradition of Tế Đàn Nam Giao traces a deep conversion and the desire for a divine-cosmic-human harmony. The Vietnamese sacrifice of Nam Giao shows both an essential belief in God and paves the way as a catalyst for a deeper conversion of the Vietnamese Catholic Church.

Fourth, Buddhism, Confucianism, and Taoism penetrate the Vietnamese nation which helps the Church in Vietnam to continue to deepen her conversion process.

For Buddhism, conversion (懺悔 - sám hồi) centers on the purification of the heart (心 or 心), returning to the pure heart (慧) through only human natural efforts. Conversion in Buddhism does not mention a supernatural power and grace. For Buddhism, God’s role or divine grace cannot interfere in the Buddhist persons’ self-purification. Buddhist conversion is not a deliverance from sins, rather progressive enlightenment from ignorance, not from above, but from within oneself to get true light. In fact, Buddhism has emphasized moral conversion through an ascetic life towards the ultimate Truth, Beauty, and Goodness.

For Confucianism and Taoism, Confucianism points to conversion towards the mandate of Heaven. Heaven here is not a personal deity but more of a higher power. Confucius holds that “At fifty I understood Heaven's will (Analects 2.4).” Conversion according to Confucianism means a radical return to the natural order, the hierarchy of

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51 Duncan S. Ferguson, Exploring the Spiritualities of the World Religions: The Quest for Personal, Spiritual and Social Transformation (NY: Continuum International Publishing, 2010), 121-125.
Heaven, Earth, and man, which is the order of morality in the society and family. Besides, conversion in the mentality of Taoism focuses on personal transformation in harmony with the natural way (道-Tao) that is the way of the universe, both transcendent and immanent in each person.\(^52\) Conversion in Taoism is not to seek self-centeredness, but humble and selfless life. Taoism holds that people should lead an authentic life and care for others. In general, religious traditions have contributed their moral human and spiritual practice to a deeper conversion of the Catholic Church in Vietnam.

Finally, the generous openness of local Vietnamese people inspired the inculturation of Christianity in Vietnam in 1523\(^53\) and the ongoing conversion of the Church amazed the local Vietnamese. For the seventeenth’s missionary, Fr. Alexandre de Rhodes, a Jesuit French missionary (1624-1645) discovered tenderness and friendship, as well as the generosity of the Vietnamese people. The foreign missionaries were warmly welcomed. Rhodes said that the mandarins enjoyed great prestige among the people, but were less proud than the Chinese.\(^54\) Rhodes also valued that the Vietnamese of the seventeenth century had neither a self-centered culture nor considered strange persons as the barbarian.\(^55\) Similarly, Fr. Cristoforo Borri (1583-1632) also said that the

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Vietnamese were very hospitable and generous.\textsuperscript{56} This openness and generous way of life is the inner force to stimulate Christian conversion.

For the neighbors, the edified life of early Vietnamese Catholics amazed the local people. Particularly, Fr. Gaspar d’Amaral wrote a Portuguese report from Thăng Long—the imperial capital in 1632 to father André Palmeiro in Macao that the native people did not know what to call the religion of the missionaries, so they called it the religion of lovers, or loving religion: “đậu yêu nhau (de modo qm gentios lhe chamão, ley de yêu nhau, ley de se amar).”\textsuperscript{57} In general, the generous openness of the Vietnamese people facilitated the Catholic Church to root herself in the soil of Vietnam. The edifying witness of mutual love among the early Vietnamese Catholics attracted the local people to conversion to God. Like the yeast in a batch of wheat flour, the Catholic Church roots herself in the Dragon Fairy soil, laying the solid foundation for an ongoing conversion of the nation.

In short, the history of the formation and growth of the Vietnamese nation motivates its people to rediscover their origin, desire for the divine, identity and original rootedness as children of the Dragon-Fairy. Those discoveries can be essential catalysts to promote the Vietnamese Church to look back on her way of life in order to appreciate the treasure of human values in other religious traditions and natural values of the local people. Moreover, the humble presence of the Church can inspire people to look towards


the higher values in their life. Thus, the Church in Vietnam is called to embrace the essential values hidden in the struggles of the nation of the Dragon Fairy. The Church is thus inspired in her ongoing conversion.

**Conclusion**

Rooted in the Dragon-Fairy soil of the Vietnamese nation that is under the control of the communist regime, the Catholic Church in Vietnam has experienced many different challenges. Those struggles have come not only from external factors such as economic urbanization, materialism, and other social evils, but also from members’ apathetic life and loss of Catholic identity. Furthermore, religious vocations in the Vietnamese Church have dealt with crises in the current situation. However, beyond the crises in the social and spiritual levels from the nation and the Church, there are the opportunities open to a conversion process towards a better life.

The conversion process can draw upon the daily encounter with Christian values hidden in cultural customs and religious traditions. In this movement of conversion, the Vietnamese Catholic Church is called to embrace and rediscover evangelical values hidden within the crises as opportunities to bring hope for the nation and implement radical change. Through a deep conversion process, the Catholic Church can attract people to return to the transcendent Reality and validate the common good for the health of the nation. In authentic conversion, Vietnamese Catholics can realize that their country is considered as the sacred womb bringing them to a prophetic witness and implementing a reconciliation drawing upon customs and traditions. Therefore, in the next chapter, conversion is explored not only in the context of Vietnam, but also through some major movements of Christian spirituality.
CHAPTER TWO
A BRIEF SURVEY OF CONVERSION IN CHRISTIAN SPIRITUALITY
Spiritual, Biblical, and Historical Perspectives

Introduction

The dynamics of conversion are examined in the particular context of Vietnam and through some major movements of Christian spirituality. Chapter I focused on the current situation of the Catholic Church in Vietnam to investigate the dynamics of conversion from the tension between light and shadow. This tension happens not only in social life, but also in the spiritual life and in religious vocations. Behind such shadows or crises, there are light and opportunity. Thus, the Church in Vietnam is challenged to reform herself and to inspire her members to re-orient their life towards greater values. Furthermore, chapter II continues to explore the dynamics of conversion from the biblical perspective and from the way of life in some major movements of Christian spirituality.

Through daily life experiences, everyone undergoes an existential and spiritual struggle for a better life. Truly, human beings are restless for a fuller becoming, a greater wholeness, and an authentic self. In order to achieve the fullness of an authentic self, one embraces both crises and opportunities, even as one is tormented between light and shadow among various inner movements that one experiences within oneself and in life. In and through these internal and external struggles, human beings can be oriented towards a transcendental Reality. This is the process of ongoing conversion involving the whole person. Conversion is a transformation from self-centeredness to God-
centeredness.\textsuperscript{1} It is a progressive transformation in which one realizes one’s true identity and lives a meaningful life not based self-interest, but on a greater reality.

This investigation does not aspire to present details of all historical, social, and spiritual aspects of conversion. It first presents some brief points of conversion as a common human experience. Then, it examines the nature and origin of spiritual conversion, as well as biblical perspectives on conversion. Finally, it probes the dynamics of spiritual conversion in some major movements of Christian spirituality, such as Martyrdom, Monasticism, Pilgrimage, and Mendicancy.

1. **Conversion Permeating the Whole Person**

   Spirituality is rooted in a restless desire that moves the person towards a greater Reality or God into an integral life. In the process, such a movement transforms the individual as well as the community to which the person belongs. In the progression towards uniting with God, the person engages in a lifelong conversion. Therefore, Christian spirituality could be considered as a call to conversion moving towards union with God.\textsuperscript{2}

   Conversion is not simply a transformation of mind, affection, or heart, but of one’s whole being. First, a conversion process is expressed in and through our daily existence through which people seek ultimate Truth, Goodness, and Beauty.\textsuperscript{3} Second, our journey seeking authentic wisdom requires us to practice a daily conversion through an

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ascetic life. Third, the dynamics of conversion permeates the whole person. Finally, it is also necessary to evaluate an enforced conversion in order to reorient towards an authentic conversion, a genuine wholeness.

First, conversion permeates the moral life of people because we are innately restless for ultimate Truth, Goodness, and Beauty. Moral conversion is a change of way of life, a change from wrong to right life which involves true understanding of objective reality. Its choices in life are done by consciously understood and verified values, which is the journey from just knowing to doing. In daily life, immanent conversion roots itself in the human conscience that makes people feel sorry for faults against others or shortcomings in what they have done. For instance, saying, “I am sorry” expresses a daily conversion. Besides, when we contemplate the beauty of a flower and witness accidents or natural disasters, for some people, these experiences change our ways of thinking, judging, and acting in our moral life. But, for some others, there is no change in their heart when they face such experiences. According to Lonergan, encounters with the natural beauty of the sea and mountains orient our human reason, guide judgments, reinforce decisions, and enrich our interior knowledge inspiring us to lead a life of authenticity and goodness. We are becoming beings on the road to a final perfection and cannot imprison ourselves in imperfection. This personal conversion is a lifelong process of a constant change that

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involves the whole person. This continual change and openness, or readiness for new things undergo many existential crises. Through this intrinsic restlessness, we are called to open ourselves to ultimate Truth-Goodness-Beauty, the transformation of one’s personality.

Second, philosophers have taught that conversion challenges human beings to seek, to love, and to assimilate ultimate wisdom. Beyond its logical function, ancient philosophy was a spiritual exercise that demanded philosophers to live an ascetic life, a self-transformation. Namely, the ancient philosophers trained themselves in a daily death through the ongoing examination of conscience to become a channel of truth, wisdom, and light. In ultimate wisdom, they practiced a death to the disordered life or self-centeredness and practiced living for universal Truth. In other words, ancient philosophers lived their philosophical life in a way similar to that of religious monastics expressing their inner death for a new life. Socrates declared that “a man who has spent his life in philosophy necessarily has the courage to die, since philosophy is nothing other than an exercise of death.” Namely, Plato held that “to live in a philosophical way is to turn toward the intellectual and spiritual life, carrying out a conversion which involved ‘the whole soul.’” Philosophers practiced their ascetic way of life to escape from the bodily to a spiritual level that enhanced perception and approached the highest divine

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9 Hadot, What is Ancient Philosophy, 67, citing Plato, Phaedo, 64a.

10 Hadot, What is Ancient Philosophy, 65, citing Plato, Republic, 518c.
powers.\textsuperscript{11} Therefore, a philosophical conversion can be considered a spiritual conversion that turns a philosopher’s life around from inauthentic, unconscious worries to interior self-knowledge, an enlightened vision of the world, inner peace, and serene freedom. A philosophical life is "becoming just and holy with intelligence."\textsuperscript{12} The intellectual part cannot be separated from the psychological part or the emotional aspect of conversion. We are called to embody authentic freedom and channel the reconciliation between the interior and exterior life.

Third, the dynamics of conversion permeates the whole person in many religious traditions. Religious conversion is a change of spiritual life, an inner transformation towards the transcendent. As Lonergan said that religious conversion a falling in love with a ultimate concern, which is total and permanent self-surrender without conditions.\textsuperscript{13} It shifts from self-love or love of any finite object to the love of the Absolute Other. Particularly, Hindu and Buddhist traditions focus on moral and cognitive conversion. That is a change in attitude in a network of life with others, and authentic understanding of objective reality. Through a long life of religious ascetic practice, a cognitive conversion liberates people from their self-illusion and self-ignorance to an authentic self or the selfless life in personal commitments towards peace and harmony. Hindu and Buddhist understandings of conversion are not a deliverance from sin, but rather a progressive enlightenment from ignorance, not from above, but from within oneself to

\textsuperscript{12} Hadot, \textit{What is Ancient Philosophy}, 69.
attain the true enlightenment. Some Hindu sects think that mindful meditations can lead people to deep tranquility and human-cosmic harmony. Clearly, they emphasize the anthropological aspects of intellectual conversion as a disciplined life towards ultimate truth and goodness. Intellectual conversion is done when one takes responsibility for the truth and falsity of belief, as well as for the way to seek objective truth. The summit of enlightened conversion is fulfilled when there is no separation or distinction between a knowing subject, perceived object, and intellectual action; all are united into one enlightened status. Therefore, conversion from Hindu and Buddhist perspectives draws people to moral and spiritual conversion, to live a moral maturity according to the truth. Self-actualization in a religious conversion leads an authentic commitment to social transformation.

Finally, we need to consider enforced conversions in which the proselytes are required to be converted. Due to heresies and schisms in the third century, Christians were called to a unity in faith, centering on Christ, faithful to the Church. During this time, enforced conversions occurred to aim at the unity in the Church. In 258 CE, St. Cyprian called all heretic Christians to return to the Church and warned that “outside the Church, no salvation.” He was anxious about the loss of people’s Christian identity and integrity. However, in 438 CE, Theodosius II and Valentinian III declared in a constitution against Jews, Samaritans, heretics, and pagans: “Our special responsibility is

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the pursuit of true religion.”¹⁷ This is the dark side of conversion of “enforced Jews” to Christianity. Later, Catholic and Protestant missionaries sought enforced conversions of “indigenous peoples.”¹⁸

Similarly, in the seventeenth century CE, Alexandre de Rhodes, SJ also attempted to convert Vietnamese Buddhist monks to the Vietnamese Catholic Church. He holds that “all the pagans had been attached to the cult of idols.”¹⁹ This exclusive theology of salvation leads to enforced conversions in which the presence of evangelical seeds in other religions is forgotten, and many non-Christians come to misunderstand the salvific message of God.

Such an understanding of conversion had lasted for more than two thousand years until the opening of the Second Vatican Council. The understanding of enforced conversion is clarified according to the teachings of the Church in Vatican II, 1962-1965: God desires to save all human beings in ways unknown to us, and the seeds of the Word are present and active in various religions.²⁰ Thus, enforced conversions must be transformed into an authentic conversion to life fulfillment. It is essential for all human beings to convert to God-centeredness voluntarily rather than through enforced conversion to a religious ideology.

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¹⁸ M. Darrol Bryant, “Conversion in Christianity from Without and from Within,” in *Religious Conversion*, ed. Christopher Lamb and M. Darrol Bryant (London: Cassel, 1999), 177-190.


²⁰ *Ad Gentes*, no. 11; *Lumen Gentium*, nos. 16-17.
In short, a conversion process not only derives from external human spheres but also from the innate impulse that motivates human beings to a better life or human fulfillment. In earthly life, people can possess an inbuilt conversion that permeates the whole person and challenges a progressive human transformation. Thus, it is necessary to explore the nature and operation of conversion through a Christian lens because conversion is the heart of Christian spirituality.

2. The Nature and Dynamics of Spiritual Conversion

A daily conversion motivates us to deepen the nature and dynamics of a spiritual conversion as a fundamental change that affects the whole person. This section presents the process of spiritual conversion that can be enlightened when its nature is put in the light of Trinitarian love, in an intimate encounter between divine and human desire, one’s true homecoming to God. Moreover, the dynamics of spiritual conversion are considered a process of emptying oneself for one’s fulfillment with the divine life. For the Christian, spiritual conversion manifests itself in love longing for union with God.

First, the nature of spiritual conversion in all human beings is the Trinitarian love, the intimate encounter between the descent of divine desire and the ascent of human desire. On the one hand, the creative love of the Trinity always desires to draw human beings into a salvific dynamic (1Tim 2: 4). “God be with you” makes humans the center of Trinitarian love. The Father attracts humans to Jesus Christ (Jn 6:44, 65) as the way and draws humans to the Father (Jn12:32; 14:6), and the Holy Spirit leads all to the Truth in the Father (Jn 4:23; 16:13). Clearly, spiritual conversion happens because God wills it
from eternity. God descends into human life to elevate it as Irenaeus and Athanasius say, “God became man so that man might become God.” A conversion process turns out to become a process of deification. On the other hand, a spiritual conversion is a response of love and gratitude to God. This ongoing response derives from a restless divine desire in one’s human depths and existential commitments. Spiritual conversion is an authentic encounter between creative self-giving love and grateful response. “God is for person and person himself is for God” constitutes the spiritual conversion that embraces the whole person. In general, a conversion process is “falling in love” between a human self and God-self, an ongoing human hunger for God.

Second, a spiritual conversion is a detachment from oneself towards divine fulfillment because human beings as the image of God are restless to return to God from whom they originate. Human self-detachment is the reflection of a divine detachment. Anthropological detachment is a mirror image of divine detachment because of God’s nature of detachment. Jesus’s detachment as God-self-giving life becomes the essence and the form of all human self-detachment. Detachment expresses the fullness of divine love. God’s detachment makes him present in all creatures. The inward detachment of God conforms human beings to God and constitutes our conversion thorough self-detachment. Thus, by falling in love with God, the detached person participates in God’s

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purity and creative simplicity, as well as in God’s natural detachment from Himself. Such an asymptotic drawing toward God demands authentic interior mortification and the abandonment of self-will in relation to God’s will. In these dynamics of conversion, the “detached” person is free from all created things, from self-concerned desire towards God. Clearly, in detachment, there is a “complete surrender of our wills to God.”26

Third, for Christians, self-detachment leads to self-emptiness, a kenotic life in Jesus Christ. In a radical emptiness, the detached person searches for one’s true self and experiences one’s home-lessness, pain of loneliness, powerlessness, nothingness, and helplessness. However, this emptiness is neither nihilistic nor destructive. Rather, it is a preemptive state preparing oneself to encounter and to unite with God in the most personal and intimate way. Having reached such a state of emptiness, the detached person is embraced by God’s loving mercy and experiences purifying love.27

In short, the nature and dynamics of spiritual conversion are enlightened through Trinitarian love, which is the kenotic love of Jesus Christ. This is a process of mutual permeation between the human and the divine self. From the nature of love in conversion, we discover the dynamics as an ongoing self-detachment, self-emptiness, and its consequence as self-sacrifice for the fulfillment of the divine self.

3. **Movements of Spiritual Conversion from a Biblical Perspective**

3.1. **Understanding of spiritual conversion through scriptural aspects**

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It is also helpful to explore the notion of spiritual conversion through its etymological and Scriptural aspects. “Conversion” comes from the Latin term *conversus*, the past participle of *cove*rtere, which means “turning around” and “turning.” Basically, conversion connotes revolving, reversing, changing directions, or reorientation of one’s human life. In Souter’s *Glossary of Latin to 600 AD*, the notion of conversion points to the turning of the sinful person away from the world and turning to God.\(^{28}\) Particularly, the prefix “*con*” in *conversus* expresses an accompaniment with its original reality, not beside, near, or asymptotic, but it manifests a union with its reality. The stem *versus* expresses a dynamic or directed movement. *Versus* derives from *vertere*, which means a turning, a transforming.

Conversion through scriptural perspectives does not only refer to a radical turning away from sins, but also a process of turning towards God. In the Hebrew Bible or Old Testament, the notion of conversion is primarily expressed by the Hebrew verbs *nhm* and *shûb*. The verb *nhm* is to regret, or be sorry, and the verb *shûb* is to turn, return, repent, both point to human repentance from sins.\(^{29}\) Besides, *shub* emphasizes both the physical action of turning as expressed in Gen 14:7; 37:29, turning back in retreat (Ps 44:11), and a change of heart: “Rend your hearts, not your garments” (Joel 2:13). Truly, both *shûb* and *nhm* imply an authentic conversion, turning back to God as the source of true conversion. Conversion in the OT is not getting converts to the Jewish religion; rather, Israelites are called to conversion back to God.

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In the Christian Bible or New Testament (NT), the Greek words *epistrepho* and *metanoia* emphasize conversion as a process of change of one’s life, a turning towards God, rather than a once for all time action. However, *epistrepho* has a wider meaning than *metanoia* because *epistrepho* always includes faith (πίστις) as a center of conversion. In general, the NT uses *epistrepho* or *metanoia* as a turning away from sin, evil, or godlessness and turning towards God, Jesus, and righteous life. In addition, the notion of conversion as *conversio* has another reference. Concretely, the Rule of Benedict (RB) prefers *conversatio* to *conversio* because *conversio* centers on a one-time conversion while *conversatio* as the way of life implies a continual, repeated turning to God, a lifelong gradual process of putting on Christ. The prologue 49 of RB mentions that “But as we progress in the *conversatio* and in faith, we shall run on the path of God’s commandments, our hearts overflowing with the inexpressible delight of love.” It is “*conversatio morum,*” which is the heart conversion of the whole person, the deep conversion throughout one’s life, not a single moment of conversion, but a lifelong way of living. Beyond a dramatic moment of conversion, *conversatio* points to a whole life transformation by turning to God.

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In short, the term *conversio* expresses the movements of transformation, the process of a change of heart, and letting God intervene into a new orientation of life. It is both a temporal and spiritual engagement of human restlessness in a life orientation directed towards God-centeredness. The notion of conversion becomes more vivid and firm when its deep roots are discovered in scriptural foundations.

3.2. **Spiritual conversion as an ongoing exodus of the new creation**

The dynamics of spiritual conversion through a scriptural perspective may be understood as an ongoing exodus. Conversion as exodus includes individual figures such as Abraham, David, or Paul, as well as the whole Israelite community journeying through the desert to the promised land in the new creation. First, this section points out that the conversion process as a spiritual exodus comes from divine initiative. Second, it observes that the exodus of conversion operates as a gradual movement from the old land to the new land, from chaos to a new order, a new creation, and from slavery to filial freedom.

First, spiritual conversion in Scripture arises from God’s ineffable mercy. Conversion is primarily an act of God who first initiates and brings to completion by divine grace. In the Hebrew Bible, God cleanses human beings from impurities, gives new hearts and new spirits, and makes the Israelites observe God’s decrees (Ez 36:25-27). God has no pleasure in the death of anyone, even the death of the sinful (Ez 18:32). Furthermore, conversion is a grace of light that reveals to the sinner both his sin and the goodness of the one he has offended. Namely, God acts through prophets to save sinful

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people: “I will allure her; I will lead her into the desert and speak to her heart” (Hs 2:16).

Because human beings are God’s treasure (Ex 34:9), God initiates protection of his people: “The Lord himself will fight for you; you have only to keep still” (Ex 14:14). The experience of the exile as punishment for sin is a turning point in Israel’s recognition of the need to turn back to God’s design. Really, God’s mercy accompanies the Israelites in their exile and desert life (Ex 16:35) to liberate the Israelites because human beings are precious in God’s eyes (Is 43:4).

For the Christian community, understanding of conversion flows naturally and converges into the words and deeds of Jesus. In the Christian Bible, conversion is central to the message of Jesus: “The kingdom of God is at hand. Repent, and believe in the gospel” (Mk 1:15). Jesus is the embodiment of the Kingdom of God as the ultimate vision for a lifelong conversion. The kingdom is his way of life: the teachings, deeds, and the personhood of Jesus. The purpose of the arrival of Jesus in our human life is to come to save what is lost (Lk 19:10) and to make an idolatrous generation the holy people of God. In order to bring people to his way of life, Jesus Christ empties himself as a servant (Phil 2:6-11) and steps into the sinful river of Jordan to purify it and turn it into a holy salvific river (Mt 3:13-17). From his merciful heart, Jesus sacrifices himself to save human beings (Jn 15:13). Because of salvific love, God wills everyone to be saved and to come to the knowledge of the truth (1 Tim 2:4).

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Second, spiritual conversion entails an inner exodus from chaos to a renewed order, a new creation, and from slavery to filial freedom. In the Hebrew Bible, chaos is a state of formlessness and void prior to God’s creative act (Gen 1:2). Chaos depicts the disordered status of the people of God in exiled lands where they lost their identity as God’s chosen people. However, in chaos, the people of God realize how they were sinful and desire to return towards God as their savior. The chaos as disorder, conflict, confusion, darkness also becomes a potential for a new creation.\(^{39}\) That is a new creation from chaos to order, darkness to light. From chaos, people are called to return to God, who converts them to the new land. God calls Abram to a new land and leads him to the promised land and changes him from Abram to Abraham (Gen 15:7). The radical change from Abram to Abraham is an exodus, the conversion process from his old land, his old person, to an unknown land, the authentic self in a new land.\(^{40}\) Like Abraham, in the new creation, the Israelites undergo an exodus at the Red Sea, in the desert, and as exiles go through purification from slavery to filial freedom. Isaiah declares the new creation: “I am about to create new heavens and a new earth…My chosen ones shall long enjoy the produce of their hand” (Is 65:17.22). Truly, it is God who makes the exodus with the people to liberate them from a sinful status towards the status of filial freedom in an ongoing conversion (Ex 14:13-14).

The Christian Scriptures present different dynamics of conversion as an exodus from the old to the new self in the new creation. For Paul, conversion is being

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transformed from a zealous Pharisee (Acts 9:1) to a tireless apostle (1Cor15:10), from a persecutor to the persecuted, the promotor of Jesus: “Woe to me if I do not preach the gospel” (1 Cor 9:16). His life is a kind of exodus from the law based righteousness to a Christ-centered one.\footnote{Richard V. Peace, *Conversion in the New Testament: Paul and the Twelve* (Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans Publishing, 1999), 18-32.} Paul’s conversion rotates around Jesus Christ as the constitutive axis. Therefore, in his epistles, conversion is a process of turning away from the old self, away from worldly desires of the flesh such as promiscuity, selfishness (Rm 8:5-6; Col 3:9). Conversion is putting on Jesus Christ (Rm 13:14), the new self (Col 3:10), falling in love with Christ (1 Cor 13:4-7). For Mark and Matthew, conversion is emphasized as the center to the message of Jesus of the kingdom of God that requires repentance from sins and faith in Jesus (Mt 4:17; Mk1:15). Radical conversion demands disciples’ self-abnegation as an exodus from what they have to who they are in the vision of the kingdom of God. Besides, Luke views conversion as the “wideness of God’s mercy.”\footnote{Witherup, *Conversion in the New Testament*, 28-56.}

Then, John develops the dynamics of conversion as an exodus from darkness to light, from blindness to sight (Jn 8:12; 1 Jn 1:5-7). In the new creation, one is transformed from the earthly to the heavenly by rebirth in the Spirit of filial freedom (Jn 3:5).

In summary, biblical tradition uses different imagery to present the conversion of the Israelites, but one of the pivotal aspects of conversion is the exodus. In conversion as exodus, God is tireless and restless to initiate the search for Israelites even when they turn away from God’s mercy in the promised land. Thus, human conversion always derives from God’s ineffable mercy. This is also the inner exodus from chaos to a new order, a new creation, and from slavery to filial freedom. The dynamic of an ongoing conversion
is rooted in the Scriptures and becomes the foundation and inspiration for conversion in Christian spirituality.

4. Some Major Movements of Conversion in Christian Spirituality

The dynamics of conversion are expressed in different ways through some major movements in Christian spirituality. Particularly, this investigation presents the status quo and motivation leading to radical conversion. Then, the dynamics of conversion are enlightened in each major movement of Martyrdom, Monasticism, Pilgrimage, and Mendicancy.

4.1. Conversion in martyrdom in the early persecuted Church

4.1.1. Status quo and motivation for martyrdom

Living out one’s conversion becomes vivid and urgent in the early period of the persecuted Church. Martyrdom is the ultimate and perfect conversion. Martyrdom is the witness to the radical conversion towards God’s love. Being persecuted in the Roman Empire during the first three centuries of the Church, Christians sought to imitate Jesus’s passion. Thus, first, this section presents the status quo leading to martyrdom. Second, it posits that the way of persecution manifests inner motivations.

In terms of the status quo, coping with the persecution of the Roman Empire, Christians embraced a new way of transformation through martyrdom. Concretely, the early Christians were accused of atheism because Christians refused to pay homage to the Roman gods. When rejecting the gods as guardians of Rome, they denied the legitimacy of the empire. Refusal to the gods was considered unpatriotic and the cause of
earthquakes, floods, and pestilence. Christians did not pay homage to Roman gods by offering sacrifices, even when the stability of the state depended on such offerings. On the contrary, Christians worshiped Jesus Christ as a political criminal and always talked about the imminent end of the world. Their Christ-centered life caused them to be characterized as agnostics in contrast to the gnostics who worshiped the Roman gods.

All of these reasons pushed the early Christians to martyrdom as a perfect conversion to be in union with the suffering Jesus.

Secondly, through persecution, the martyrs were challenged with the inner dynamics of conversion. Some Christians refused martyrdom out of fear of persecution and physical torture. Those Christians valued their own selves, so they needed time to return to Christ. Some Christians, however, wanted to be voluntary martyrs to be a witness of the faith to audiences of other religious traditions, or because of vain glory, worldly reputation, which centers on egoism rather than Christ-centeredness. They sought martyrdom for its own sake. This self-centered martyrdom might destroy the weak in faith, and turn martyrdom into earthly merit. Considering voluntary martyrdom, Origen rebuked the would-be volunteers and called the volunteers to return to Christ’s love. Thomas Aquinas emphasized that one cannot self-designate oneself as a martyr. Jerome stressed that “martyrdom is worthless if it is undertaken for the sake of honor and glory.”

Christian martyrdom is not a cult of death. Death through martyrdom is neither

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46 Whitby and Streeter, Christian Persecution, Martyrdom, and Orthodoxy, 158-163.
a denial of God’s given life, nor an escape from fate; rather it is a witness to the value of life. Thus, martyrdom itself is an act of conversion to testify to the love of God. As a way of conversion to witness to Christ’s values, martyrdom is motivated by the union with the suffering Christ, which is taken as a sign of divine grace.

In short, martyrdom as perfect conversion values the witness of the suffering Christ. Through coping with persecutions, martyrs discover their inner responses that are mixed between human and divine motivations through which they are called to return to Jesus Christ as the ultimate model of a martyr. Martyrdom motivates a deep and perfect conversion to God as the goal of life.

**4.1.2. The dynamics of martyrdom as radical conversion**

This section examines radical conversion through martyrdom as a passion with and in Jesus Christ, who is the ultimate form of all martyrdom. Converted and drawn into the passion of Christ, martyrs desire to witness to the eternal values of the Truth. The death of martyrs functions as a living example to strengthen and kindle people’s faith towards conversion to God’s love.

First, the suffering Jesus is the constitutive form of the dynamics of martyrdom. Thus, early Christians were converted to enter into the flow of the passion of Jesus. Historically, martyrdom flows from the Old and New Testaments to the present. Examples include the thousand murdered Jews (2 Mac 6:3 -7:32) who died to fulfill the commandments, the death of Stephen (Acts 8:1b) for the love of Christ, the many Christians persecuted under Nero (64 CE). All these martyrdoms center on Jesus Christ

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as the primary martyr: “Jesus Christ, the faithful witness, the firstborn of the dead and ruler of the kings of the earth” (Rev 1:5). Truly, martyrdom is the transformational journey of radical conversion.48 Therefore, a perfect conversion through martyrdom is the consequence of the kenotic love of Christ. In other words, conversion through martyrdom is not the ultimate end because Christians are not called to seek death, but to witness the truth and to praise divine life even to the point of giving up their earthly life. To be a Christian is to suffer. The martyr Ignatius longs “to be an imitator of my suffering God.”49

Second, in conversion towards the kenotic love of God, martyrs desire to witness the eternal values of truth. They are eager to deny their selfish life to gain Christ’s life. Particularly, Origen exhorts: “I should pray that I might become a martyr to God in Christ.”50 St. Ignatius of Antioch longs for martyrdom: “I am eager to die. My love has been crucified, I desire the drink of God, namely His blood.”51 Perpetua is convinced that “the prison was made a palace for me.”52 Polycarp fell in love with Christ: “I must be burnt alive.”53 Later, in the sixteenth century, Teresa of Avila also cried, “I desire to suffer, Lord, all the trials that come to me and esteem them as a great good enabling me

to imitate you in something." The martyrs testify to their deep conversion that leads them to total self-sacrifice to God's salvific love. Martyrdoms stem from a deep love for the suffering Jesus Christ, who is wounded for the martyrs' sake. In this wounded love, martyrs celebrate their perfect conversion to God. Consequently, a loving act of renunciation in martyrdom is celebrated as a perfect conversion in conformity with the suffering Christ.

The death of martyrs expresses not only the perfection of conversion, but also functions as a living example to strengthen and bring people to their own radical conversion. Martyrdom demonstrates a radical conversion and exhorts others to transformation through liturgical and devotional tools in the promulgation of Christianity.\(^{55}\) Clement of Alexandria held that martyrdom presents a gravitational attraction drawing people toward conversion.\(^{56}\) Thus, the martyrs’ acts become invitations to ongoing conversion and encourage Christians to cultivate a God-centered life in and through imitation of the suffering Christ.

4.2. Conversion in the ascetic life of monasticism

4.2.1. Status quo and motivation of ascetic monasticism for conversion

Ascetic monasticism deriving from the Hellenistic and Jewish world grounds itself in the hidden life of Jesus of Nazareth. The word “ascetic” has a Latin root that signifies discipline. Ascetic monasticism becomes a sign of the hidden presence of the

\(^{54}\) Teresa of Avila, *The Way of Perfection*, chapter 26, no. 6.

\(^{55}\) Moss, *The Other Christs*, 13-17.

risen Christ in daily life. Thus, it is helpful to present the state of the Church after the edict of Milan as an opportunity for the practice of ascetic conversion. From this state, the ascetic monastics discovered their deep motivations for ongoing conversion.

When persecution ceased after the edict of Milan in 313 CE, peace came to the Church so that devoted Christians could not be martyrs to witness the love of God. In other words, the complex political and cultural changes led to a readjustment in the Church’s self-understanding and spiritual values. This ascetic movement gave birth to monasticism by way of a countercultural reaction to the Church, which had joined political and social establishments.\(^{57}\) Thus, Christians sought for other proofs of love to replace martyrdom as perfect conversion. Many devoted persons left the world to go to deserts to live out their virginity and celibacy as a new way of martyrdom.\(^ {58}\) This resulted in a counter-cultural ascetic movement. Monastic spirituality dominated the East and to a lesser extent the West by the fifth century.\(^ {59}\) Instead of combating the evil of the Roman Empire, Christians engaged in a lifelong combat with the evil of their own sinfulness in a deserted solitude. They detached themselves from society to find God through ascetical ways of life that turned away from self-centeredness to full dependence on God.

Second, ascetic monasticism manifests its deep motivations for ongoing conversion. Ascetical practice is training or discipline as the pathway to perfection, such as fasting, longer prayer, and flagellation. That is true, asceticism is a conversion by practice of self-emptying exercises imitating the hidden life of Jesus. A practice of the


ascetic life motivates an ongoing conversion in which God purifies one’s wholeness. Furthermore, ascetic monasticism does not search for asceticism for its own sake, but for God in the ascetic struggle. In a divine word, God said to St. Anthony, “Anthony, I was here all the time; I simply waited to witness your fight.” Mary of Egypt said: “God was seeking my repentance, … in forty-seven years in the desert, I passed seventeen years in fighting wild beasts, mad desires and passions.” There is an inner motivation that motivates one to live an ongoing conversion through ascetic monastic practices. A restlessness draws one to participate in the divine union through ascetic conversion. The ascetic monastic life is a journey of turning away from the old self, the disordered world, and turning towards Christ-centeredness according to the model of a hidden life. Through ascetic monasticism, conversion comes from Christocentricism and an eschatological focus on the return of Jesus Christ.

In short, Christian conversion through ascetic monasticism involves disciplining one’s self assisted by moving towards union with God. Many Christians are restless to find ways to return to the ultimate source from which they come. They are thirsty for God through ascetic practices and hungry for depth with God in their own context because it is the familial life.

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4.2.2. The dynamics of conversion in ascetic monasticism

There is an internal and external movement from red martyrdom to green and white martyrdom.⁶³ Red martyrdom means bearing witness unto death or shedding one’s blood for Christ. Green martyrs focus on fasting and penance out of love for Christ. They went to deserts as anchorites or hermits to free themselves from evil desires and seek union with God. White martyrdom is dying to the world and its allurements in order to make one’s life a perpetual pilgrimage. There is movement from martyrdom to solitary and communal life. Each context discloses a unique dynamic of conversion. First, the desert life emphasizes a personal and individual aspect of one’s spiritual fight. Second, communal life in monasticism points to the mutual help and challenge between an individual and his or her community.

The desert is a sacred space for transfiguration. The desert signifies a radical break to seek an inner return to God. The desert is the sacred context of detachment, struggle with oneself, conversion to God, encounter with God. The Israelites wandered in the desert for forty years of purification (Ex 16:35), and Jesus began his salvific ministry after spending time in the wilderness (Mt 4:1-10). Christians fled from the world into the desert to re-establish their priorities, to reconcile with creation and reconnect with the world, the ordered self.⁶⁴ This lifelong conversion in the desert is the process of grace to free oneself from the prison of selfishness. In this dynamic, St. Anthony discovered conversion in the desert as the new creation and became the model, the father of the

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eremitic life, the solitary life. “St. Anthony said, ‘One who wishes to live in solitude in the desert is delivered from conflicts.’”65 In the combat for conversion in the desert, the hermit is motivated to seek both an interior and exterior solitude for God. On the other hand, the desert as a place of abandonment signifies death, and threat. In the bible, the desert is the dwelling place of demons, one confronts one’s demons. In the desert, one only faces oneself, one’s weakness, and one’s deepest desires. One realizes that the desert is a sacred space to remove all forms of idolatry and be completely opened to the boundless God.66 In fact, one cannot take refuge or hide in the desert because one confronts oneself. This conversion process in the desert influences others and also needs help and confirmation from a transformed community.

Individual conversion cannot be separated from eremitic to cenobitic one’s community. Communal life is a "school for the Lord's service" (RB Prol. 45).67 There are mutual help and challenge between community and individuals. It is necessary for hermits to need help from the cenobites, and in communal life. A solitary life can fall prey to self-complacency, and conversion may deviate to self-centered effort. One can fall into pride rather than self-denial.68 Therefore, Pachomius who initiated the cenobitic life, communal monasticism as the way to provide a secure refuge for those who were too weak for the eremitic life.69 Living a communal life as koinonia is a mortifying

66 Chryssavgis, In the Heart of the Desert, 33-34.
69 Melville, The World of Medieval Monasticism, 7.
conversion. The cloister of the cenobitic community is the new desert in which the cenobites follow the examples of the hermits. Pachomius notes, “Take shelter in solitude with the conscience of God and let us mortify ourselves because mortification deals roughly with impurity.” The dynamics of conversion finds its basis in the ascetic life in solitude, but is reinforced by communal rules. Monasteries can safeguard the individual struggle for perfection in a lifelong conversion. For Benedict, conversion is lived in a communal life through keeping rules and obeying the superior with humility.

**4.3. Conversion in pilgrimage**

**4.3.1. Cause and motivation of pilgrimage for conversion**

Human existence in the world is a pilgrimage to one’s life source, a journey towards the Kingdom of God that orients the Christian life and challenges one’s daily choices. A pilgrimage requires Christians to change their ways of life because a pilgrimage is also a journey of conversion. Therefore, this investigation presents the causes that led to the flourishing of Christian pilgrimage. Then, it examines the motivations in Christian pilgrimages.

First, the early Christian pilgrimage movement comes from diverse causes. There were progressive changes in political conditions favoring Christianity since the time of emperor Constantine (313 CE). Later, Christians acculturated to the Roman Empire, which led to the development of piety, Christian identity in the Roman world, including

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the pilgrimage of the life as an ascetic lifestyle, and a journey of heart conversion.\textsuperscript{72} Christian pilgrimage also inherited the practice of Jewish pilgrimages to the Jerusalem temple, as Jesus joined the pilgrimage to Jerusalem when he was 12 years (Lk 2: 41). The early Church fixed the beginning of the pilgrimage movement to the Holy Land in the second half of the second century. The movement centered on pilgrimage as a simple state of alienation which required Christians to embark upon a journey of conversion.\textsuperscript{73}

From the fourth century, many pious believers undertook the arduous journey to Jerusalem for devotional purposes.

Second, Christian pilgrimages involve diverse motivations. One of the main motivations of pilgrimages is to seek closeness to God, partaking of the sacred. Columbanus exhorted his community that "Like pilgrims, we should continuously sigh for and long for our homeland" (Sermon 8. 2).\textsuperscript{74} Pilgrims trust in God and go to an unknown place with a firm hope of finding God. The pilgrimage arouses in them a desire to imitate Jesus Christ or a saint. This involves self-detachment, and the pilgrimage challenges a radical conversion to God. As St. Brendan encouraged his brothers:

"Brothers, do not fear… just leave the sail spread, and God will do as he wishes with his servants and their ship."\textsuperscript{75} A pilgrimage as a radical conversion is really a journey of dying to self, going to an insecure space, pilgrimage also involves penance. St. Columbus


\textsuperscript{73} Brouria Bitton-Ashkelony, \textit{Encountering the Sacred- The Debate on Christian Pilgrimage in Late Antiquity} (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2005), 17-18.

\textsuperscript{74} Ian Bradley, \textit{Pilgrimage: A Spiritual and Cultural Journey} (Oxford: Lion Hudson, 2009), 40.

notes that “If any cleric had committed murder and killed his neighbor, let him do penance for ten years in exile.”

A pilgrimage reawakens a radical penance for the love of God. Some people joined pilgrimages for indulgences, for thanksgiving, for recreation, or even out of curiosity. Many medieval pilgrims sought healing miracles in shrines. Some simply deepened their faith because they were convinced that earthly life is a pilgrimage and that they were aliens who needed to return to God as it says, “They were strangers and pilgrims on the earth” (Heb11:13). Thus, pilgrimage involves various motives, but the deeper desire for pilgrimage is still a journey of penance, a radical conversion from sin towards God.

A pilgrimage towards the holy land of Jerusalem or a shrine encompasses various religious motivations. Yet, underneath all of these motivations lies a deep innate restlessness endowed by God, who invites people to go out of the human self, to take a journey to a sacred place. This inner restlessness engenders a radical conversion for pilgrimage, and pilgrimage itself becomes a conversion process to God.

4.3.2. The dynamics of conversion in pilgrimage and crusades

The dynamics of pilgrimage flow in all human beings as a transitory journey for a new life beyond death. Many people still wonder about eternity and why they have to move forward to the future, to a place which they do not know. However, in an earthly pilgrimage, there is also a spiritual pilgrimage as a radical conversion orients to self-transformation, a new identity in Christ.

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A divine pilgrimage of love in the world is the transforming dynamic for a human pilgrimage of conversion. The human life of pilgrimage is modeled on the Trinitarian pilgrimage. God himself goes out of his God-self in order to take a pilgrimage of love in each individual’s life. This divine pilgrimage is the inner power for a human pilgrimage back to God. One can trace the Trinitarian pilgrimage of love manifesting itself in and through the kenotic descending love of Jesus Christ, who makes a human pilgrimage in order that human beings make a pilgrimage back to God. The divine pilgrimage of love is the expression of the divine passion to undertake a pilgrimage in history in order to bring human beings to God. God desires to draw human beings into the orbit of divine pilgrimage, into the dynamics of Jesus’s self-emptying.

Pilgrimage as a radical conversion orients the self to a transformation, a new identity in Christ. God accompanies his people when they wander through the wilderness, going ahead of them to protect and to liberate them: “The Lord preceded them, in the daytime by means of a column of cloud to show them the way, and at night by means of a column of fire to give them light” (Ex 13:21). As a people of pilgrimage, the Israelites were formed to be a model for pilgrimage peoples, a nomadic religion. God accompanies people in order to purify them and orient them to self-transformation. Therefore, a divine pilgrimage awakens people’s conversion so that they never lose hope even in the desert or in a life of exile. A pilgrimage in the desert and exile requires people’s hearts to transform. The nomadic pilgrimage aims to shape a new identity, an identity as the children of God. Columbanus declared that “Our whole life is like a

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journey of a single day...let us love what is above, desire what is above...for our homeland is there, where our Father is” (Sermon 8.1).\(^{79}\) The dynamics of pilgrimage involve being more for God. We are motivated to renounce sin and make progress in the way of God, who is free and the liberator of all human pilgrimage.\(^{80}\) Going on a pilgrimage is a radical conversion for being more in order to be closer to God.

The conversion during crusades (1095-1216) should be re-evaluated in terms of authentic values of the gospel or in the person of Jesus Christ. Before 1095 CE, the true faith of western Christians seemed to be destroyed because of the barbarian invasions who conquered and destroyed the Roman empire. However, many Christians survived their faith in the fortresses of monasteries. Coping with this crisis, missionaries were sent out to the barbarian kingdom and converted the Anglo-Saxons to Roman Christianity. In reality, conversion of most illiterate people seemed to be political because Christians tried to create a new identity and to escape from their deep sense of inferiority. Later in the 8\(^{th}\) century, converting Muslims was not their first object.\(^{81}\) In 853 CE, Pope Leo IV declared that “whoever in piety of the Catholic faith falls in a war fighting strenuously against infidels, will gain rest in eternal life.”\(^{82}\) This calling paved the way to the holy war that was a form of external penance. During the crusades (1095-1216), conversion was clothed with the spirit of defending the Church of Christ. Many Christians responded


\(^{80}\) Peter Hans Kolvenbach, SJ, The Road from La Storta (Saint Louis: The Institute of Jesuit Sources, 2000), 207.


to the summons of the popes. Christian crusaders were armed with remission of sins, but unfortunately, their project was imbued with violence. In 1095, Pope Urban II at the council of Clermont proclaimed the Crusade with promise of eternal life or remission of sins. Many people joined a military service for the Church, and the crusade served as a penitential act. Many crusaders would never regard Jews and Muslims as normal human beings. They massacred the Jewish communities and Muslim inhabitants of Jerusalem with horrible savagery in 1099. Thus, this so-called conversion turned Christianity into bloodthirsty religion in contrast to suffering Jesus Christ.

Conversion through crusades became a scandalized Christian witness to the values of the Gospel. The crusades were a political, military and territorial affair. Many crusaders lost their lives in expeditions. Their so-called conversion was a mix of secular motives and immature piety. Even Bernard of Clairvaux regarded the crusades as the work of God and argued that crusaders could receive remission of their sins. In order to promote the liberation of holy land, a theology of indulgences and penance was applied to the crusades. It is essential to return to the authentic conversion to Jesus Christ, who never used the brutality to conquer souls. Basically, Jesus modeled conversion to the Father’s will, which is to save, not to condemn (Jn 3: 17).

In short, human life is the pilgrimage toward the creative love of God. This pilgrimage is a challenge involving the human response to unconditional love. Human beings are called to take a risky pilgrimage of faith. The divine pilgrimage challenges a

83 Bysted, The Crusade Indulgence, 73.
84 Armstrong, The Holy War, 374.
85 Armstrong, 210-221.
nomadic human life and requires a radical conversion of self. Thus, the human self becomes a new pilgrim of conversion to God-self.

4.4. Conversion in mendicant life

4.4.1. The state and motivation for conversion in mendicant life

God reveals Godself in order that human beings can encounter and respond to God’s incarnational love in concrete life contexts. God continues to draw us into the flow of incarnational spirituality as one observes changes in medieval society and the Church. Thus, this section investigates a partial state of the society and the Church in medieval times. Then, considering changes in society, we can discover the inner motivations of a mendicant lifestyle as conversion.

The social changes in medieval society opened up new responses to Christian spirituality. From the eleventh to the twelfth centuries, Western society underwent a rapid urban growth that created a growing literate merchant class. This new complex social development partly explains the rebirth of new forms of Christian life and spiritual practices outside the traditional monastic cloister. These social changes challenged the monastic lifestyle and pushed the reform of the older orders such as Cistercians or the foundation of new ones, such as the mendicant orders of Franciscans and Dominicans. Urban growth also led to the existence of new cities and universities as a sacred space, which was seen as the images of the heavenly Jerusalem. Cities were considered sacred because they were blessed by Eucharistic processions that purified the cities from evils.

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The new universities as the intellectual ministry of Dominicans became a spiritual path. Therefore, the response of ascetic monasticism to the economic growth and social changes opens the development of mendicancy as a new incarnational form of spirituality.\textsuperscript{88} Namely, the breakaway life of the mendicant lifestyle was molded according to the public life of Jesus and his disciples, who were called to renounce worldly goods and to engage in active evangelism.

The inner motivations of a mendicant lifestyle as a conversion process in the new context of medieval urbanization and the expansion of academic universities contain both internal and external perspectives. Ascetic monasticism was a vivid sign of the Kingdom of God and a vigorous invitation to radical conversion. From a new context, a mendicant converts the self, returns to the primordial charism in Jesus Christ, who empties himself in order to engage in human life. The public life of the kenotic Jesus is the inner impulse of a mendicant. In the face of social changes, mendicants were drawn into an attraction to urbanization and universities as spiritual paths. They embraced the world for the salvation of souls. Catherine of Siena noted that “very pleasant to me is the desire willingly to bear any trouble and labor until death for the salvation of souls.”\textsuperscript{89} Truth, goodness, and beauty are hidden in the social crises that attract one to return to the values of Jesus Christ. Mendicants are motivated to commit to social life because of the salvation of the world. They are drawn in a conversion process in Jesus Christ.

The mendicant lifestyle breaks away from ascetic monasticism. However, it is the adoption of a style of conversion that is in line with changes in medieval society.

\textsuperscript{88} Lawrence, \textit{Medieval Monasticism}, 219-220.

Following the public life of Jesus, mendicants engage in social crises in order to live out their inner conversion and attract people as pastors and through academic life to engage in an ongoing conversion for eternal values.

4.4.2. Dynamics of conversion in mendicant spirituality

Mendicants such as Franciscans and Dominicans were rooted in monastic movements, and yet moved to respond to the situation of the medieval Church that was in need of returning to the kenotic message of Jesus Christ. To return to the values of the gospel, mendicants revitalized a vision of conversion. This conversion involved a radical detachment from one’s possession and denial of one’s self.

First, as imitators of the kenotic Jesus in his public life, mendicants are ready to detach from what they have and who they are. That is a radical conversion from the possession, even of their very self, towards Jesus Christ as their authentic self. In 1206, Francis Assisi encountered Jesus in the leper. He also taught the gospel of self-denial for rebuilding the Church. He stripped off his clothes and threw them aside, standing completely naked.90 Francis was possessed completely by God, so that he could relinquish what he had, his family identity, reputation, life security, even his own self, until he was totally naked, and empty before God.91 Such relinquishment as a radical conversion is both a divine call and an unconditional gift as the turning point of a mendicant spirituality. Conversion is a fundamental renouncement of the world for living the values of Jesus. From self-denial in conversion, mendicants consider themselves as


pilgrims and strangers in the world. Francis said in his Testament: “Let brothers always be guests in the monastery as pilgrims and strangers.”92 Self-detachment aims for the richness and fullness of virtues, namely, conformity with the poor Jesus. Francis said in the Rule: “As pilgrims and strangers in this world, my dearest brothers, poor in things but rich in virtue.”93 For Dominicans, Catherine of Siena shared that “hunger for souls and penance should be but the means to increase virtue.”94

Second, the dynamics of conversion are manifested through the mendicants’ commitments to the world according to the model of the disciples with Jesus during his earthly life. For mendicants, the world becomes the desert in which they practice their conversion to return to God and discover God’s will in their daily commitment. The world is also a new cloister in which they engage with their pastoral and academic ministries.95 Thus, the conversion process of leaving the world is interiorized through renouncing worldly values and self-will and adopting a penitential life of prayer as well as humble service to the needy.96 As strangers in the world, Dominicans focus on wandering around, on finding places where truth and goodness shine through.97 Dominican conversion occurs through academic ministry at universities. The academic ministry requires an ongoing conversion that is reinforced by a transformed heart seeking

95 Melville, The World of Medieval Monasticism, 206-211, 353-357.
96 C. H. Lawrence, Medieval Monasticism, 230.
for the salvation of souls. The Dominican Constitutions explain that "Our study ought to
tend principally, ardently, and with the highest endeavor to the end that we might be
useful to the souls of our neighbors."98 In general, Dominican friars return to God in their
focus on knowledge. They overemphasize their conversion through their academic
ministries at universities. However, for Franciscans, they do so through social and
pastoral work as a means to live out their conversion even they also have universities
with great academic teachers like Bonaventure and Duns Scotus. Thus conversion is total
engagement in the apostolic life, but an ambivalence between flight and engagement.99

In short, the dynamics of conversion in the mendicant lifestyle manifest a radical
rootedness in the public life of Jesus and is molded by the model of apostles sent into the
world. Mendicants are called to radical conversion and motivate others to return to God
through their pastoral and academic ministries. Through the spiritual lens of a mendicant
conversion, the world becomes a sacred space, a place where people are purified and
transformed to be in union with Jesus for preaching the kingdom of God.

**Conclusion: Conversion as Falling in Love with God**

Conversion is the transformative encounter of human-divine restlessness, which is
a radical turning away from the disordered self towards centeredness on God. A divine
restlessness permeates human life and invites human responses to crises and
opportunities at the individual and communal level. A divine restlessness initiates and
orients a genuine conversion from an inauthentic to an authentic self for a transformed

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98 *Primitive Constitutions of the Order of Friars Preachers*, accessed March 12, 2020,

99 George A. Lane, SJ, *Christian Spirituality - An Historical Sketch* (Chicago: Loyola University
community. Personal conversion requires help from the community, and authentic communal conversion strengthens individual transformation.

A call to conversion in response to the Kingdom of God (Mk 1:15) is rooted in falling in love with Jesus Christ, who leads us back to the Father and transforms all to be children of God. Conversion as falling in love with God takes a different form and arises from social crises. It has occurred in Christian spiritual traditions such as martyrdom, ascetic monasticism, pilgrimage, and mendicancy, as well as in other religious traditions. From the depth, human beings are restless to search for ultimate Beauty, Goodness, and Truth.100 Through our ascetic struggles, the beauty of our soul is a response to the beauty of God, whose beauty that calls us back to God.101 In general, whoever we are to be called to return to the authentic self in God.

In conclusion, conversion as falling in love with Jesus Christ penetrates the whole person. Falling in love with God leads us to become co-creators of our self with God. In love, God draws and attracts us to the self-emptying love of Jesus Christ, whom we are restless to know, to love, and to follow (Spiritual Exercises 104), we are called to surrender our total personhood to God so that we ask God to take and receive all our liberty, memory, understanding, will, all what we have and all what we are, not only our possessions, but also our what-ness (SE 234).102 Through ongoing daily conversion, Jesus Christ and human beings permeate one another. God deifies human beings to make them

102 Ignatius of Loyola, The Spiritual Exercises, Nos. 104 and 234.
more divine, and human beings allow Jesus Christ to grow in their life. A conversion process as falling in love with Jesus Christ is continuous wrestling within oneself, and with God through a transformed communitarian life. This wrestling demands a deep and authentic discernment of inner movements, both good and bad.
CHAPTER THREE

MOVEMENTS OF SPIRITS IN THE DYNAMICS OF CONVERSION IN
IGNATIUS’S AUTOBIOGRAPHY AND SPIRITUAL EXERCISES

Introduction

The dynamics of conversion are explored in the current context of the Catholic Church in Vietnam that faces the tension of shadow and light. Then, this study also examines some major movements in Christian spirituality. Now this chapter focuses on the understanding of conversion through the movements of spirits in Ignatian discernment. In the Ignatian viewpoint, conversion seeks an inner change that requires a spiritual discernment towards radical transformation. It explores the notions of spirits in inner movements. This exploration can help us understand, name, and receive, or reject the nature and operation of spirits that lead us to God or not.¹

This chapter highlights the spiraling dynamics of ongoing conversion. Namely, Ignatius's life is woven and recreated by his ongoing inner conversion towards Jesus Christ. His conversion highlights a triptych of movements of spirits away from centering on himself to centering on God, not for his/her own mission but for the mission of Christ. In the dynamics of conversion as spiral movements from…to…for, this chapter focuses on three movements of spirits in Ignatius's spiritual conversion. First, there are the movements of spirits in self-examination for self-detachment, which aims at self-surrender to God. Between self-detachment and self-creation, there is a liminal space, which is marked by indifference. This indicates an inner tension between self-detachment

and self-creation. Next, ongoing conversion aims at self-re-creation of a new relationship
with God. Finally, ongoing conversion is oriented towards the mission of Christ in whom
a transformed person is sent out like Jesus Christ.

1. Some Exploration of Spirits in Biblical and Ignatian Perspectives

Our conversion is operated from the dynamics of the inner movements of sprits. Thus, it is necessary for us to discern what kind of movements of spirits lead us to Jesus Christ or not. This section highlights the continuity and change of the notion of spirits in the Bible. Next, it engages the notion of spirits in the dynamics of conversion in Ignatian Spirituality. Finally, it is necessary for us to be sensitive to the operation of spirits in our spiritual life.

First, the understanding of spirits is explored in the Bible. In the Hebrew Bible, spirits are created beings which are called ruah in Hebrew or pneuma in Greek. They are personifications of God to help humankind to return to God. However, the mysterious ruah in persons can be understood to be faint, troubled, or angry (Gn 41: 8; 1 Kgs 21: 5). Human beings can find the spirits of discord within themselves, evil spirits (Jg 9: 23). Abusing the gift of freedom in their journey towards God, human beings can turn away from God and enslave themselves to evil inclinations. In the Christian Bible, evil spirits are considered as the spiritual enemy (Lk 10: 19). The devil is named as the ruler of this world (Jn12: 31) and the father of lies and murderers (Jn 8: 44). Evil can be viewed as an empirical reality, but it is also an impenetrable mystery. In theological understanding,

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evil is understood as a lack of being, a privation of goodness. A bad spirit or evil is the “humiliation or the violation of a person,” which brings a person to self-contradiction, loss of self, and turning away from God.

Second, for Ignatius, based on his conversion to God, the term “spirits” refers to a wide range of understanding from the Holy Spirit to created spiritual beings such as angels, satan, and demons who separate us from God. In his convalescence at Loyola, “Ignatius little by little, he came to recognize the difference between the spirits that were stirring, one from the devil, the other from God” (Auto 8). Beside Satan and demons, Ignatius also uses the term “evil spirits” refers to “tendencies in our own psyches which come from egoism and disordered life (Auto 1).” The evil spirit derives from self-centeredness and vainglory. Ignatius could not bear his protruded bone because he was set on a worldly career and thought that "this would deform him and asked the surgeons to cut it away" (Auto 4). Moreover, Ignatius mentions the variety of inner movements, such as thoughts, feelings, desires, urges, and fears, which are caused by spirits. The rules of the discernment of spirits bring us to the spiritual understanding of such movements. For the person progressing from good to better in service of God, the evil spirit causes gnawing anxiety, sadness, and sets up obstacles, while good spirit stirs up courage, tears, and an increase in faith, hope, and love of God (SE 315). Indeed, spirits

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act in their rude or subtle ways or use contrary strategies depending on the maturity of the person.

Finally, from the lived experience of Ignatian ongoing conversion, we realize the dynamics of the dialectical movement of spirits in conversion in our daily life.\(^7\) The good spirit moves us closer to our authentic self and towards God or transcendence, while the bad spirit, or the enemy of human nature, draws us away from who we truly are and who God calls us to be.

The dialectical movements of good and evil spirits occur in an incarnate way. This involves movements from the heart of mystery to one’s history and from the earthly battle for eternal values to the incarnate mystery of Jesus Christ. That is the immanent and transcendent interpenetration of the grace of God and human effort in order that the values of Jesus Christ penetrate our authentic self. In the movements of conversion, we are transformed to conform to whom we follow.

This conversion is a lifelong, ongoing process rather than a dramatic one for all moment.\(^8\) This transformed life is marked by a self-surrendering habit of listening and responding to God’s will and committing our authentic self to the new creation. The movements of conversion are a long journey of radical transformation from self-

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\(^7\) George Aschenbrenner, "Becoming Whom We Contemplate," *The Way Supplement 52* (Spring 1985), 32-40.

centeredness to God-centeredness.\textsuperscript{9} The movements of conversion can be observed in Ignatius’s \textit{Autobiography} and \textit{Spiritual Exercises}.

In short, inner movements are initiated by different “spirits.” To each of its end, these spirits move the person accordingly. They may be good or bad. As created creatures mediating God’s presence, good spirits remind us that God is present in us and those spirits are the intermediate milieu for our encounter with God. Thus, in our daily life, it is essential for us to do a self-examination to discern their movements in our journey of conversion.

2. A Brief Survey of Self-Examination Leading to Self-Surrender

In the dynamics of ongoing conversion, self-examination is the first stage of a long process of the movement from the old self to the authentic self, from human disorder to divine order. Self-examination or the examination of conscience is done in both the dynamic of God as the revealing Reality looking for human beings (1Tim 2:4) and the human dynamic of self-discovery.\textsuperscript{10} Such self-examination orients a person towards self-surrender to God in self-re-creation. However, between self-detachment or self-surrender and self-creation, there is a liminal space, which involves an inner tension between one's perspective and God's perspective. That is the so-called indifference in which one is waiting for God. First, this section explores some viewpoints of self-examination in the Christian tradition. Second, it identifies self-examination as a spiritual battle. Third, self-examination is viewed in the Ignatian tradition that highlights the discernment of spirits.


\textsuperscript{10} William A. Barry, SJ, “Toward a Theology of Discernment,” \textit{The Way Supplement} 64 (Spring 1989), 129-140.
2.1. Authentic self-examination

2.1.1. In Christian tradition

Self-examination in the history of spirituality is considered as an efficacious means of spiritual growth. In the history of Christian spirituality, the examination of conscience helped many saints conquer their old self and open to holiness. Particularly, St. Basil instructed monks to make this examination every night. St. Augustine, St. Antony, St. Bernard, and St. John Chrysostom advised their religious to do an examination of conscience before they go to bed.\(^{11}\) The night examination of conscience helps us live more deeply. In fact, the examination helps us avoid sins and faults, root out vice and evil propensities, and make amendments with radical commitments to a new life.

Furthermore, in the journey to gain wisdom, philosophers noted that the achievement of the light of natural reason demands a daily examination of conscience. Pythagoras, St. Jerome and St. Thomas, advised their disciples to make their examination of conscience once in the morning and once at night. They focused on three things, such as what have I done, how have I done it, and what have I left undone of what I ought to do? They did an examination with rejoicing over what was good and grieving over what was evil. Beyond intellectual exploration, this spiritual examination turned philosophers’ life upside down from inauthentic, unconscious worries to interior self-knowledge, an enlightened vision of the world, inner peace, and serene freedom.\(^{12}\) Certainly, in order to


gain wisdom, self-examination must be done in serenity and humility. Such a way of self-
scrutiny inspires us not only to review our weakness and our finite limitations but also
orients us towards a greater reality, the transcendent God for whom we hunger.\textsuperscript{13} The
examination of conscience as a form of discernment of spirits is both a charism and a
virtue.\textsuperscript{14} God works to transform human beings and also requires them to collaborate with
grace as well as to commit themselves to self-examination. Thus, by faithfulness to do the
examination of conscience, we become more sensitive to God’s will within our inner
movements.

Self-examination is a sacred means for one’s divine-human encounter and
transforming souls. Self-examination moves from self-awareness to God-awareness in the
person. Its operation includes remembering, reflective understanding, choosing, and
desiring action. The examination of conscience takes place deep in the self: the self
which is evolving self-as-subject, not the false self-as-object, or our inauthentic and
disordered self.\textsuperscript{15} The self-as-subject includes our consciousness, subconscious, and
unconsciousness, which have both spiritual and corporeal dimensions. From such an
understanding of the whole self, our unconsciousness carries within it the potentiality for
developing our talents, gifts, and destiny in our life. Furthermore, our unconsciousness
involves and also represents our entire genetic and spiritual capability-mind, heart, body,

\begin{itemize}
\item \textsuperscript{13} David Townsend, “The Examen and The Exercises,” \textit{The Way Supplement} 52 (Spring 1985), 56-57.
\item \textsuperscript{14} Jacques Guillet et al., \textit{Discernment of Spirits} (Collegeville, MN: The Liturgical Press, 1970), 26-70.
\item \textsuperscript{15} Joann Wolski Conn and Walter E. Conn, “Self,” in \textit{The New Dictionary of Catholic Spirituality},
\end{itemize}
and spirit.\textsuperscript{16} Hence, when we do the self-examination, our whole person participates in this action. Namely, we operate it from external to internal, from consciousness to unconsciousness and vice versa, from unconsciousness as the deepest self to our self-conscious actualization. This notion of self is identified as our conscience that is a holy and sacred place where the individual meets God alone (\textit{Gaudium et Spes}, 16). Similarly, for Christians, with our examination of conscience, we let God's mercy penetrate our totality and allow God to transform our whole person (Eph 2:10). Our formed conscience is a capacity or tendency to know and to do the good. It is considered as a process of discovering the particular good, God's voice, and as a judgment to orient our life.\textsuperscript{17} the examination of conscience focuses on the whole self as a thinking, willing, intuiting, and embodied person.

In terms of time, self-examination extends to our past, present, and even future in our divine horizon. As we consider our capacities of soul, our re-memberance of past time, understanding of the present, and the will or desire to act in the future, all of which participate in our spiritual act of self-examination. As our faith activity, examining our memories is not a nostalgic act, rather a re-memberance with our whole person.\textsuperscript{18} We represent our past into our present life with God who is always present for and with us because self-examination is an act of penance, a conversion, an act of love rather than a fear of self-loss. Each time we do re-memberance in self-examination, we become a “new” member (re-member) of our becoming self into a greater reality. Similarly, when

\textsuperscript{16} Dr. Dan Montgomery, \textit{God and Your Personality} (Boston, MA: Pauline Books, 1995), 120-124.


our will or desire participates in our act of conversion, our future becomes present. This self-examination is the transforming encounter beyond our finite time and space. The encounter is made up of God’s mercy and our responsible freedom towards our authentic self.

In other words, the exploration and operation of self-examination are celebrated in faith. This faith celebration actualizes all aspects of the self, makes them present in a so-called Christ-event.\textsuperscript{19} That is the God-centered action of a new creation in which our past-present-future self is transformed into God's merciful presence. Thus, self-examination awakens our desire for God’s here-now transforming love and engages us in the movements of the Holy Spirit.

2.1.2. A spiritual battle towards God’s perspective

The movement of spirits needs to be examined according to Ignatian discernment, where we let ourselves be led towards our ultimate source, Jesus Christ. In the journey to conformity with Jesus Christ, a becoming self, the inner self is moved by a variety of spirits. It is easy for us to be confused about good and bad spirits in our spiritual battle. Therefore, this section explores the self-examination as a spiritual battle, the incarnate principle of inner movements, and a way to learn the language of God.

First, self-examination is an unceasing spiritual battle against our voluntary imperfections.\textsuperscript{20} It is not a flight from self or an escape from these existential challenges, not a relaxation into illusions, but a fight against spirits to gain interior knowledge of our

\textsuperscript{19} Catechism of the Catholic Church, 2\textsuperscript{nd} (Washington, NE: USCCB Publisher, 2000), no. 1104.

\textsuperscript{20} Jordan Aumann, OP, Spiritual Theology (Huntington, IN: Our Sunday Visitor, 1980), 157-160.
Lord and love him more intensely and follow him more closely (SE 104). Our orientation toward greater life in Jesus Christ can be blocked with our laziness, limitations, and the difficulties of our fallen nature. Even in periods of serenity, or seeming peace, the battle keeps shaking our holy desire and actions for glory of God. The reason for the ongoing tension is that our evolving self is on a journey to reach to God as the ultimate source of life.

In this spiritual fight, there are two protagonists (Rom 7:19). God and Satan are in a dialogical relationship with the soul for different ends, the battleground of which is found in our hearts, minds, and even our bodies. On the side of the good spirit, Ignatius holds that God tries to attract us to a better life that is modeled on Jesus Christ. Good spirits fight against a dis-ordered self to draw us back to God, to lead us to union with the life of Trinity. On the side of bad spirits, Satan tries to alienate us. Evil spirits manage to manipulate our weaknesses and immature convictions. Bad spirits seek to draw us away from the Christ-event. However, in the spiritual battle of self-examination, we are not left alone to fight against evil spirits. God neither lets us alone nor forsakes us even though we might abandon God. Even leaving us with our own natural powers, God is still present within our restlessness to accompany us in the conquest over evil (SE 319). The Father, Jesus Christ, and the Holy Spirit accompany us in this inner battle to transform us.

Second, the incarnate principle of movements of spirits is discovered in the authentic self-examination. Under the guidance of the Holy Spirit through self-

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examination, we are slowly taught to notice and identify inner movements, to own feelings, and to name interior thoughts and motions. We can then have a proper understanding of such inner movements and can follow the good spirits and reject the bad ones. With such an incarnational approach, we move from external actions to inner thoughts and feelings. We can then probe the original agents of those inner movements. From the effects of movements, we can point out their original causes. During this self-examination, we must be careful with bad spirits that disguise themselves as good ones (2 Cor 11:14, SE 332). Movements can come from God, from spirits, or from us. Movements that come from spirits or from us can be good or bad. So it is important to discern the direction toward or away from God of the movements coming from spirits or us. Spirits can find a way to compromise our immature freedom and hinder our spiritual growth. Our wounded self is easily snared by false reasoning, which can be crystallized into self-deceit.

In addition, to have reached certain integrity and consistency in God as a focus of conversion, we root ourselves in the person of Jesus Christ. Gospel values are constitutive criteria to scrutinize the whole process of self-examination or conversion, from the beginning, through the middle, to the end (SE 333). Jesus Christ is the departure, middle, and the final purpose of self-examination. In, with, and through Him, the movements of self-examination lead to Trinitarian dynamics. The Father gives himself and also draws us to Jesus, who brings us to the Father through the movements of the


Holy Spirit (Jn 6:44.65; 13:16; 14:6). Through self-examination, we trace our experiences back to their divine source and overcome estrangement and illusion. We seek where God is at work, and so make our response.\textsuperscript{26} We examine the movements of spirits.

Finally, doing self-examination in our prayer and faith context is to learn the "grammar" of the language of God,\textsuperscript{27} to learn the logos of the Father, to learn the language of Christ who speaks to the Father. God talks to us in order that we can listen to and respond to his creative voice. Because of our alienation, spiritual deafness, self-centeredness, or external social pollution, we cannot tell the difference between God’s voice and evil’s voice. To be familiar with the tone of God’s language, we have to learn, to discern his voice in our noisy life. We need to ask God for a “discerning heart” (1 Kgs 3:9.12). His voice is sometimes loud from a burning bush (Ex 3:2), or sometimes tiny whispering sound in a light breeze (1Kgs 19:12). Therefore, we have to learn the syntax, the meaning, the structure of the language of the Holy Spirit as God communicates his language to us. Jesus Christ is the Father’s language. Learning the language of the Father means that we study Jesus’s way of proceeding.

In short, the discernment of spirits in self-examination is a gift in faith. We conquer our selfish desires and learn to follow the Holy Spirit and listen to God’s voice, even in crises.\textsuperscript{28} Self-examination engages us in a movement from self-centeredness to God-centeredness as an ongoing conversion. Moreover, through self-examination, we are


called to follow divine movements. Namely, we walk after Jesus and follow the Holy Spirit through darkness and crises for a new life in the Father. Similarly, Fr. Jerome Nadal said that “Ignatius did not run ahead but followed the Spirit. Little by little, he went running after the road which was opened to him, wisely ignorant, simply placed his heart in Christ” (J. Nadal, *Dialogi*, 17. FN II: 252).^29_

### 2.1.3. In Ignatian tradition

Self-examination plays an important role in St. Ignatius’ life of conversion, which is manifested in the *Autobiography* and the *Spiritual Exercises*. It is so indispensable in the ongoing conversion that Rodriguez notes: “Even sickness and indisposition, which is sufficient to excuse us from any long prayer, should not excuse us from making our examens. Thus it is right for all to hold as a first principle that the examens must never be omitted.”^30_

#### 2.1.3.1. Self-examination in the Autobiography

Self-examination is the thread running through Ignatius’s *Autobiography*. It reveals the progressive movement of his conversion. It is the highlight that marks the struggle between self-centeredness and God-centeredness in his *Autobiography*.

First of all, Ignatius appreciated and embraced the traditional devotion of confession in coping with his weakness. Ignatius made a careful self-examination and spent much time confessing to God when he faced his death. He made his confession

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before the battle of Pamplona (Auto 1), then again at Loyola in danger of death (Auto 3). Those confessions still indicate Ignatius’ self-security or fear of death, which arise from his worry.

Second, there is a progressive change from I-do to God-wants in his self-examination. A deep change runs from his question of “what if” to a heartedly restlessness of “Quid agendum.” This is a long process of self-examination from “I-do” as a subject of confession to “God-wants” as God is the initiator of transformation. Concretely, Ignatius reasoned, "What if I should do what St. Francis did, and what St. Dominic did?" (Auto.7). “What if” points to a new way for a new life, which makes him ponder the inner movements of spirits in his conversion. However, “What if” still focuses on Ignatius, on his aggressive self, his disordered self. On the way to Montserrat (Auto 14), Ignatius remained captive to the vanity and arrogance of his past life because he wants to outshine Francis and Dominic.32

There is inner torture between "I-do” and “God-wants.” Ignatius slowly paid attention to the inner movements of spirits (Auto 16). At Manresa, Ignatius started his inner examination that was discouraged by the devil (Auto 20). During this spiritual battle, Ignatius was tortured by his scruples about former sins (Auto 23-25). In the tension of this battle, he fell into a self-emptiness that became an opportunity for the grace of forgiveness. In his sense of self-impotence, he moved from an active I-do to a passive receiver of grace. This is a transformation from I-do to God-acts. As a consequence,

Ignatius realized that God treated him as a schoolmaster, and he discovered God’s will (Auto 27). The dynamics of self-examination continue to be challenged at the river Cardoner where Ignatius “examined himself carefully” (Auto 33). Then, he did a more radical self-examination when he was ordered to leave Jerusalem (Auto 47). Leaving there as a failure, he eventually realized the will of God and found a way to help souls. Such failure moved him from “what if” (Auto 7) to “Quid agendum?” (Auto 50). The turning point focuses on how God wanted to be served, what is God asking me to do rather than what ought I to do?33 His self-examination was a lifelong process of transformation.

In short, Ignatius experienced various types of self-examination. Subjectively, he examined himself and his own decision to find out the will of God (Auto 16.27.33). Objectively, he was examined by other external actors such as the guards at Jerusalem (Auto 42.51), doctors of theology as representatives of the Church at Alcalá, and Salamanca (Auto 56). God used various ways to transform Ignatius into a self-examined person.

2.1.3.2. Self-examination in the Spiritual Exercises

The Spiritual Exercises (SE) highlight the self-examination movements from self-direction to God-direction covering the whole spiritual life. Self-examination highlights a Theocentric point in the Christocentric structure of SE. Self-examination arises from deep gratitude to God as creator and redeemer. Finally, it is strengthened by the rules of discernment, which transform our way of life in a life of conversion.

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First, the self-examination derives from a Theocentric dynamic in a Christocentric structure, which is the essence of the whole operation of the *Spiritual Exercises (SE)*.\(^3^4\) The structure of the *SE* involves a Theocentric dynamic. God awakens our authentic understanding (*SE* 2). He enters our soul and draws it towards loving Him (*SE* 330). God also grants the soul his abundant favors while respecting our natural freedom (*SE* 320-322). God is actively bringing the soul’s restless desires into the new order (*SE* 16). Indeed, God communicates Himself to and embraces the exercitant (*SE* 15).\(^3^5\) This communication focuses the self-examination on discovering the will of God.\(^3^6\) Thus, we make our authentic self-examination to get rid of a false self with disordered attachments to seek God’s will in a newly ordered life and (*SE* 1, 21).\(^3^7\)

Secondly, Theocentric self-examination follows the standards of the *Principle and Foundation* (*SE* 23) and the *Contemplation to Attain Love* (*SE* 230-237). The first sentence of the *Foundation* opens up God-centeredness as the compass for self-examination: “The human person is created to praise, reverence and serve God our Lord, and by so doing save his or her soul” (*SE* 23\(^1\)). God is praised not only by formal worship. Thus self-examination and engaging in the *SE* are viewed as a Theocentric cultic act.\(^3^8\) At the end of the *SE*, the *Contemplation to Attain Love* points to a


\(^{3^6}\) Harvey D. Egan, SJ, *The Spiritual Exercises and the Ignatian Mystical Horizon* (St. Louis, MO: St. Louis University, 1976), 67-68.


Theocentric elevation. We are raised to contemplate the Lord’s presence in the created universe, to respect and venerate it as the means leading to God. Such a Contemplation draws our Theocentric self-examination to praise and serve the loving Divine Majesty.\(^\text{39}\)

The theocentric-reach of self-examination is expressed in the Christocentric operation of the four weeks of the \textit{SE}. If we consider the \textit{SE} as a radical self-examination, the Ignatian prayer, \textit{Anima Christi}, is the Christocentric entrance into Theocentric life because Jesus Christ is both the unique mediator and our companion leading us to the Father. We are invited to embrace the same attitude of Jesus orienting his life to the Father (Phil 2:5). The first-week deals with the purification of sins in relation to a merciful God. Sorrow, contrition, and tears in the first week flow from the question “What have I done for Christ?” (\textit{SE} 53). The movement runs from Christ to the human self and back to Christ.\(^\text{40}\) In God’s love and mercy, we surrender ourselves to Jesus Christ. As the illuminative way, Jesus is the light of the second week: the call of Christ in the \textit{Kingdom} (\textit{SE} 91), the example of Christ in the \textit{Third Degree of Humility} (\textit{SE} 167).

The third week immerses us in the Passion of Jesus Christ. This passion and death are opportunities to test our faithful love to Jesus after we are forgiven to be his disciples in the second week. The fourth week engages us in the glory and joy of risen Christ, who is our genuine consolation.\(^\text{41}\) The dynamics of the four weeks follow the mysteries of

\(^{39}\) Gilles Cusson, SJ, Biblical Theology and The Spiritual Exercises, trans. Mary Angela Roduit, R.C., and George E. Ganss, S.J. (St. Louis, MO: The Institute of Jesuit Sources, 1994), 322-326.

\(^{40}\) Harvey D. Egan, SJ, \textit{The Spiritual Exercises and the Ignatian Mystical Horizon} (St. Louis, MO: St. Louis University, 1976), 87, 107.

\(^{41}\) Egan, SJ, \textit{The Spiritual Exercises and the Ignatian Mystical Horizon}, 89.
Christ’s life by which we practice our meditative and contemplative self-examination.\textsuperscript{42}

After all, the Christocentric dynamics lead our self-examination to the Theocentric summit in the \textit{Contemplation to Attain Love} (\textit{SE} 230-237). This contemplation can be viewed as a kind of self-examination at the level of love and gratitude to God. There is a movement of transformation from consideration of reason to the contemplation of love. It is a radical change \textit{from} self-centeredness \textit{to} God-centeredness in the \textit{Spiritual Exercises}.

Thirdly, self-examination comes from unconditional grace and is rooted in deep gratitude to God. In the unconditional love of God, a loved sinner of the first week of the \textit{SE} begins the self-examination. Jesus loves and died for sinners. While sinners turn away from God, Jesus offers them forgiveness, grace, mercy, and love.\textsuperscript{43} Gracious love comes first to attracts us to see our sinful situation through the eyes of God’s mercy. Through doing a daily self-examination, we realize that the mercy of God liberates our disordered self.\textsuperscript{44} The core of self-examination in the first week is wider than the focus on sin. The ultimate focus is the creative love of God. Furthermore, gratitude is the pivotal emotion that leads a loved sinner into the Christocentric dynamic (\textit{SE} 23.234). Giving thanks to God operates throughout the self-examination. This dynamic is the key to the method for making the examination of conscience (\textit{SE} 43). To respond to God’s love, we express our deep gratitude to Jesus: “because of what Jesus Christ has done for me, what can I do for Him?” (\textit{SE} 53). This directs our self-examination in the pattern of our gratitude to Christ.

\textsuperscript{42} Juan Luis Segundo, \textit{The Christ of the Ignatian Exercises} (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 1987), 64.

\textsuperscript{43} Larry Warner, \textit{Journey with Jesus: Discovering the Spiritual Exercises of Saint Ignatius} (Downers Grove: IL: IVP Books, 2010), 106.

Especially, at the end of the first week, a beloved sinner makes an intimate colloquy with Christ: “thank Christ…so much pity and mercy” (SE 71). Gratitude to God always orients and transforms us when we do a self-examination in light of the unconditional love of Christ.\footnote{Peter G. Van Breemen, “The Examination of Conscience,” in Spiritual Exercises: Contemporary Annotations, ed. David L. Fleming, SJ (St. Louis, MO: St. Louis, 1996), 110-111.}

In addition, the rules of discernment ensure that the purpose of self-examination is to have authentic interior knowledge (SE 44.63.104) and to accept or reject the movements of various spirits (SE 313). The Spiritual Exercises points to layers of interior knowledge. In the human layer, self-examination motivates us to gain knowledge of our sins (SE 44.63), which enlightens us to know our true created self. Disordered attachments blind us from knowing who we are as creatures in relation to God. But, returning to our authentic self in self-examination, we are awakened to the need to be healed by God’s mercy. In the divine layer, Jesus is both the creator and companion on our new journey of conversion. We thus desire to gain an interior knowledge of the Lord (SE 104). This knowledge goes beyond rational information or understanding. Rather, it is such a personal relationship in faith and union with God that we are led into the loving mystery of Jesus.\footnote{Parmananda R. Divarkar SJ, The Path of Interior Knowledge (Gujarat, India: Anand Press, 1983), 14. 26.} Consequently, human and divine layers permeate into one another so that we can receive interior knowledge of all good things (SE 233).

Furthermore, authentic self-examination leads us to accept or reject the inner movements of various spirits. For the first set of discernment of inner motions, self-examination helps us to unveil inner motions that are strange to us and of which we are
totally unaware. This examination leads us to a more authentic self-confrontation and self-revelation in the eyes of Jesus. With Him and in Him, we point out the contrary spirits who manipulate us (SE 314-15). This makes us sensitive to spiritual consolations and desolations (SE 316-17). Such a way of discernment of interior movements leads the examination to show whether God is present or not.\(^{47}\) Certainly, in the spiritual battles of thoughts, feelings, actions from bad or good spirits, self-examination must be consistent, “standing firm in resolution and decision” (SE 318-19) and patient (SE 320). Indeed, in such a battle, Jesus is the ultimate and constitutive criterion by which we do the self-examination. We may be lazy in a spiritual battle (SE 322), or we are immature in the spiritual life (SE 323), and consolation is a totally God-given gift (SE 324). Therefore, with Jesus, self-examination strengthens us to adjust our strategies to face evil inner movements. These strategies are the \textit{agere contra} (SE 325), telling the truth (SE 326), and overcoming weakness (SE 327). The object of such strategies is established as a means toward God-centeredness.\(^{48}\) For the second set of rules for the discernment of spirits (SE 328-336), the self-examination deals with the various actors or agents of consolation. The second week confirms that our self-examination can be initiated by God,\(^{49}\) who can give a consolation without cause (SE 330. 336). Such examination must be done using the criterion of consistency (SE 333-334)\(^{50}\) and familiarity with the

\(^{47}\) Bautista, SJ, “\textit{Discernment of Spirits in the Spiritual Exercises},” 53.

\(^{48}\) Ivens, SJ, \textit{Understanding the Spiritual Exercises}, 218.

\(^{49}\) Jules J. Toner, SJ, \textit{A Commentary on Saint Ignatius’ Rules for the Discernment of Spirits} (St. Louis, MO: St. Louis University Press, 1982), 82.

\(^{50}\) Ivens, \textit{Understanding the Spiritual Exercises}, 246.
manifestations of good and bad spirits (SE 335). Even after a time of consolation without cause, one should continue to examine oneself.

In short, self-examination is not just a one-time event in our life, but a lifelong process of purification with Christ’s kenotic love in our heart, mind, intentions, and actual choices. Furthermore, self-examination opens to a new stage of conversion, which is self-surrender to God's will in the way of Jesus Christ.

2.2. Authentic self-surrender

The dynamics of conversion do not stop at self-examination, but point to self-surrender to God. In such an encounter, self-surrender is a new movement of falling in love, which involves letting-go. In other words, after detaching from our false self through self-examination, we are motivated to embrace the Christ-self. After leaving our disordered attachments, we let ourselves be moved by divine attraction. This section explores self-surrender in the Christian tradition. Then, it examines the movements of self-surrender that are highlighted in the Autobiography and the Spiritual Exercises.

2.2.1. In Christian tradition

Self-examination not only aims at one's self-awareness, but also leads one to self-detachment or surrender to God. Such a self-surrender is explored in the Christian tradition. Indeed, the foundation of self-surrender derives from the example of the Holy Trinity's self-surrender. Moreover, self-surrender to God is manifested in the self-surrender of Jesus to the Father.

First, the self-surrender of Trinity is the foundation for human self-surrender. By their own communion, the Trinity is present to actualize the life-surrendered relationships
in their substance and personhood. The mystery of the Fatherhood is the mystery of self-surrender in the eternal kenotic life. Such eternal self-surrender to one another occurs in the economy of salvation. “The Father surrenders himself completely as the Father of the Son and breathes forth the Spirit, love substantialized.”\(^{51}\) Similarly, the Son and the Holy Spirit surrender themselves to the Father. Because of inseparable difference among three Trinitarian personhoods, each person surrenders self to others and receives wholly others’ self-surrender. Such self-surrender is the source of creative love, "self-giving reciprocal communion."\(^{52}\) This immanent and transcendent self-surrender of the Trinity manifests itself in ongoing human creation and redemption. God's self-surrender embodies the self-surrender of Jesus Christ through the mystery of incarnation and passion. God continues to offer his self-surrender to us by giving the Holy Spirit (Jn 16:13). Indeed, Trinitarian self-surrender initiates and draws human beings into divine self-surrender. Such ultimate foundational and constitutive form of Trinitarian self-surrender enfolds and unfolds our self-surrender to one another in God’s perspective like the Son and the Holy Spirit to the Father.

Second, in the Christian tradition, the Trinitarian self-surrender flows into the way of human life expressed in self-surrender. Immersed in the current of divine self-surrender, creatures are drawn back to the ultimate source of Love to mold their new identity. From a Biblical perspective, Abraham surrendered his own beloved son to

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Yahweh (Gen 22:1-18). This image points to the complete self-surrender of Jesus to the Father, who surrenders himself to all humans. Driven by the force of kenotic love from the “selfless-surrender of Jesus,” many Christians have surrendered themselves to God. Following Jesus, who emptied himself to the Father (Phil 2:7), implies a total self-surrender to God. In the period of persecution, bloody martyrdom is the act of self-surrender, and martyrs identified themselves with the suffering of Christ through their death. St. Ignatius of Antioch insisted God, "Allow me to be bread for the wild beasts; through them, I am able to attain to God." Polycarp declared, "I must be burnt alive… I am a Christian." Due to the salvific self-surrender of Jesus Christ, the martyrs are transformed to surrender themselves to the Father.

When the persecution was over, rejecting worldly life and surrendering took another form. Life in the desert and convents or monasteries became a new way of surrendering to the kenotic love of Christ. Many Christians let their self-denial, prayer, fasting, and celibacy express their deep love of Jesus. From the fourth century, large numbers of men and women in the East withdrew from the world to live in the desert of Egypt to encounter God. Their yearning for union with God motivated their self-surrender in the eremitical and cenobitic life of hermits and monks. St. Pachomius said to

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54 Michael P. Jensen, Martyrdom and Identity: The Self On Trial (NY: T&T Clark, 2010), 42. 129.
55 Sean McDowell, The Fate of the Apostles: Examining the Martyrdom Accounts of the Closest Followers of Jesus (USA: Ashgate publishing, 2015), 189.
his brothers, “let us mortify ourselves.” In the Rules of St. Benedict, self-surrender means “fidelity to monastic life and obedience” (RB, Prol.58). For pilgrims, human life is a journey towards God as their authentic home. In this homecoming of conversion, pilgrims surrendered all to God. St. Columbanus in the 6th century said that “we live as travelers, as pilgrims (Hospes Mundi), as guests of the world” (Sermon 8.2). During the mendicant period, Franciscan and Dominican monks considered the world like the desert. Their leaving the world was interiorized, and conversion through their self-surrender centered on the public life of Jesus. Therefore, their self-surrender was achieved through their commitments to pastoral and academic life at universities and parishes. For Francis, “the secret of sanctity is the secret of surrender to the Holy Spirit.” Such self-surrender rooted in Jesus Christ and points to the salvation of souls.

In the process of conversion, self-surrender to God continues to challenge our ongoing self-detachment. We are still tested in this spiritual battle. Teresa of Avila struggled for twenty years before she could fully surrender to God. Indeed, God is patient to transform us and waits for our total surrender. The Trinitarian self-surrender is still present in our aridity. God continues to yearn for our participation in the self-surrender of Jesus. God told Teresa of Avila, "surrender yourself to me" (Spiritual Testimonies, no. 10). Thus, Teresa

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could counsel her sisters, “Forget yourselves and surrender to God come what may.”

This is an intimate encounter between Trinitarian downward self-surrender and human upward self-surrender. It is both passive and active participation in grace and human effort in conversion.

In short, each person, as the image of God of the process of creation, also participates in the Trinitarian immanent and transcendent self-surrender. Through the Christian tradition, we are reminded of a long journey of conversion to Christocentric self-surrender. In such self-surrender, God slowly draws us to conform ourselves to Jesus Christ and allows us to be embraced by Christocentric life. Thus, our new identity is molded in Christ-identity, the participants of Trinitarian self-surrender to the world’s salvation.

2.2.2. In Ignatian tradition

In the transition of conversion, we move from self-determination to discipleship, from being in charge to self-surrender. Such discipleship engages us in a radical transformation, which is a turn from egocentricity to letting go and dedication to God. For Ignatius, his growing self-surrender is a long process that moves through various stages of his life through which Ignatius continues to discern the inner movements of spirits.

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2.2.2.1. Self-surrender in the *Autobiography*

Little by little, the *Autobiography* reveals the amazing changes in Ignatius’s life. Such transformations disclose his life as a progressive self-surrender to God. It is a movement from self-determination as he embraces his self-surrender to God. This dynamic is evident through different periods of his life. Self-surrender is initiated by and is confirmed by a merciful God.

First, self-surrender operates from his conquest of earthly values to self-surrender to God, moving from vainglory to self-denial. As a young man, Ignatius was trained in courtly manners to become a Castilian gentleman. He had dreamed of military glory, fame, and success (*Auto* 1). Supported by his iron will, such hopes motivated Ignatius to surrender to his youthful ambitions of power and glory. However, such ambitions were shattered at Pamplona. Ignatius’s refusal to surrender the castle of Pamplona to the French was necessary for him in his search for what was better. Ignatius eventually surrendered himself to God through dreams of saintly heroics, of self-conquest, self-denial, and the glory of holy sacrifice. He dedicated himself to God following the example of saints (*Auto* 9) and said farewell to his former life for the new life of service (*Auto*.13). Especially, in keeping the vigil at Montserrat, he turned “the worldly knighthood into the spiritual one.” He gave “his mule to a monastery, leaving sword

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and dagger placed in the church at the altar of Our Lady" (*Auto* 17), which is viewed as a symbolic and actual surrender of his former life.\(^{70}\) Ignatius surrendered his worldly armor and security to God. He clothed himself instead as a knight in sackcloth, the armor of a poor knight of Christ.\(^{71}\)

Second, Ignatius’s self-surrender followed the Christian tradition, but required a discerning process of total surrender to God’s designs. In his desire to imitate the saints, Ignatius followed the Christian tradition of self-denial to serve God. He imitated the ancient monks in making his pilgrimage to Jerusalem to do penance and save souls by living a life of self-renunciation, withdrawal, solitude, and quiet.\(^{72}\) However, with the bull of ex-communication to leave Jerusalem (*Auto* 46-48), Ignatius realized that his self-determination did not align with God’s will. This was the dark night of faith in which he learned to discern the purification of hope, total abandonment to God’s designs.\(^{73}\)

Finally, authentic self-surrender comes from and is confirmed by God. During the conversion process from Loyola to Manresa, and to the end of his life, Ignatius realized that he was like a small child who was taught by a patient and merciful God as a schoolmaster (*Auto* 27). He was carefully taught to subtly discern and follow the will of God.\(^{74}\) Furthermore, God brought Ignatius to the divine illuminations of Trinity, creation, Eucharist, the humanity of Christ, and insight into spiritual matters (*Auto* 28-30). God

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\(^{71}\) Coleman, SJ, *Walking with Inigo*, 38-40.


\(^{74}\) Coleman, SJ, *Walking with Inigo*, 61.
offered God-self to Ignatius in order that Ignatius could gain an authentic understanding of the pedagogy of God. Really, God surrendered God-self to Ignatius in order that Ignatius could surrender himself to God. This dynamic of self-surrender was confirmed by the Father, who placed Ignatius with Christ carrying the cross on his shoulder: "I want you to take this man for your servant" (The Spiritual Diary, 67).75 The risen Christ offered himself to Ignatius and carried him on his shoulder.

In short, through challenges and failures in conversion, Ignatius was convinced that his total self-surrender to God could be authentic when he was drawn into the unconditional love of God. Such a dynamic motivated Ignatius to move from self-determination to self-denial, from self-centeredness to God-centeredness.

2.2.2.2. Self-surrender in the Spiritual Exercises

The Spiritual Exercises (SE) are done not only for self-examination, but also for self-surrender to God, and self-recreation in union with God. This section examines one dynamic of self-surrender, which is highlighted in the second week, and extends to the third and the fourth weeks. First, human self-surrender is grounded in the Trinitarian self-surrender and concretized in Jesus Christ. Second, we still need to discern the inner movements of spirits in our self-surrender because we can deviate from the way of Jesus Christ.

First, self-surrender in the SE as a journey of conversion is begun by the love of the Trinity, which reaches down to us. Such a dynamic is the constitutive element of

transformation in which the Trinity draws a person into total self-surrender. The Trinity contemplates the whole of creation. The three divine persons suffer they see seeing people going down to hell. Thus, they decide to surrender themselves to save the human race (SE 102). This divine motivation is fully manifested through and with Jesus in the four-week structure of the SE. Jesus empties himself to conquer and brings everything to the Father (SE 95). Poor and humiliated, He sacrifices himself on the cross to save all creation (SE 167). The first week presents Christ on the cross showing pity and mercy to save sinners (SE 53.71). In the fourth week, God from whom all good gifts descend dwells in all creation, gives life to all, and labors to conserve life (SE 135-137). Such Trinitarian love is surrendered to people in order that people can surrender themselves to God in the kenotic salvific love of Jesus.

Further, our self-surrender to God is a radical response to the descending-down surrender of God in the model of Jesus Christ. The structure of the Spiritual Exercises highlights the dynamics of self-surrender. Generosity and courage invite people to “offer Him their entire will and liberty to God” (SE 5). When entering into the first week, we are oriented towards God as the ultimate end of creation (SE 23). In the second week, total service to God is emphasized through laboring with Christ, working against worldly love (SE 97). Self-surrender involves imitating Christ by desiring and choosing poverty with Him, contempt with Him, being a useless fool for Christ (SE 167). In the third week, Jesus sacrifices himself to save us in his passion, which orients our self-surrender. Our sorrow joins Christ in sorrow, suffering with Christ, who endures for us (SE 203).

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Finally, the self-surrender to God in the way of Christ reaches to the summit of contemplation to attain love. This prayer is a total and radical offering of our possessions and being to God: "Take, Lord, and receive all my liberty, my memory, my understanding, and all my will, all that I have and possess" (SE 234). The descending-down self-surrender of the Trinity attracts our ascending-up self-surrender. Thus, the whole Spiritual Exercises is a "total mutual self-surrender." The structure of the *Spiritual Exercises* is woven together by the mutual self-surrender between God and human beings.

Finally, the movement of self-surrender is examined according to the second set of the rules of discernment of spirits in the second week. The second set centers on the discernment of spirits that are the agents of inner movements (SE 328), while the first set centers on the discernment of inner motions which are the results of the influence of the agents. Both help us to perceive, understand, then to receive or reject inner motions (SE 313) as well as spirits.

The second set emphasizes that good spirits are constitutive agents of self-surrender because God alone gives genuine happiness and joy (SE 329) and spiritual consolation without a cause (SE 330. 336). God gives God-self to us in order to draw us to His mysterious life in Jesus. Ignatius notes that God communicates Himself to the devout soul, inflames it with His love and praise (SE 15), and works directly in one’s soul to unite with one’s Creator (SE 16.20). In the time of consolation without previous cause

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(CWPC), there is no need to discern because it is proper to God alone, without any discernible cause. Such consolation totally transcends our finite desire. CWPC flows from God alone, so it is the touchstone, the basic measure against which other consolations are to be measured.\(^7\) In the CWPC, one mysteriously experiences oneself greater than oneself. Something more than oneself makes one most oneself. Therefore, one is elevated to surrender oneself to the greater reality.\(^8\) However, Herve Coathalem, SJ, held that it is a rare occurrence for us to have CWPC.\(^9\)

The criterion of self-surrender to God in the dynamics of spiritual consolations is consistency. In the consolation of self-surrender, we must pay attention to the whole train of thoughts, words, and deeds from the beginning, middle, and end (\(SE\) 333). If the whole chain is good and right, this constitutes a sign of good angels leading us to God. Otherwise, evil spirits interfere.\(^8\) Consistency makes us aware of the strategies of bad spirits that disguise themselves as angels of light (\(SE\) 332). This is essential during the afterglow of consolation without previous cause, even “still warm and favored with the gifts.” During this time of afterglow, our reasoning about judgment and choice can be affected by good and bad spirits (\(SE\) 336). Consistency becomes a hinge for our discerning self-surrender. In addition, we need to be sensitive to the opposite ways in which good angels and evil spirits operate, in which the gentleness or sharp disturbance

\(^7\) Harvey D. Egan, SJ, *The Spiritual Exercises and the Ignatian Mystical Horizon* (St. Louis, MO: St. Louis University, 1976), 43.

\(^8\) Egan, SJ, *The Spiritual Exercises and the Ignatian Mystical Horizon*, 38.

are signs to discern (*SE* 335). In general, self-surrender needs to be examined even in the
time of consolation, so there is a need for the ongoing process of discernment of spirits.\(^3\)

In conclusion, self-surrender to God in conversion is the transitional step between
self-examination and self-re-creation in a new relationship with God. Such transitional
self-surrender is woven from movements of falling and rising, resistance and acceptance.
In such a process of tension, self-surrender still needs the examination of the movements
of good angels and evil spirits. Thus, faithfulness to self-examination is the way toward
self-re-creation in a new intimate relationship with God.

2.3. **Liminal space between resistance and free acceptance**

Self-surrender always involves the tension between self-resistance and free
acceptance in belonging to God. This is a liminal space, in which we wait for God with a
spirit of indifference. In such a liminal space, God continues to strengthen us and leads us
in the direction of God’s plan. Indeed, in the movement from self-examination to self-
surrender to God, there is a break between the old and new self. It is a painful process in
which God purifies souls.\(^4\)

Ignatian indifference in a liminal space is a gift from God and comes from a
“mystical death” to self for the salvific love of God. It also derives from a transformed
self-awareness in authentic self-examination. Such indifference originates in and is
governed by Trinitarian self-surrender and kenotic love in a new creation.\(^5\) Indifference

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House, 2006), 73. 279. 384.

\(^5\) Helen Orchard, “Reaching Equipoise: The Relationship between Indifference and Discernment
enlightens us to the authentic freedom of Jesus for the Father’s glory. Such balance detaches us from our old self-centered attachment to a God-centered attachment. In this liminal space, we are indifferent for the purpose of God’s greater praise and service (SE 23). Thus, indifference is an essential “precursor” that orients us towards a Christocentric way of life. In such a liminal space of indifference, however, we are still in the tension of total self-surrender to God.

Self-surrender to God involves a break between self-examination and self-recreation into a new relationship with God. In such a transition, we experience our powerlessness and sinfulness, as well as acceptance of our finiteness, and the infiniteness of God. In the process of conversion, we realize that infinite gravitation pulls us towards God in freedom. God draws us towards His goodness without end. As the Father draws us to Christ (Jn 6:44.65), Jesus draws us to the Father (Jn12:32; 14:6). From a deep orientation towards God, we are drawn into this divine movement. Thus, through divine attraction, we offer our self-surrender to God. In our self-surrender, we are awakened to Christ, who surrenders himself to God and also offers himself “down” to us.

In the early stages of our self-surrender, there are resistance and withdrawal. This situation occurs when we have not totally abandoned the old self, and in the new life, we are not yet fully familiar with the way of Christ. In the journey of conversion, fear of self-loss still challenges us. We can pull back from the salvific movements of good spirits that

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threaten the false self.\textsuperscript{88} Therefore, we need to discern which inner movements come from and lead us to God or lead us back to our old self. Such resistance constitutes the inner tension of our spiritual self-surrender.

In short, free acceptance in self-surrender brings us hope, strength, and orientation to follow Jesus. With a firm trust in God and free acceptance of a new life, we happily embrace the kenotic life and detach from our old self. Our converted self is possessed and oriented by the movements of good spirits, by angels of light, and by God himself. At the center of the process of conversion is authentic freedom, the act of surrender to God.\textsuperscript{89} God never forces us to surrender. Instead, God gives more grace to perfect our natural self and invites us to come back to the ultimate source of life, God’s love. In the love of God through Jesus Christ, we can be strengthened to surrender ourselves to God-self.

3. Self-Re-Creation in the Paradigm of Jesus as a New Identity

Self-re-creation in conversion derives from the contemplation of Jesus Christ through the journey of self-examination and self-surrender. It is the integral transformation of the whole person. But, it still needs to be supported and tested by our constant effort at self-examination and surrender. This section examines self-re-creation as a transformation and participation in divine mysteries, which is explored through the lens of Ignatian spirituality.

3.1. In Christian tradition


\textsuperscript{89} Jacques Pasquier, “Experience and Conversion,” \textit{The Way} 17/2 (April 1977), 116 - 120.
Conversion moves us to self-re-creation in Jesus. Such a movement is a progressive transformation or divinization of the whole person, in which our intimate relationship with God is rooted in Christ and led by the light of the Holy Spirit. Moreover, with grace and our openness, we become co-creators with Christ in our self-re-creation.

Self-re-creation is a radical and integral transformation. It is not a superficial commitment or superficial change in moral or intellectual matters. Rather it is something more fundamental and radical. Such change involves the whole person and involves rebuilding what it means be human from the ground up. This transformation restores human nature to its ultimate purpose, friendship with Christ.\(^90\) Through relationships with God through Christ in the Holy Spirit, we are converted to be “partakers of the divine life and nature” (2Pr 1:4). This status of conversion leads us back to the face to face encounter between God and Moses, “as a man speaks to his friend” (Ex 33:11). Similarly, Jesus calls his disciples “friends” (Jn 15:15).

The transformation of the self is also the re-creation of the integral relationship with Christ. With this transformed relationship, we are re-created to be new creatures in Christ (2 Cor 5:17). In and through our radical conversion, our intimate relationship is grounded in the person of Christ. This is a supernatural change of our total person in which we undergo a cognitive, affective, moral, and faith transformation.\(^91\) In this new creation, our desires, thoughts, feelings, behaviors, and intentionality reflect an intimate

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\(^91\) Conn, *Christian Conversion*, 198.
relationship with God, the union with Jesus Christ. Through this conversion, divinity
grows in our humanity, and humanity also grows in Christ’s divinity.\footnote{92} With these deified
relationships, the Trinity becomes visible, and our relationships with our neighbors or the
universe can be traced back to the creative work of the Trinity. The more we belong to
Jesus, the purer, and more authentic is the quality of this divine permeation. Our self-re-
creation in a radical transformation leads us to embrace God’s desire and put on Christ’s
identity and mission.\footnote{93} This is a growing process of the new self in Christ (Col 3:9-10).

Through contemplation of the Risen Christ carrying the cross in salvific love, his
divine infiniteness transforms our human finiteness. We can carry his divine sonship in
our destitution.\footnote{94} We allow Jesus to enter into our life that is woven with his incarnational
and paschal mystery. Self-re-creation requires our collaboration with the grace of God.
God never works alone, but always respects our freedom. In the new creation, we are
elevated to a new level of relationship with God, which is that of free agents.

In short, according to God’s intent, we are co-creators who share God’s intention
for salvific creative action.\footnote{95} In this new creation, we discern the divine movements
within our new relationships, and we pay attention to God’s intentions in the internal and
external events of our life.

\subsection*{3.2. In Ignatian Tradition}

\footnote{92} Bernard McGinn, ed., \textit{The Essential Writings of Christian Mysticism} (New York: Random
House, 2006), 397. 427-472.

\footnote{93} Conn, \textit{Christian Conversion}, 209.

\footnote{94} Piet Penning de Vries, SJ, \textit{Discernment of Spirits According to the Life and Teachings of St.

\footnote{95} William A. Barry, “Toward the Theology of Discernment,” \textit{The Way Supplement 55} (Spring
1986), 129-139.
3.2.1. Self-re-creation of relationships in the *Autobiography*

Ignatius’s spiritual *Autobiography* is the vivid story of his conversion from his disordered self to God-centeredness. During his progressive conversion, Ignatius’s human relationships are recreated into human-divine relationships in conforming with Jesus Christ.96

First, rebuilding new relationships with God gradually emerges from his self-referential to Christ-possessed life. After reading carefully the books of a *Life of Christ* and *Lives of Saints* in Castilian, Ignatius pondered over “St. Dominic did this, therefore I have to do it; St. Francis did this, therefore I have to do it” (*Auto* 7). Ignatius desired to imitate the saints (*Auto* 9). This style of conversion remained competitive in his pattern of imitation. His motivation resembled the crude spirit of rivalry. The ambitious spirit of Inigo of Pamplona did not disappear. With a desire for fame still within him, he emulated the saints by living a life of rigorous penance and by making a pilgrimage to Jerusalem.97 In imitating the saints, he neglected his appearance, not cutting his hair, etc (*Auto* 19).

Gradually, because he wanted to help souls, he realized that he had to modify his appearance so as not to scare people away. He changed his appearance to imitate saints to helps souls. Therefore, he cut his hair and nails, etc. Gradually, through pondering his natural talents, Ignatius began to realize the building blocks of a relationship with God. The appearance of “Our Lady with the Holy Child Jesus" (*Auto* 10) reinforced his sense of being on the right path. This re-creation of his relationship with Christ was done in the


context of faith, prayer, and the companionship of mother Mary (Auto 17). From Monserrat onward, Mary as his “knight’s lady” became the mother and guide of Ignatius’s journey.

From Manresa to the Holy Land, Ignatius desired to develop a closer relationship with the “historical Jesus.” On Mount Olivet in Jerusalem, he desired to touch the footprints of Jesus (Auto 47). His rebuilding of a new relationship with Jesus continued to deepen. During his travels from Ferrara to Genoa on the dangerous main road (Auto 51), he heard the call to be with Christ in poverty, to trust in the Lord, and to rejoice in the sufferings of Christ (Auto 52). In the vision at La Storta, his new relationship with Jesus Christ was confirmed: he was to be with the suffering and humiliated Christ (Auto 96). This would be his new intimate relationship with Jesus, carrying a cross in Ignatius’s new life in Rome.

On his journey of conversion, empowered by divine grace, Iñigo was continuously molded into a new identity. The new person of Ignatius was gradually formed through conversion to Christ. Born around 1491 at the castle of Loyola in the Basque province of Guipúzcoa in Spain, Ignatius was a caballero, a knight. In 1521, he served as a gallant and courageous soldier defending the citadel of Pamplona against the French. However, at the family home in Loyola, this soldier of vainglory became the wounded patient (Auto 2), who was nourished by reading the life of Jesus and the examples of saints. Ignatius underwent the “cutting away of protruding bone” on his leg

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(Auto 4) as a martyr to his own values. As the patient of God, Ignatius took the time to be healed and reformed to become another person living for higher values. At Monserrat, “Iñigo resolved to lay aside his garments and to don the armor of Christ” (Auto 17). He slowly took on a new identity in Christ. At Manresa, the patient offered all what he had to mother Mary intending to lead the life of a hermit and pilgrim (Auto 15-18). Dressed as a pilgrim, by the end of February 1523, Ignatius left Manresa and traveled by way of Barcelona and Rome to Venice bound for the Holy Land (Auto 38-47). Then, after being kicked out of Jerusalem, Ignatius, a pilgrim, became a student to learn Latin, especially, to ponder the will of God: “Quid Agendum?” (Auto 50).

After being forced to leave Jerusalem, the pilgrim sought the will of God (Auto 50). Ignatius eventually began a new way of life as a student. He needed to get educated so he could pursue his mission of helping souls. At Alcala and Salamanca (Auto 72), Ignatius became a center of gravitation to attract friends: “Iniguístas”- the friends of Inigo. Through the time at Paris (Auto 85), the relationship of those friends was oriented towards God: “amigos en el Señor,” they were friends in the Lord. God was their center, not Ignatius. Finally, after Venice, and with the vision at La Storta (Auto 96), the relationship of his friends in the Lord became a vivid body of Jesus Christ: “la Compañía de Jesus.” They were the companions of Jesus, who was the center of gravitation of the group. Eventually, Ignatius easily encountered God whenever he desired (Auto 99). He was totally possessed by Jesus Christ, and his life was God-centered.

99 Coleman, SJ, Walking with Inigo, 8.
100 Coleman, SJ, 181.
In short, Ignatius’s spiritual Autobiography discloses the progressive process of his self-re-creation. It is woven with movements from his self-referential to Christ-possessed life. At Loyola, Ignatius underwent his external detachment - a wounded Iñigo. At Jerusalem, he undertook an internal self-detachment for God’s will. This process also traces his transformation from an active soldier searching for earthly values to a mystic possessed by God. It is the story of the mutual penetration of divine love and Ignatius’s desire to serve God generously and faithfully.\textsuperscript{102} In the end, Iñigo was no longer known as Iñigo. He became Ignatius, the Superior General of the Compañía de Jesús. The new name manifested his lifelong conversion in re-creation by God in terms of his new identity and new mission for Jesus.

### 3.2.2. Authentic self-re-creation in the Spiritual Exercises

The dynamics of the Spiritual Exercises aim at the creation of a new relationship with God, with our authentic self, and with a transformed community. The self-re-creation operate in the structure of particular samples and various tools of the Spiritual Exercises that foster us to stay with God and ready to do God’s will.

First, the four-week structure of the Spiritual Exercises seeks to re-create a new self in Christ. Ignatius, as the guide and exercitant, invites us to follow the movements from self-centeredness to God-centeredness in the first week. There is movement from sin and worldly attachment to reverence and praise to God. This is a creation of new order away from the old order of disordered attachments as seen in the sins of angels, Adam and Eve, and oneself. In the first week, a new identity is created and molded from

\textsuperscript{102} Healey, The Ignatian Way: Key Aspects of Jesuit Spirituality, 16.
God's perspective. In this new creation, God himself forms us to be a new person, a follower of Christ. In the second week, we are reformed from self-determination to discipleship with Jesus as the principle and foundation. Then, in the third week, we are conformed to Jesus from sympathy to compassion for his paschal mystery. Finally, we are elevated to a realized hope with the risen Christ in the fourth week. With these dynamics of conversion, David L. Fleming, SJ, emphasizes the transformation from self-centeredness to God-centeredness in Christ. Those movements follow a dialectic structure: a human-self becomes smaller, self-emptying, and the God-self grows larger (Jn 3:30). This moves from a sinful state of slavery to a free filial relationship with the Father. The whole Spiritual Exercises engage us in the Christ-event. We can become conformed to Jesus Christ in union with the Father. Such a structure flows from the transformative movement between the individual and God (SE 15).

Second, a new relationship with God is directed by the step by step structure of the Spiritual Exercises (SE 45-53). The preparatory prayer draws us to the merciful presence of God as the ultimate end of our life (SE 46). Then, as our entry into the setting of the spiritual exercises with imagination, we place ourselves in the biblical accounts and become active participants in God’s story (SE 47). Next, we ask of God what we desire in prayer (SE 48); this request becomes our compass for the whole prayer. We use memory, understanding, and will to consider, to meditate, or to contemplate on mystery (SE 50). Finally, in order to have a balance between reason and affection in prayer, we enter into a colloquy with mother Mary, Jesus, and the Father, as a friend in conversation (SE 53).

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Colloquy leads us into a deeper and more intimate relationship with God and with Jesus. These step-like movements of the structure are a means to lead us to encounter God personally.

Finally, to renew and reinforce our relationships with Jesus, Ignatius gives us various spiritual tools. In the Spiritual Exercises, Ignatius guided us to enter into the way of Jesus, who draws us to the Father. Through the tools of the SE, Jesus is a spiritual teacher and guide, and the source of our authentic identity.\footnote{Roger Haight, SJ, A Christian Spirituality for Seekers: Reflections on the Spiritual Exercises of Ignatius Loyola (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 2012), xxi-xxiii.} There are 20 Annotations (SE 1-20) as the keys to the door that lead us to a personal relationship with God. The Annotations give us a vision of self-re-creation and conformity with Christ. They also explain the nature and purpose of the Spiritual Exercises. In addition, Ignatius uses other tools like Notes (SE 49), which are about constant preparatory prayer, about the method of the colloquy (SE 54), and Notes for the second week (SE 127-131). At the end of the first week, Ignatius uses additional Directives to help us adjust our interior life or exterior observations to get what we desire (SE 73-90). These are recommendations for certain practices to keep us focused on communion with God.\footnote{Haight, A Christian Spirituality for Seekers, 38.} For the interior life, Ignatius uses two sets of rules for the discernment of spirits (SE 313-336) to help us find God’s will in our new relationship with God. For a relationship with other people, Ignatius gives us the rules for distributing alms (SE 337-344) and the rules for solving scruples (SE 345-351). Finally, Ignatius gives us the rules for thinking, judging, feeling with the Church (SE 352-370). In the vision of Ignatian spirituality, God continues to draw us into a new relationship with
Jesus who is dwelling within ourselves, our neighbors, and the Church. We are drawn into Jesus’s salvific story.\textsuperscript{106} Authentic self-re-creation involves the intense love of Jesus Christ (\textit{SE} 167) and deep gratitude for God (\textit{SE} 233), who is laboring in all the details of our existence.

In conclusion, the re-creation of an authentic relationship with God is a lifelong process of ongoing conversion. In this process of conversion, God asks us to collaborate as his co-creators for self-re-creation. This process is shadowed by our disordered self in false relationships with other creatures. Thus, we need to discern the movements of spirits that may destroy God’s plan for us. Indeed, in this dynamic of self-re-creation, the Holy Spirit is the main actor who transforms our desires and molds a new identity to follow Jesus through commitments marked by humility.

\textbf{Conclusion: Conversion for the Mission of Christ}

The end of authentic ongoing conversion is conformity with Christ and participation in his mission. Such a mission communicates Christ’s love and mercy for the greater glory of the Father.\textsuperscript{107} This is the third movement of ongoing conversion from self-centeredness to Christocentric transformation for the greater glory of God. Such conversion does not pause at an individual transformation as one’s final perfection, but it motivates one to assimilate the way of life of Jesus Christ. In the dynamics of conversion as movements \textit{from...to...for}, authentic conversion centers on God, not for one’s own mission, but \textit{for} the mission of Christ. If the conversion stops at personal growth in terms

\textsuperscript{106} Haight, 72.

of finite human perfection as the final goal, it is inadequate and short of authentic conversion. Human perfection cannot be ultimate criterion for one’s fullness. Indeed, authentic conversion always motivates a person to the One who is the ultimate source of human life and engages one in Christ-event. Conversion for the mission of Christ as a divine restlessness draws one to participate in the salvific mission of Christ. Authentic conversion leads one to in-cor-porate into the salvific mission of Christ. The Spirit brings him/her into the corporate, the body, in which the center of body is “cor,”¹⁰⁸ the heart of Christ’s mission for the glory of the Father.

The spiral dynamics of conversion engage in the mission of the Church, which derives from the salvific mission of Trinity, Missio Dei. There is only one ultimate mission from the Father who sends the Son and the Holy Spirit to save all (Jn 3:17, 14:26, 16:7). As the eternal missionary, God is both the One who sends and the Sent One.¹⁰⁹ The Father is present to us through the missions of the Son and the Spirit and draws us to this eternal mission. Indeed, three divine persons send the Church and join in the salvific mission of the Church: “The Church, sent by Christ to reveal and to communicate the love of God to all men and nations” (Ad Gentes, 10). By its nature, the Church is on a mission to the whole world (AG 2, 10). Thus, in the Church we are called to be transformed to live out the Trinitarian mission. Through this joint mission of the Son (Jn 20:21) and the Spirit (Acts 10:20), the Father converts us from disciples to apostles for

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¹⁰⁸ The term “Incorporate” includes “in” that manifests the entrance, participation in the new reality in which corporate means the body. “In” points to the participative oneness of body. It also refers to receiving life from the body. Besides, the center of “corporate” is “cor” that is the heart in the nominative case of Latin. “Cor” means the whole living body or total person in Jewish and Christian understanding.

the mission of Christ in the Holy Spirit. By learning and watching Jesus as he works, we are motivated to embrace his mission and to be sent to carry it out in the Church for the world’s salvation.

In Ignatian tradition, conversion aims at becoming companions of Christ in his salvific mission. The Ignatian mission is to celebrate the mystery of Christ’s incarnation and passion, in which companions are totally drawn into the life and the love of the Trinitarian community.\textsuperscript{110} His enlightenment at the Cardoner helped Ignatius to move from contemplation of the Trinity to contemplation of the works of the Trinity (\textit{Auto} 28, \textit{SE} 102).\textsuperscript{111} After being expelled from Jerusalem, Ignatius realized a new mission from God (\textit{Auto} 47), which was to study in order to help souls. Then, the companions' intention to help souls in Jerusalem turned out not to alight with Christ’s mission. Since they could not go to Jerusalem, the companions returned to Rome and presented themselves to the Vicar of Christ for the glory of God and the good of souls (\textit{Auto} 85). In Venice, they discerned that their union would result in dispersion; “the body” was for the “mission” (\textit{Auto} 93).\textsuperscript{112} Ignatius and his companions were slowly transformed to participate in the mission of Christ sent by the Father in the Spirit. Similarly, through engaging in the \textit{Spiritual Exercises}, we are converted to be intimate companions of Christ in order to be sent out to conquer the whole world for him (\textit{SE} 95). Especially, the exercises of the Second, Third, and Fourth Weeks reshape us to be companions for

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\textsuperscript{112} Coleman, SJ, \textit{Walking with Inigo}, 181.
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Christ’s mission.\textsuperscript{113} We are led to fulfill the salvific mission under Christ’s standards: poverty, contempt, and humility (SE 146). The mission is living out an attitude of self-surrender to God, through which our Christ-identity is molded. Such identity and mission converge in the Trinity. To be companions of Christ is to be sent on His mission.\textsuperscript{114} We become whom we contemplate.

In short, the dynamics of conversion move \textit{from egoism to God-centeredness for} the mission of Christ. Such movements derive from the unconditional love of the Trinity through self-emptying of Jesus in the Spirit. The Trinity desires to draw us to their eternal mission and transform us to embody the mission of Christ. As intimate companions of Christ, we continue the mission from the Father like Jesus. Namely, we turn away from our old self to surrender to God for the mission of Christ in the guidance of the Holy Spirit.


\textsuperscript{114} O’Leary SJ, \textit{Sent into the Lord’s Vineyard}, 82 - 87.
CHAPTER FOUR
MOVING TOWARDS SPIRITUAL CONVERSION FOR JESUIT NOVICES IN VIETNAM

Introduction: Internalizing the Dynamics of Conversion in Novitiate

The novitiate as a sacred space that helps novices actualize the dynamics of conversion through their daily commitments in searching for their new identity in Christ. Rooted in love with God and desire for the authentic self, novices can recognize their true vocation in life through their particular choices. They are trained to be responsible for their vocation. Their vocation can involve being a member of a religious order, a diocesan priest, a married person, or someone focused on a career. Whoever they are called to become, novices are assisted to become intimate companions of Christ and to follow his salvific mission in their life choice. Indeed, “Becoming Whom They Contemplate”\(^1\) demands novices to undergo a lifelong conversion. In other words, in the Novitiate, empowered by the divine grace, novices begin the journey of adopting and modelling themselves after Christ, as Christ’s companion. Thus, Jesuit formation entails a long process of de-forming themselves from disordered attachments while re-forming and con-forming themselves with Christ. Such a process necessitates self-examination, self-surrender, and finally being re-created “through Christ, with Christ, and in Christ.”

Novices’ self-examination, self-surrender, and self-re-creation do not occur in a vacuum. Instead, they actualize their conversion according to the Ignatian pedagogy of personal experience which follows the dynamics of discernment (sentir), understanding

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\(^1\) George A. Aschenbrenner, “Becoming Whom We Contemplate,” *the Way Supplement* 52 (Spring 1985), 32.
(conocer), and action (hacer). Through their commitments, novices can sentir, experience the vivid presence of God, savor the divine sweetness (SE 2), or “sense God’s will”. After having personally experienced (sentir) the divine action in their life, novices are led to know (conocer) a felt-interior knowledge of God (SE 104. 233), or commonly known as “interior knowledge” of themselves and of God (el conocimiento interno del Señor)”.

Finally, the novices’ intimate knowledge and love of Jesus Christ inevitably resonate with their restless question: “What ought I to do for Christ?” (SE 53) [Qué haces por Cristo?]. Learning what Christ has done for him, as a response the novice is moved to action, opening himself ever more generously to the process of conversion. Indeed, God hacer acts in the conversion of the novices, who always ask God to do God’s will. Polanco radically says, “May God do (Dios haga) in him and all people his holy will” (Sept. 30, 1564).

Applying the Ignatian dynamics of sentir, conocer, and hacer, into the context of the Novitiate in Vietnam, this chapter consists of three main themes. First, the novices tell their his-story of personal salvation, then follow up with spiritual conversations with one another. Like Ignatius, through recalling and sharing such personal experiences, novices can examine and encourage one another in moving towards ongoing conversion. Second, novices are invited to live out a spirituality of gratitude through daily self-

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2 Peter Hans Kolvenbach, SJ, The Road from La Storta (St. Louis, MO: The Institute of Jesuit Sources, 2000), 178.


5 Kolvenbach, SJ, The Road from La Storta, 184.
examination to cultivate a deeper intimate knowledge of Jesus. Finally, novices actualize their ongoing conversion through their commitments to some outside apostolates. Thus, the three dynamics of sentir-conocer-hacer function together to enlighten and challenge novices in fulfilling their vocation.

**A Pedagogy of Conversion for the Novices in Vietnam**

In the beginning, God creates us in the divine image. Though the human dignity is innate, it is cultivated through our daily experiences. Looking back and reflecting on the ups and downs, novices can be slowly convinced that the merciful Creator can act directly on the loved creature in the most intimate way (SE 15). God works within us in different ways according to our uniqueness, openness, and level of spiritual maturity. Furthermore, we encounter God’s presence not only within our own heart, but also through other people. Each person's intimate and individual experience does not remain confined to oneself but is enriched by the lives of surrounding friends.\(^6\) Thus, through telling our personal experience to others, we are invited and challenged to move away from our narrow self-centered perspective to a more expansive view so to re-form our lives accordingly. As a Christian and as in Ignatius’ life journey, the story of Jesus’ life remains foundational for any other life’s story. Ultimately, storytelling aimes at providing better light on one’s own history, so to free him/her to move out on mission with Christ. Similarly, spiritual conversation also leads us into a wondrous encounter and communication with God. This interpersonal conversation challenges our way of life and

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deepens our discernment of God's will for a better life. These experiences lead us into the mission of Christ and sentir and conocer God’s will in a new identity.

1. **Sentir**: “God creates human beings because God loves stories” – Experiencing God in one's story and storytelling.

1.1. **Foundation, purpose, and principle**

Telling and sharing one’s life story is deeply rooted in Biblical and Ignatian traditions. In the biblical aspect, as the eternal Logos (Word) of the Father, the risen Christ always speaks to us in our human language (Heb 1:1-2). Namely, Christ reveals the story of the Trinity to us: "I made known to them your name, and I will make it known" (Jn 17:26). Similarly, the Holy Spirit reveals the Father to us (1Cor 2:10) and re-tells the salvific story of Jesus to us (Jn 16:13). After an encounter with God in our life, we recount to others what has occurred. The disciples on their way to Emmaus share their story with a stranger. In return, the stranger who accompanies them on the way, illuminating the whole salvific story, setting their hearts on fire. Sharing at the table and breaking the bread, they come to recognize Jesus in the stranger. Immediately, they return to recounted to their friends what had taken place in their personal encounter with the Lord (Lk 24:35). Storytelling comes from our transformative encounter with God and also from an inner divine demand. After healing the man from unclean spirits, Jesus demanded that he go back home to share his healing story with his family: "Go home to your family and announce to them all that the Lord in his pity has done for you" (Mk 5:19). Both Christ and the Spirit tell the story of the Father to us in order to lead us to the

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Trinity and to send us to recount the story of the Trinity to others. The Trinitarian story continues in our story.

In Vietnamese cultures, storytelling plays an important role in forming communal and individual identity. On Lunar New Year’s Eve, during the ancestral memorial feasts (Giỗ tổ) and the anniversaries of the deaths of the parents and grandparents, the head of the family reads the family genealogy explicitly announcing that “Everyone thinks that the ancestors or departed persons have come to the altar to take part in the family banquet.”

The head of the family tells the story of ancestors in order to transmit the filial piety, moral values and norms to the next generations. It also communicates the strong familial hierarchal bonds between the living and the dead across generations. At the communal level, all villagers gather in the temple, or the community hall (đình), the head of the village tells the village annals to commemorate deeds and teachings of the guardian spirits, village gods (Thành Hoàng). At the common ancestral hall (tổ đình), “people of a particular trade or craft also worshipped the founder of their trade or craft (tổ sư).” This inspires people to make present the story of the founder. Moreover, in families, the myths of the origin of nation and good stories of national heroes are told to orient people's way of life and to maintain moral values. In the catholic families, parents often tell to their children the stories of Christian persecutions in the past as well as under the recent communist regime in order to reinforce the faith in God as well as to inspire them to witness the greater values. One of the most popular way to teach catechism is re-telling biblical stories, lives of saints, and stories of 117 Vietnamese Christian Martyrs to

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9 Tran, Gods, Heroes, and Ancestors, 79.
children. The story of salvation is recounted through prayers. Before mass, parishioners often recite the Ten Commandments, Six Moral Principles of the Church, Seven Sacraments, and Beatitudes. These prayers lead participants into the process of salvation from the old to the new testament. In short, storytelling or oral narration is essential for Vietnamese cultures to maintain communal bonds and transmit moral values as well as norms among generations.

In the Ignatian perspective, reading the Autobiography reminds the audience of how God was working in the life of the saint. For Nadal, it is utmost important for Ignatius to share his conversion story to the early companions because Nadal was convinced that what God has given to Ignatius was not for Ignatius alone, but for all the companions. In addition, in sharing his story, it was meant to showcase neither Ignatius’ failures nor his triumphs, but to recognize how the Lord in his love and mercy has been actively laboring in his life. Thus, for Nadal, Ignatius was considered and remained as the prima forma y gratia for all members of the Scoiety of Jesus and of the Ignatian family.

Consequently, he convinced Ignatius to recount his life story as a way to counsel Fr. Louis Gonzalez da Camara on his own personal problem of vanity, tardiness, and other weaknesses. Then, Fr. Camara recounted Ignatius’s Autobiography as a “remedy for spiritual illness” and a way to help others in the journey of conversion. For that reason, Ignatius appears in the Autobiography or even better his reminiscence never as in the first

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10 Chính Quang Đỗ, SJ, Hòn Minh Vào Xã Hội Việt Nam, 156-158.
11 Fontes Narrativi – FN I, 11; II, 2.5.6.43.143.165.227.
person pronoun but instead referred to himself in the third as “he, the pilgrim, or the
prisoner.”\textsuperscript{14} This indicates a movement from self-centeredness to God-centeredness, from
a man of worldly pleasure (\textit{Auto 1}) to a mystic possessed by God (\textit{Auto 99}). Perhaps,
通过 telling our story to one another, God turns our autobiography into a spiritual
instrument to transform ourselves and others. This is a transformative "collaboration
between God and human beings in the most ordinary things of life."\textsuperscript{15}

In addition, in the first prelude of meditations (\textit{SE 137, 150}) and contemplations
(\textit{SE 102, 111, 191, 219}) of the \textit{Spiritual Exercises}, Ignatius invites us to enter into the
history of the matter about which we are praying. Such preludes of salvific history help
us to realize how God works in our life as in the life of Jesus. The structure of the
\textit{Spiritual Exercises} is based on the history of salvation and personal response in which
Christ is the center.\textsuperscript{16} The first week of the \textit{Exercises} centers on our human
autobiography in which we discover our history of sin and the history of the mercy of
God. We recount our autobiography to seek the Divine Will regarding the disposition of
our life (\textit{SE 1, 21}) in which God communicates directly to the devout soul (\textit{SE 15}). Then,
we contemplate the story of Jesus from the second to fourth weeks of \textit{Exercises}.\textsuperscript{17} Such
exercises turn Jesus`s Autobiography into ours, and in turn we share with others, our life
is absorbed and transformed by the story of Jesus.

\textsuperscript{14} McManamon, SJ, \textit{The Text and Contexts of Ignatius Loyola’s Autobiography}, x.
\textsuperscript{15} Kolvenbach, SJ, \textit{The Road from La Storta}, 158.
\textsuperscript{16} Varghese Malpan, SJ, \textit{A Comparative Study of the Bhagavad-Gita and the Spiritual Exercises of
Saint Ignatius of Loyola on the Process of Spiritual Liberation} (Roma: Editrice Pontificia Universita
Gregoriana, 1992), 191. 284.
\textsuperscript{17} Franz Meures, “The Spiritual Exercises as Biography,” \textit{The Way}, 47/1–2 (Jan/April 2008), 186-90.
Telling our autobiography to others motivates our ongoing conversion in different ways. It helps us to experience the merciful presence of God in each person, contemplating God in one’s history. This draws others into gratitude to God and appreciation of what God continues to do in each person. Telling our own story reveals who we are to others and accepts what God gives us.\textsuperscript{18} We also discern God’s will through our stories of lived experience. Storytelling as a spiritual conversation helps us to discover who we are and to discern where God works in the ups and downs of our life.\textsuperscript{19} This motivates our conversion in searching for God’s voice and responding to God’s loving presence. This practice also opens our inner eyes to a deeper and more intimate knowledge of others. This leads listeners to embrace others’ stories in the sight of God. Namely, we can reform our way of seeing, judging, and acting in different cultural, personal, familial, and faith backgrounds.\textsuperscript{20} Telling our stories to one another is a way of building up our friendship in the Lord and supporting one another in orienting ourselves towards Christocentric life. Through sharing our stories with their shadows or lights, we are moved to form our new identity in Christ as the center of our ongoing conversion.

Telling a story of one’s life requires internal and external principles. It is the way to “celebrate” our autobiography in faith, hope, and charity.\textsuperscript{21} Such storytelling is done in the context of prayer in front of God and in trust of one another. It also requires generosity and courage to celebrate our life story according to inner motivation from


\textsuperscript{19} Luz Marina Diaz, “Spiritual Conversation as the Practice of Revelation,” \textit{The Way}, 55/2 (April 2016), 53.

\textsuperscript{20} Diaz, “Spiritual Conversation as the Practice of Revelation,” 46.

God. We have to discern to choose events or movements that help ourselves and others realize God’s merciful patience. Moreover, telling one's autobiography should be done in a quiet and friendly atmosphere. It is more useful for our ongoing conversion when we take time to contemplate our autobiography by which we discern God's will.

1.2. Actual exercise

In Vietnam, most often, first-year novices have already known one another from their year-long pre-novitiate program. After the first week of the first year in the Novitiate, the novices are directed to build up a friendship in the Lord. Besides, such actual exercise also helps them to discover who they are and to prepare themselves to do the thirty-day Spiritual Exercises.

Preparations:
After novices have been invited to read the *Autobiography* of St. Ignatius again, each novice points out the significance of “cannon ball,” “Pamplona fortress,” and “Loyola” in his life. More importantly, he is to locate where “Monserrat,” “Loyola,” and “Jerusalem” are in his own life journey, highlighting “Manresa” denotes Ignatius’ struggles to search for his life’s meaning to to point of almost suicidal, and “Jerusalem” as post mark for the beginning of discovering God’s will. He centers on what lights as attractiveness and shadows as hardness are as signals that God inspires or challenges him.

- Map your life journey thus for in term of years.
- Explain the significance of these historical landmarks in spiritual terms.
- Pick/choose important/significant postmarks: cannon-ball, Loyola, Monserrat, Manresa, Jerusalem.
- How would you describe yourself during postmarks or locations?
- Where was God present/absent, images of God involving and encountering?22

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22 The questions of actual exercise were done in class “Dynamics in the Spiritual Exercises,” Fall 2018, which was instructed by Hung T. Pham, SJ, STD.
Members in each small group include three partners named A, B, and C. Each partner tells his autobiography in one hour. Regarding their place of sharing, they can choose where they feel comfortable. There are two rounds. The first round is done in a small group and the second in a bigger group. After they finish sharing in small groups, all partners gather to share in the whole first-year novice community. Their actual exercise follows the steps below:

Exercise:

- The first round of sharing in a small group

8:00 – 8:15 am: Prayer in a small group:
  - Being silent and aware of the merciful presence of God
  - Raising a personal prayer: Ask for grace to be generous to share, deep knowledge of others, and being ready to do God’s will.

8:15 – 8:45 am: Novice named A shares his own autobiography on faith, personality, turning points of life, the motivation of vocation, self-discovery, conversion experience, and family background.

8:45 – 9:00 am: Break

9:00 – 9:30 am: Novice A continues to share his story of life

9:30 – 9:45 am: Each novice takes some individual notes on others’ autobiography. Such notes are used to share in a bigger group.

9:45 – 10:00 am: Break

10:00 -10:30 am: Individual prayer:

  Each novice finds an appropriate place, such as a chapel, garden, or private room.

  ✓ Identify some of the inner movements observed during the sharing.
  ✓ What would you like to pray for at the moment?
  ✓ Paying attention to deep gratitude to God focusing on this person.
• Meditating and contemplating a personal history in the eye of God and discerning God’s will through some essential period of life.

• The second round of sharing in the whole first-year novice group

Preparation: Novices should pay attention to some following guidelines. After listening and contemplating the autobiography of one novice in a small group, other novices should be authentic in re-telling novice's story with authentic and prayerful hearts. They help the community to realize the way God guides this novice in his life and point out what turning points as lights and shadows are in his life.

- Map out the life journey of that novice thus far in term of years.
- Pick/choose important/significant postmarks in the life of that novice: cannon-ball, Loyola, Monserrat, Manresa, Jerusalem.
- Where was God present/absent, images of God involving and encountering in his life journey?
- How did you discover God’s pedagogy in guiding you through this storytelling?

When the first round of sharing one's autobiography has done, all novices gather in one large group. This second round aims to objectify one's own autobiography in the other two novices' recounting. Such a method follows the way that Fr. Camara noted and recounted Ignatius's Autobiography to other Jesuits and the next generations. The second round is done in the main chapel of the community, where novices are aware of Jesus Christ as their close friend listening to them and welcoming them to the Father.

Exercise:

8:00 – 8:15 am: Prayer in a large group:

o Being silent and aware of the merciful presence of God
o Raising a personal prayer: Ask for grace to be honest to share, to embrace others in God’s will, and to transform hearts for a new life in the Holy Spirit.
8:15 – 8:45 am: Novice named B shares the autobiography of novice A with community

8:45 – 9:00 am: Break

9:00 – 9:30 am: Novice named C continues to share novice A’s autobiography

9:30 – 9:45 am: Each novice takes some individual notes on others’ autobiography.

9:45 – 10:00 am: Break

10:00 -10:30 am: Individual prayer:

Each novice finds an appropriate place for internalization of what they receive.

✓ Identify inner movements if any while listening to other’s sharing.
✓ What would you like to pray for at the moment?
✓ Paying attention to deep gratitude to God focusing on this person.
✓ Meditating and contemplating a personal history in the eye of God and discerning God’s will through some essential period of life.

• Colloquy with Jesus Christ: Finishing sharing with Eucharist benediction

When two rounds of sharing the first-year novices' autobiographies, they celebrate the Eucharistic benediction. They gather around the monstrance in order to make their own colloquy with Jesus Christ. During fifteen minutes of intimate conversation with God, they continue to offer themselves and each novice to God and ask God to receive all into the family of the Trinity. Thus, this practice not only helps the novices experience friendship in the Lord, but it also deepens intimate knowledge of Jesus Christ in order to love and follow Him more closely (SE 104).
2. *Conocer*: Leading a life of gratitude through self-examination (*SE 43*)

2.1. Foundation, purpose, principle of gratitude

Living a grateful life through self-examination deepens our deep desire to return to the greater reality, the transcendent God, the ultimate giver of our human life. It also manifests our finiteness and a “deep feeling of absolute dependence.” This practice arouses *conocer*, self-awareness, and felt-knowledge of the living God in novices’ life. Thus, the practice of living a grateful life is essential for novices in the context of Vietnam, where they are influenced by a "culture of no-care," materialism, and defensive individualism. Indeed, living a spirituality of gratitude is grounded in Christian and Ignatian tradition.

Living a grateful life is central to the Christian life, which expresses a way of life of the children of God. Such gratitude is rooted in and built on Jesus Christ. The whole life of Jesus is a life of gratitude to the Father. Gratitude is found not only in his teachings, but also in his deeds. Jesus’s gratitude is manifested during the last supper: “Jesus took a cup, gave thanks to Father” (Mt 26:27). He then offered his life on the cross, showing ultimate gratitude to the Father. Jesus Christ is the living Eucharist, the “divine thanksgiving,” which forms our identity and mission as his followers. From this source of gratitude rooted in Jesus, St Paul reminds us, “In all circumstances give thanks, for this is the will of God for you in Christ Jesus” (1Thes 5:18). The Common Preface IV says, “For, although you have no need of our praise, yet our thanksgiving is itself your gift, profits us for salvation, through Christ our Lord.” Thus, to realize who we are in God

and receive intimate knowledge of God, we need to celebrate our life with Jesus Christ as the ultimate gratitude to the Father. Our life becomes a Eucharist of the risen Christ to the Father.

Ignatian spirituality leads us to a deep level of gratitude. In fact, it is considered as “the center of the Exercises” operating from the beginning to the end. As the entrance door of the Spiritual Exercises, the Principle and Foundation stirs up the spirit of gratitude as the gifts of creation and life are given (SE 23). At the end, the Contemplation to Attain Love as the culmination of the Exercises repeatedly inspires our gratitude for all of God's gifts of creative redemption. It also draws us to engage God’s loving, transformative presence in all realities (SE 230-237). The preparatory prayer of each Exercise reminds us of the abundant grace we receive from God as our ultimate creator and savior (SE 46). The first week brings sinners to gratitude for God’s saving and merciful love when they look at Jesus on the cross (SE 53). The second week raises gratitude for the unconditional love of the Trinity (SE 102), the self-emptying incarnation, and the good news from Jesus. The third week deepens gratitude for Jesus' love in surrendering his passion to God for our salvation. Finally, the fourth week promotes gratitude for the ongoing presence of the risen Christ as an intimate accompaniment in our daily life.25

This dynamic of gratitude in the form of Jesus’ surrender to the Father and in the pattern of Ignatian tradition lead us into deeper self-awareness and the felt-knowledge of

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God in our life. Such gratitude re-orient novices to different wonderings in the long journey of self-discovery of their vocation. Deep gratitude awakens their desires, their orientation, and their quest for meaning in their choices in daily life. These experiences of wonder from their heart and from social life can arrest their discerning attention and open their inner eyes to their life as a door to the sacred.26 Thus, the more they live a grateful life, the more they wonder, and vice versa. This spirituality invites novices to practice gratitude in all details of life. In this practice, they express gratitude through their daily self-examination, which is a method to interiorize the spirituality of gratitude.

2.2. Actual exercises

Some suggestions: Novices ponder some following questions before entering into the actual exercise of self-examination.

- What are some of God’s images that are operating in your life at the moment? A strict judge or a merciful father…?
- What are something you are grateful to God in your life thus far?
- What are some of the ways in which you express gratitude?

The image of God that novices have in their heart and minds is very important. Their image of God orients their life of faith, morality, community, and relationship with nature. Thus, the first-year novices, living the third month in Novitiate, not yet making the thirty-day retreat, practice this self-examination of gratitude to God. After the Principle and Foundation (SE 23), the Examen (SE 43) is the gateway into the entire Exercises.27

Preparation:

In practicing the self-examination of gratitude, the first-year novices combine the biblical setting of human creation and also a diagram of the chemical composition of the human body. For the biblical setting, novices read and contemplate that the merciful God has created me yesterday, today, and tomorrow.

“13 You formed my inmost being; you knit me in my mother’s womb. 14 I praise you, so wonderfully you made me; wonderful are your works! My very self you knew; 15 my bones were not hidden from you, When I was being made in secret, fashioned as in the depths of the earth. 16 Your eyes foresaw my actions; in your book, all are written down; my days were shaped, before one came to be” (Ps 139:13-16).

Then novices also use the pictures below as a real catalyst to deepen gratitude to God.

- Chemical Composition of the Human Body:

In combination with the setting of Psalm 139:13-16, we look into the chemical composition of our human body. We see that the human being is made of non-human elements, such as mineral and chemical elements in various percentages. Looking at this diagram of a human being harmonizes a person with the whole universe. Zen master Thích Nhất Hạnh notes that our human ancestors are present in us now as the current of life, and all cosmic or natural elements participate in our wondrous existence here and

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now. Our ancestors and all mineral or chemical elements do not belong only to the past, but they are present with us and become one with us. Without them, we cannot see the way we see, and we cannot think the way we think. In God, we live, move, and have our being (Acts 17:28). When we contemplate this wondrous image, our ancestors and all cosmic elements participate in our self-examination. Thus, when we express our gratitude to God, all good things join us in this act of faith.

Novices then have the option to choose a place of prayer and practice for one hour. Time of this practice: 8:00 – 9:15 am for personal prayer. 9:15 – 9:30 am is break time, and 9:30 – 10:30 is for communal sharing.

Actual exercise:
- 8:00 - 9:00 am: Individual self-examination
  - First - Setting a sacred space of gratitude (SE 23, 46, 232)
    Novices can create a “sacred space” (SE 47) for the encounter with God, where grace can be sought and given. They choose their relationship with God, for example, father-child, Lord-servant, creator-creature, or friend-friend.
  - Second – Asking grace
    May God give me more interior knowledge of Him in all details of my life and guide me to live a grateful life like Jesus in order to love and serve God in all things (SE 104 and 233).
  - Third – Reviewing
    Review with gratitude the novices’ daily creation, redemption, and other gifts particular to themselves (SE 234). Reviewing them through thoughts, words, deeds, desires, consolations, desolations (SE 235-237).
    - What am I grateful for?

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For example, for me, I thank God for my heart, still beating and pumping blood to nourish my body. Thanks be to God, I can move, see, smell, and feel. Beside these good things, I thank God for troubles, vulnerability, brokenness, deficiency that help me to return to Him.

- In what ways have I failed to be grateful?

  For example, for me, I am ungrateful for the fresh air and water that I receive every day. I forget to express my deep gratitude to God about all gifts, such as my reason, mind, soul, which I think belong to me. I am also very selfish about some gifts that God gives me, such as good health, and various skills, etc. .

- Fourth – Expressing confirmation and sorrow

  May God continue to strengthen me to live out deep gratitude to Him in my daily commitment. By the way, I am sorry for all for which I am not grateful.

- Fifth – Amendment: Colloquy means making an intimate conversion with God

  For example, dear Father, may you give me more insight and courage in order to implement the deep gratitude to you in all the details of my life. Especially, please help me to be sensitive to the voice of the Holy Spirit in particular discerned choices. Similarly, you know my weakness and limitations, may You awaken my heart and give insight to my mind in order to live a grateful life according to your will.

  Finally, novices finish this self-examination with Lord’s prayer.

  - 9:00 – 9:15 am: Reviewing the whole prayer and taking personal notes.

    After reviewing the recent self-examination, the novices take some notes about the movements during prayer. Then, the novices can jot down some points about “what I am grateful for and what I am not grateful for.” This practice can also be done at noontime and before going to bed. It can also be used for the weekend self-examination and the monthly retreat.

  - 9:15 – 9:30 am: Break

    - 9:30 – 10:30 am: Each novice has five minutes in communal sharing

      ✓ Which are some of the movements that have moved you closer to God?  
      ✓ Where do you think God is leading you?  
      ✓ Where are the sources of your distraction? How have you confronted them?
The more we belong to the ultimate reality, the more we become a living image of that reality. We remember the image of domestic geese startled by a flock of wild geese flying overhead. Suddenly, the domestic geese realize their wild origin and desire to fly freely. In order to fly like wild ones, the domestic geese need to practice how to fly because they have the potential of flying. Similarly, we are created for an infinite reality, for a loving God (Col 1:16). Our life is a convergence of elements from the biosphere, human sphere, and divine sphere. All that we are and have come from God (SE 234). As John the Baptist said, “No one can receive anything except what has been given him from heaven” (Jn 3:27). Thus, our life can become meaningful and valuable when we lead a life of gratitude to God, our ancestors, other people, and the natural world. With discerned generosity in wholehearted commitments, we embody thanksgiving to God and can channel life, love, and hope to others.

3. **Hacer: Presence with the poor as companions sent by Jesus**

3.1. **Foundation, purpose, principle - Accompanying on their mission**

Continuing the dynamic of sentir and conocer, novices are moved to action, hacer. “Inner knowledge cannot be an end in itself, but a means” 31 that motivates them to actualize their daily commitments. After doing the thirty-day *Spiritual Exercises*, the novices commit themselves in apostolates on Sunday mornings. Apostolates with the poor engage their conversion in a new way, especially outside the context of Novitiate in order to discover God’s presence in and through suffering people. Such apostolates are grounded in the pedagogy of Jesus training His disciples and in the Ignatian tradition.

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Through the outside apostolates, novices can deepen their self-identity and fulfill their vocation in life. These experiences strengthen their deeper conversion.

First, the apostolates of novices on morning Sunday derive from the paradigm of pedagogy in the formation of disciples. After the disciples witnessed Jesus’s wondrous deeds and teachings, Jesus sent them to train and to test their maturity in love for Jesus and for the poor. Jesus said, “go rather to the lost sheep of the house of Israel” (Mt 10:6). For the first experiment, disciples were sent out to the lost sheep, not to the gentile people. It is the first step in training disciples, who slowly experienced the cost of following Jesus. Jesus also warned them that they would meet dangers and challenges: “like sheep in the midst of wolves, so be shrewd as a serpent and simple as doves (MT 10:16). In encountering temptations or difficulties, disciples need to raise their eyes and hearts to God, to observe from a distance, to employ the wisdom of serpents to adapt themselves in the context.32 They also need to trust in God with humble and simple hearts like doves. For the second experiment, Jesus sent His disciples to the whole world. This is the second step of training. After the disciples witnessed the passion and resurrection of the risen Christ, Jesus said, “Go into the whole world and proclaim the gospel to every creature” (Mk 16:15). This is a progressive transformation from discipleship to apostleship. In apostleship, they went forth and preached everywhere because the risen Christ worked with them (Mk 16:20), just as Emmanuel, God was always with them (Mt 28:20). The disciples underwent a journey of conversion in their encounter with the risen

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Christ, learning to see Him in the hungry, thirsty, stranger, naked, and slave (Mt 25: 35-36). The disciples were trained to embody Christ for people.

Second, the apostolates outside the Novitiate are grounded in the conversion to the mission of Christ as the center of Ignatius’ incarnational spirituality. This spirituality embraces and draws the whole person to the concrete reality of the world where the Word incarnate is present.\(^{33}\) While at Alcala in 1526, Ignatius engaged in giving the spiritual exercises and teaching Christian doctrine (\textit{Auto 57}). In Venice in 1537, Ignatius and the first companions devoted themselves to serve the sick in hospitals and hospices (\textit{Auto 93}). In Rome in 1538, they engaged some pious works such as “the Catechumens, Saint Martha, the Orphans” (\textit{Auto 98}). Such an incarnate spirituality leads the novices to experience and integrate ongoing conversion. Thus, in the Jesuit \textit{Constitutions (Cons)}, Ignatius requires novices to undergo some experiments outside Novitiate such as service in a hospital (\textit{Cons 66}), the pilgrimage (\textit{Cons 67}), and teaching catechism to children and illiterate people (\textit{Cons 69}). However, under the communist government in Vietnam, novices cannot make their pilgrimages. Instead, they can visit the poor in some social centers and slums.

Third, the outside apostolates are to test, explore, and examine novices’ motivation of for their vocation, as well as to train and re-orient to follow deeper values.\(^{34}\) Visiting the poor continues to "filter" their vocational motivation and help them deepen what they discover in their self-identity or the new inclination of their call. Such a

\(^{33}\) Kolvenbach, SJ, \textit{The Road from La Storta}, 142.

\(^{34}\) Antonio M. de Aldama, SJ, \textit{An Introductory Commentary on the Constitutions}, trans. Aloysius J. Owen, SJ (St. Louis, MO: St. Louis University, 1989), 49-51.
presence with the poor in hospitals or in slums also tests their potential or initiative in confronting unfamiliar human conditions. Furthermore, staying, working, and talking with the poor bring novices to a deeper personal love of Christ and the wondrous discovery of God present and working in all things. They can feel and touch a loving God or also undergo certain crises in their faith when they cope with the suffering and misery of humanity. These apostolates help them to encounter social injustice and the need for charity in current society. Similarly, when approaching the poor in their actual contexts, novices verify their understanding of the Church with and for the poor. These encounters also inspire novices’ new missions or invite them to re-discern their vocation in life. These apostolates help novices re-discover their true self with its shadows and lights. They can experience their powerlessness in what they or others suffer. Such experiments aim to enlighten novices’ self-knowledge and reinforce their re-orientation towards God-centeredness. These apostolates push them to search for deeper meaning and greater value of human existence in Jesus Christ.

In short, apostolates with the poor are transformative encounters between the novices and God. God searches for the novices both in their own context and in others’ circumstances. He draws them to their authentic selves through their yearnings for God in and through their humble service. Novices are drawn to such apostolates in order to search for the ultimate meaning of their life in Christ. These encounters require self-renunciation (Cons 66) and invite them to be dead to worldly values and self-love in

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order to live a Christocentric life \((Cons\ 61)\). Thus, “they can embrace, accept, and desire whatever Christ has loved and embraced” \((Cons\ 101)\).

### 3.2. Actual exercises - discerning ministries and accompanying

After undergoing their thirty-day retreat, novices living in Hồ Chí Minh city engage in apostolates on Sunday mornings. Novices spend half a day in their apostolates. This helps them re-orient their vocation, discover God’s will in their life, deepen their conversion, and even relax. The novices learn that they engage in apostolates in the pattern of the disciples under the demand of Jesus. They are conscious of being disciples sent to serve the poor and to listen to God's will. Because of this discipleship, they always go in pairs or three persons in order to help one another. As noted above, they spend a half-day on apostolates, and every two months they change their apostolate and their partners. Novices can go to the following places to have contact with people of ancestral, Buddhist, and Christian faiths. They also experience various human plights from babies to old persons.

- **Preparation**: possible apostolates
  
  - Trung Tâm Bảo Trợ Trẻ Tân Tật Mộ Côi Thị Nghè (The Orphanage for Disabled Children Supporting Center of Thị Nghè):\(^{36}\) 153 Xô Viết Nghệ Tĩnh, ward 17, Binh Thạnh District, Hồ Chí Minh city, Vietnam.

There are disabled children aged 18 and below living in the Orphanage for Disabled Children Supporting Center of Thị Nghè. The majority of children are in states of cerebral palsy and mental retardation. Novices come here to support the staff of the

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center, such as feeding, playing, or walking with children, cleaning, or mopping rooms. They can also help staff with cooking.

- Bệnh viện Tâm Thần Thủ Đức (Thủ Đức Mental Disordered Hospital): \(^{37}\) 37 Phú Châu, Tam Phú ward, Thủ Đức district, Hồ Chí Minh city, Vietnam.

  Novices come here to help patients with trimming their hair and nails. Novices help clean the beds and the floors. Besides, they can have conversations with patients who are not seriously ill.

- Mai Hội HIV Center: \(^{38}\) Lộc 6, An Nhơn Tây Village, Củ Chi district, Hồ Chí Minh city

  Mai Hội Center is managed by the Daughters of Charity of St Vincent de Paul. They cooperate with other voluntary organizations, benefactors, doctors, and specialists in various fields to help patients in the last stages of HIV to find meaning and value in life. Novices come here to work with sisters of Vincent de Paul in teaching catechism, cleaning the house, taking care of patients, and sharing with patients about their catholic faith and about their life story.

- Trung Tâm Dưỡng Lão Chùa Điều Phá (Orphanage for Elder’s Caring Center of Điều Phá Pagoda): \(^{39}\) 188 Nơ Trang Long, ward 13, Bình Thạnh district, Hồ Chí Minh city, Vietnam.

  This Orphanage for Elder’s Caring Center is run by the Buddhist monks of Điều Phá Pagoda, with around 40 women aged 65 to over 80. The majority of the women belong to the ancestral religion and Buddhism. They come from various situations of

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\(^{37}\) VietPho TV, “Thủ Đức Mental Disordered Hospital,” (Video of Interview), posted February 7, 2017, accessed March 26, 2020, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=asICoXpcDhE.


\(^{39}\) A general view on the Orphanage Elder Caring Center of Điều Phá Pagoda, accessed March 26, 2020, https://hieuvetraitim.com/donggop/vien-duong-lao-chua-dieu-phap.221/
suffering; some of them have no relatives, some are abandoned, and some never want to live with their children. Novices come here to experience the human journey, the deep desire of old persons, to find a meaningful life. Novices can make friends with these women, listening to their life stories. They also clean their rooms and cut hair and nails.

- Trung Tâm Báo Trợ Khám Th犁 Nhật Hśnie (Nhật Hśnie Blind Children’s Supporting Center): 40 1 Street 7, Tam Bình ward, Thủ Đức district, Hồ Chí Minh city, Vietnam.

Nhật Hśnie Center is managed by the Lovers of the Holy Cross of Thủ Đức. The sisters take care of blind children, help them to develop their potential to adapt to their future social life. Novices come here to collaborate with the sisters in teaching catechism, music, and some subjects from primary to high school classes. The novices also help the sisters prepare meals for the children.

- Discerning ministries

Each first-year novice spends one week reflecting on five apostolates mentioned above and discerning the attractiveness and challenges from each apostolate. Each prayer lasts 30 minutes after dinner. Then he discerns his inner motivation, desire, and purpose that he is drawn to one of the above apostolates. Their prayers are based on the following questions:

- Grounded on the desires stemmed from your life history, what would be something that draw to each of the apostolate? What would inhibit your desires to join?
- What are some of the most immediate reaction upon hearing about each of these apostolate? joyful, sad, anxious, or fearful?
- Which points attract and repulse you to commit yourself in that apostolate?
- Where do you feel that God is drawing me or challenging me?

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After reflecting on five above apostolates and discerning their inner movements, every first-year novice meets the novice master in order to discern which apostolate is appropriate to the person of each novice and his process of ongoing conversion. In other words, novices share their stories and learn from their stories. Now, based on their experience and their knowledge, they discern from these options, what would fit best for them.

- **Accompanying ministries**

  The first-year novice goes with the second year one in order to have a mutual help. The second-year novice helps the first-year novice to adapt himself to a new context and to discover God's will. On the other hand, the first-year novice renews the apostolic fire and desire of ongoing conversion in the person of the second year novice. They follow the exercise below.

  - **Actual exercise of apostolates on Sunday mornings:**

    - 7:00 – 7:15 am: Prayer before going to the apostolates
      
      May God accompany us in our apostolate today and enlighten our hearts and minds to realize God’s loving presence in the poor we meet today.

    - 7:15 am: Departure to the apostolates
      
      Novices go together in pairs or three to the assigned apostolates

    - 8:00 – 10:00 am: Present at the apostolates
      
      Novices are conscious of being sent by Christ and reflect on what St. Peter advises:

      “As each one has received a gift, use it to serve one another as good stewards of God's varied grace, and whoever serves, let it be with the strength that God supplies, so that in all things God may be glorified through Jesus Christ” (1 Pet 4:10 -11).
- Enthusiastic about teaching catechism, other subjects, or helping staff with cooking
- Joyful to play with patients or children
- Generous to clean the floors and beds
- Attentive to listen to patients’ sharing
- Subtle and wise to have contact with children and another gender.
- Mindful to observe activities at apostolic places

- 10:00 – 10:15 am: Reviewing and self-examination of the whole morning at the apostolates
  - How did you realize the presence of God in and through works or persons of this apostolate?
  - What does God want you to do in community?
  - What are the insights for the orientation of your vocation?

- 10:15 am: Giving thanks to God and returning to Novitiate

These apostolates motivate novices to actualize their intimacy with Jesus and to encourage them to re-orient their vocation in life. Such experiences make novices appreciate what they have and receive, and then generously offer themselves to God and others. Indeed, engaging in apostolates in various places kindles their ongoing conversion from self-centeredness to a God-centered life. In order to deepen their conversion, every two months, novices are assigned to a new apostolate with a new partner.

**Conclusion: Remarks on Formative Aspects in Conversion**

In the process of ongoing conversion, novices and the formators should be aware of some following remarks. First, we must keep in mind that God remains the ultimate formator for these novices. Having said that, God works directly in novices (SE 15) but mediates the divine grace through human agents. Formators serve as the instruments of God in empowering novices towards fulfillment of their vocation. Fulfilling the mission of such a divine instrument requires formators to acquire the necessary perspectives.

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They should have deep self-knowledge and harmonious integrity with their deep desires, limitations, shortcomings, and potential. Formators should have acquired a level of self-knowledge, knowledge of the Spiritual Exercises, most specifically, experience and interior knowledge of inner movements of the spirit. This expected requirement is viewed as an important part to integrate novices' personal values and vocation. Naturally, novices hope to live with formators who are empathetic, patient, open, collaborative, available, trustful, moderate, consistent, and firm in their consecrated values. Similarly, to help novices to be responsible for their conversion requires formators to be spiritual persons, men of God for others. In fact, formators ought to first interiorize and integrate the charism and Jesuit way of proceeding of their orders in order to transmit and facilitate these gifts to novices. Namely, formators are persons of prayer who are sensitive to the dynamics of good and bad spirits. They embody the love of Christ. As such, formators can empower novices in orienting their motivation and fulfilling their vocation.

Second, aspects as knowledge of human nature, social behavior and relationship serve as necessary tools for novices' formation and orientation to their vocation. At times in the past, formators have spiritualize all aspects of formation. Some formators so overemphasized the spiritual aspect that they neglected the human, unconscious or deep-seated issues of the novices. In fact, the recent forums of religious formation has formally recognized the important role of psychological formation in the Novitiate. In other

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43 Kolvenbach, SJ, The Formation of Jesuits, 4-10.

words, novices need to confront their inner issues and benefit from help from spiritual
directors, novice masters, and those who are well-versed in psychology. “If serious
psychological problems emerge, a member should be advised to visit a counselor,
psychologist, or psychiatrist.”45 Perhaps, it sounds normal to those outside of Vietnam.
For Vietnamese religious, such a recognition marks a monumental shift in the formation
of a whole person. Such holistic formation requires formators to balance psychological
and spiritual aspects. Both dimensions enlighten and complement one another in the
ongoing conversion of novices. Consequently, formation begins where the novices are,
then subsequently helping them to open inner space to a deeper encounter with God on
their way to conversion. This contributes to novices’ conversion and openness to new
experiences in the discernment of spirits.

Finally, formators should pay attention to both unconscious and conscious aspect
of the novices’ life. 46 Conscious commitments need to become valued habits to penetrate
the whole person, and then transform the unconscious in the process of authentic self-re-
creation. This is a “downward” conversion moving from consciousness into the
unconscious. On the other hand, novices can also befriend unconscious movements to
become conscious self-detachments.47 They draw unconscious impulses into their
conscious actions. This is an “upward” conversion. In up-and-downward converging in
love with God, there exists a tension between the actual and ideal self towards the

45 Complementary Norms, Part VI, No. 148, 20; GC 31, d. 16, no. 9, b; GC 34, d. 8, nos. 36-44.
47 Dan Montgomery, God and your Personality (Boston, MA: Pauline Books & Media, 1995),
119-134.
authentic self of Christ-identity.\textsuperscript{48} This is an ongoing tension between a defensive and self-transcendent consistency in conversion towards greater values, towards a Christ-centric life.

In short, formators can serve as catalysts to help novices achieve inner freedom in order to respond to God's call. Besides, novices' ongoing conversion needs to be supported by their communal life. Their commitment to the community is the measure of their integral-self orienting towards God-centeredness. Community is the mission that novices live their identity. Novices' conversion cannot separate their identity conformed to Christ with their apostolic mission and community.\textsuperscript{49}


\textsuperscript{49} Jesuit General Congregation (GC) 35, Decree 2, no. 19.
CONCLUSION

Arriving in Vietnam in 1615, Jesuit missionaries laid the “solid foundations for the inculturation of Christianity in Vietnam.”¹ They opened dialogues with local religions and cultures. On May 24, 1957, the Jesuits returned to Vietnam continuing the works of their predecessors adapting Ignatian spirituality to the Church in Vietnam, exemplified in the establishment of St. Pius X Pontifical University in Đà Lạt.² The Jesuits have sought to integrate the Gospel into the mindset and Vietnamese way of life. They have tried to present “Jesus Christ with the Vietnamese face instead of a God in Western culture.”³ Such an effort continues until today. Unfortunately, currently, there are only a few lay Catholics who are knowledgeable about Ignatian spirituality and its way of proceeding. Therefore, to present the dynamics of conversion of St. Ignatius of Loyola to Vietnamese Catholics as a way to strengthen the Christian identity in Vietnam remains a challenge for all Jesuits. This requires all people to live out their conversion as the work of God operating in the human effort to search for ultimate meaning in life. Moreover, understanding conversion as authentic self-transformation can support interreligious dialogue between Christians and other religious traditions in Vietnam.

For St. Ignatius, self-examination, self-surrender, and self-re-creation aim at conversion to the mission of Christ. As such, conversion is understood as the work of God operating within the human search for ultimate meaning in life. Thus, understanding the meaning of conversion as a reorientation of oneself towards God and others can

² Chính Quang Đỗ, SJ, Dòng Tên Trong Xã Hội Đại Việt 1615-1773 (Religion Publication, 2008), 449.
³ Chính Quang Đỗ, SJ, 450.
empower Jesuit novices toward the fulfillment of his vocation. It also motivates people to live out greater values and support the common good, so to transform the society.

Like Ignatius, Jesuit novices are led through various stages of conversion during their formation. Upon entering the novitiate, the novice is encouraged to “die to the old self,” so to sacrifice himself to Christ, the eternal King: “…to imitate you in bearing all injuries and affronts” (SE 98) and become “…a useless fool for Christ” (SE 167). Subsequently, like "novice Inigo" in Manresa spent “seven hours of prayer” daily (Auto 23. 26) in denying himself to adopt the “imitation of Christ,” Jesuit novices are led to deep meditative and contemplative prayers. These early practices prepare the novices for entering into the Thirty-day Spiritual Exercises. In making the exercises, the novices withdraw themselves further "from all earthly concerns and live in solitude to achieve more progress" (SE 20). Empowered by the divine grace, such a time of seclusion or “desert like” enable the novices to re-orient his disordered self towards God for the mission of Christ. After having completed the long exercises, like Ignatius who referred to himself as “pilgrim” on the journey to find God’s will (Auto 15. 38, the novices are sent out to do various ministries so to continue their conversion in the world. As such, the dynamics of conversion in Ignatian spirituality are rooted in and built upon one’s relationship with Jesus Christ, who continues to call the novices into his disciples so to be sent out to the world.

Second, this thesis views the understanding of conversion as the work of God operating in the human effort to search for the ultimate meaning of life. Understanding

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the meaning of conversion as a new way to reorient oneself towards God and others can empower the Jesuit novice toward the fulfillment of his vocation. This involves the full participation of the whole person in this reorientation to Christocentric values. This awakens the desire to return to God and molds authentic relationships for a transformed community. Conversion involves self-knowledge and engagement in daily commitments. This understanding of conversion penetrates into all aspects of the restless self.

Intellectual conversion orients oneself to higher truth and liberates one from subjective knowledge centering on one’s disordered self as criteria for knowledge. Christian moral conversion draws one to higher goodness and toward authentic Christian values in Jesus Christ. Spiritual conversion comes from encountering God and motivates one to fall in love with God. It frees one to love God with one’s total being and impels one to love others with the love of Jesus Christ. Such an understanding of holistic conversion becomes a new way to re-orient oneself towards God and others. Simultaneously, such self-re-orientations lead novices to authentic inner freedom to respond to God’s will while contributing to a transformed community. This rational-spiritual understanding of conversion empowers novices to fulfill their vocation and liberates them to choose their vocation in life.

Exploring the dynamics of conversion in this thesis is not intended to motivate people to apostatize their own religious traditions in order to enter the Catholic Church. Rather, understanding conversion is a way to awaken the inner quest for greater values, the common good, universal truth, and ultimate beauty in human life. In coping with the

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crises of life, people can progressively realize the traces of hope hidden behind the shadows. Even if a person could deny their self-identity to blend in socially, they cannot escape from their restless quest for meaning and value. When they confront this restlessness, they might first deny the existence of this restless inner fire, then run from it, and later they might fight against it. In the end, however, their restlessness could be at rest in re-orienting themselves towards a higher reality and taking responsibility for the common good. In this quest of awakening, people undergo a journey through self-awareness, self-understanding, self-acceptance, then self-change, and finally making a free decision. Darkness is not the last word, and crises always open to opportunities. From deep within their hearts, people sooner or later can realize this transforming quest for a higher reality and respond to this awakening faith in their own circumstances. Authentic conversion draws people into harmony with themselves, resulting in inner peace. Conversion also invites people to surrender to a transcendent reality through communion with others in building up a transformed society.

In conclusion, understanding conversion as authentic self-transformation can support interreligious dialogue between Christians and other religious traditions in Vietnam. Authentic conversion leads a person to realize the forgiving and compassionate presence of transcendent Reality. This experience can widen one’s horizon to make commitments in solidarity with members of other religious traditions. Conversely, respectful interreligious dialogue challenges one’s own conversion. As children of one common Mother, religious traditions, such as Buddhism, Confucianism, Taoism, Caodaism, Ancestral worship, and Christianity all of which are commonly found in

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Vietnam, can live together and share their responsibility in caring for the common home. Even as these traditions have different understandings of conversion, they share the same end of service to the common good and a better life. Their similar commitments to the common good motivate everyone to seek a transformation of society. This understanding of conversion strengthens each person according to his or her tradition to embrace a multilateral perspective of authentic conversion. Such an understanding of conversion also opens to the various levels of reconciliation with transcendent Reality, with oneself as intrapersonal transformation, with people of other cultures as social transformation, and with nature as ecological reconciliation. Thus, for Christians and especially for Jesuit novices, understanding conversion is celebrating and actualizing conversion to God in daily life and always choosing Jesus Christ as the principle and foundation of personal transformation.

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Chapter 2: **A Brief Survey of Conversion in Christian Spirituality**

**Conversion permeating the whole person**


**The nature and dynamics of spiritual conversion**


**Conversion in Biblical perspective**


Conversion in martyrdom, monasticism, pilgrimage, crusade, mendicant


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