

Fall 2019

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Recommended Citation

Meki, D. (2019). Discernment: Ignatius of Loyola and Libermann – Two Models? Toward a Methodology of Discernment. *Spiritan Horizons*, 14 (14). Retrieved from <https://dsc.duq.edu/spiritan-horizons/vol14/iss14/15>

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DISCERNMENT: IGNATIAN AND LIBERMANNIAN - TWO MODELS? TOWARD A METHODOLOGY OF DISCERNMENT

Introduction

To discern is to find in every day's events or in exceptional circumstances a path to freedom that guides our history in the world. Ignatius of Loyola and Francis Libermann are two renowned masters in the field of discernment. From the first, the Ignatian tradition has inherited the *Spiritual Exercises*, a reference for discernment. The second has not left a systematic treatise on discernment. However, he wrote a series of comments and letters that suggest an aptitude for the conduct of souls of which he was aware. He wrote to Jerome Schwindenhammer: "I believe that it pleased God to give me a special grace for the truth of salvation and the guidance of certain souls It is a grace that is purely for others and from which I derive nothing for myself."¹

If the purpose of discernment is to lead to a choice of life as the unfolding of what is still germinating in the individual, then it must lead to discovering the expectations and the appeals addressed to that individual. It will help mobilize resources and energies towards the fulfilment of a life in accordance with the individual's very self; one becomes reasonable and productive under the influence of the Holy Spirit. It is thus a matter of finding the inspiration that nurtures a choice.

Discernment presupposes three conditions: right intention, an experienced guide, and the time and means to discern. These three elements occur in both Ignatian and Libermannian ways of discerning. However, some quite detectable variations indicate two distinct approaches to one's relation to the divine, justified by anthropological and religious backgrounds of diverse provenance. This tints the two ways of discernment in a particular way to the point of rendering them non-reducible one to the other, revealing an "Ignatian tradition" and a "Libermannian tradition" in discernment and spiritual direction.

I carry out an interrogative and critical investigation on the ways and means these two masters propose for spiritual discernment, with a special focus on their anthropological and theological backgrounds, highlighting their convergences and divergences. An assessment of the fruitfulness of Libermann's way of discernment will justify

interest in cultivating and deepening its originality.

1. IGNATIAN DISCERNMENT²

Our purpose is not an exhaustive description of an already known process, validated by a great tradition of spiritual direction, but to give its main lines, emphasizing the relevant themes for our discussion. Ignatius of Loyola³ (1491-1556) through the rules of discernment of spirits⁴ exposed in his *Spiritual Exercises*,⁵ opened in the sixteenth century the way to procedures of spiritual growth and well-being in the unconditional search for the will of God by a free and responsible person. As Quenum, Jesuit Novice Director in Cameroon, writes: “Spiritual growth consists in St. Ignatius of Loyola in a personalized itinerary towards God where the concern to decide the best for oneself is marked by the thoughtful and prayerful dynamics of the spiritual exercises.”⁶ The dynamics of the *Exercises* therefore make us walk in faith towards a free decision inspired by love of God, praise, reverential fear, and service of God.⁷ The purpose of the one who engages in the *Exercises* is to become free in order to choose, which supposes a path to inner freedom guaranteeing joy and peace at the end of the decision.

This path has four stages over four weeks. The beginning is the time of “Principle and Basis.” This time places the relationship to God within the created world, within a received narrative where the whole creation is made to gear man towards his aim which is to serve God (*Spir. Ex.* No. 23). It unfolds this way:

- Man is created to serve God;
- Things are created to serve man;
- So man can use things for God.

The underlying principle is that human freedom is realized only if one chooses the good

The underlying principle is that human freedom is realized only if one chooses the good. Because he can choose the good, then he must, since his purpose must be fulfilled. One has to use things for God if one wants to achieve one’s aim. In the same movement, human freedom is accomplished by consenting to God.

However, because he has free will, the person may not want to accomplish his purpose without knowing it clearly. The stages of discernment reveal the resistances of freedom and open the way for a personal response to Christ’s call to serve, according to who one is and what one has to live out

in the world.

- The first week is turned towards the recognition of being a forgiven sinner.
- The second calls to contemplate the life of Christ in order to follow him, answering his call; at the end of that week there is a time of election that allows for a choice of life with complete freedom and responsibility.
- The third week is a time of contemplation of the Passion; and
- the fourth week is a time of contemplation of the Resurrection.

The last two weeks are times of confirmation of the choice: the retreatant, having experienced the conditions of freedom and made the choice of doing God's will, must uproot everything that prevents this freedom to perform in order to be born to the joy of freedom according to Christ.

Some Elements in Detail

The guide. The guide is necessary as an assistant, to indicate the way of conducting the research and the dispositions needed to carry out the discernment in a fair, true, and complete manner for a free and responsible decision. Throughout the process, he delivers general information, leaves the candidate free of his choices without ever relieving him from his personal responsibility. He can only offer his support to allow the candidate to exercise his free initiative and refine his own discernment. His experience helps to point out the states and movements through which the retreatant is passing, to initiate him to the recognition of the Spirit at work, and to allow him, in a personal relationship, to discern the paths towards God.

Discernment. Discernment is a matter of wanting the will of God and consequently of desiring more deeply the will of God than the realization of one's aspirations. It implies a greater spiritual freedom because one prefers the will of God to personal aspirations. Steps 2 and 3 provide access to the lucidity and firmness of the will necessary to conduct this discernment with the help of grace. But one must have turned down beforehand the "hidden refusal," the one that makes it possible to accomplish the good without actually doing the will of God. To become indifferent is the way of being free to choose the will of God because personal will is not the Father's and the Son's and could be an injustice or even a refusal of what is right.

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To truly serve, one must become indifferent to all created things

Indifference. Indifference consists in the verification that the subject is not insensitive, that he has desires, because desire is the basis for any motion towards choosing. To truly serve, one must become indifferent to all created things. The candidate must then realize that God is present in the world under the mode of absence and want. Indifference to things springs from the subjective opening by which one becomes sensitive to what is not palpable: the presence of God in created things. This presence of God is experienced through the want that cannot be satisfied, felt through the difference between the vibrations of the senses and spiritual motions. In the discovery of things as given, man's desire and his aim, the desire of God, are experienced.

But this desire being intermingled with what drives our behavior and our choices, we often confuse our own will with the desire of God. To discover the desire of God thus presupposes passage through indifference as experience of being loved by God with the consciousness of not responding to this love, a discovery both peaceful and painful of a resistance to his call felt in the heart. Indifference makes it possible to recognize the world as the place of God's presence and of encounter with the Creator in order to serve him (*Spir. Ex.* No. 233).

Election. It is a choice of life, an expression of a liberated and purified desire to respond personally to the call of Christ to serve according to who one is and what one has to live in the world. The choice is confirmed and renewed daily or by particular reminders in order to bear fruit.

Examination. The Exercises invite, by way of examination, to follow the track of feelings experienced in respect of thoughts which are of three kinds:

- My own, born of my freedom and my will;
- Those that come from the evil spirit;
- Those that come from the good spirit (*Spir. Ex.* No. 32).

For Ignatius, one becomes master of oneself, one's thoughts, words and actions, by recognizing that he is led, and allowing himself to be led, by the Spirit of God

For Ignatius, one becomes master of oneself, one's thoughts, words and actions, by recognizing that he is led, and allowing himself to be led, by the Spirit of God. Self-control is preceded by self-sacrifice. Examination allows to recognize the presence of God and to move forward serenely. Concurrently, it is necessary to dispose oneself to encounter the other. With the help of the Holy Spirit, one can then turn with faith to the inner host to make himself present

to God's presence in him. This process requires a certain voluntarism to learn how to receive the self from the Creator in loving fidelity. Then the immediate experience of God becomes possible where he is "within reach of invocation ... when we do not seek to subject him but we rather surrender to him unconditionally."⁸

2. LIBERMANNIAN DISCERNMENT

Libermann left a practice and abundant correspondence on spiritual direction. I base myself on three articles written by Spiritans.⁹ For Libermann, vocation is God's work. It is not to be invented, but to be known. From this principle, we can draw the following conclusions.

- *One does not choose one's vocation.* We only decide to answer it or not. Our vocation is God's concern because it is he who has the initiative: "he has determined for all eternity the ministry to which he destines [us]."¹⁰ What we need to do is set ourselves in a state of discovering what is expected from us, in total availability, faithfulness to his will, in a peaceful and confident expectation of the manifestation of his hidden wishes. For that, we must have "the soul free, calm, recollected, humble, and peacefully abandoned to God."¹¹
- *It must be welcomed as a grace.* It is useless to make voluntary efforts, as if God were within reach of our human will. If our will is to intervene, it is to welcome and dispose ourselves to the action of God, because it is God who attracts, God who transforms, God who acts.¹²
- "These are not conjectures that must decide us either for or against ... It is not necessary that your reason constructs or dismantles your vocation. Vocation is to be known in the light of God ... It is neither for you to give yourself a vocation nor for you to decide it ... Your vocation ... is a matter that does not concern you but only God. Set yourself in a position to be all his own and he will command you at his pleasure ... he will manifest his will to you."¹³
- *It manifests itself as an inner attraction.* For Libermann, every vocation is attractive because attraction is an essential modality of grace's action in us. Every vocation is a call by God and the inner attraction of grace is the voice through which God speaks to souls. The Holy Spirit speaks to the Christian soul:

It is neither for you to give yourself a vocation nor for you to decide it ... Your vocation ... is a matter that does not concern you but only God

- “I believe that the Holy Spirit constantly breathes in the same way in the same soul, all its impressions are almost similar in it, its conduct on it is always uniform, and consequently ... vocation is declared in the same way in a soul as its other attractions, and therefore the same means must be used to know it and to discern it.”¹⁴
- So vocation is all about listening to God who speaks to the heart and to “Listen to God in your interior ... It is a general rule that the voice of God who calls us is within us ...”¹⁵
- *Which must be confirmed by an outside call.* Vocation implies the correspondence of an inner and an external call which is often the voice of the superiors and the events of Providence. If there are two calls, there is only one vocation, because the One who calls is unique and cannot contradict himself. For priestly vocation, the internal call is subject to the double control of the director and of the superior who accepts or refuses it, on behalf of the church. In the absence of this submission and this authentication, the internal attraction loses all value and can no longer be considered as a call from God. “It is the Spirit and the church, in a perfect harmony, who say to a soul: come”¹⁶
- To recognize God’s call, it is necessary to discern the attraction of the supernatural and to recognize it in one’s own history. A spiritual guide is needed to help this discernment: “For your vocation, it is necessary to consult your director ... he has the grace of state to decide these things ... The opinion of the director must be an infallible rule, which one always follows with the assurance to have done the will of God.”¹⁷

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However, one of the major principles for discernment and spiritual direction for Libermann is the refusal of a system and insistence on the personal character of each journey. Such a principle holds especially for the spiritual guide who should in no way substitute for the candidate in his search for the will of God. At most, he can clarify the situation, in the light of faith and of his experience, without ever wanting to bring anyone to his own mind. It is the meaning of Libermann’s remark to Mr. Feret: “I blame your principles on the direction of vocations ... I think I can say with certainty that this is not the true conduct of a good director.”¹⁸

On the contrary, “It is a great principle, in divine things, not to want to bring everyone to his opinion and his way of acting ... God has his views on everyone; he communicates and distributes his graces differently; and no matter how hard we try we can never succeed in changing others.”¹⁹ Refusal therefore of “spiritual imperialism” or “manifestation of the will of power”²⁰ for the spiritual guide in order to respect the will of God and the freedom of the soul. According to Blanchard, Libermann sees in John the Baptist the type of purity needed from the guide in the direction of souls of whom he must imitate the reserve and discretion.

The spiritual director is a guide, the outer word of God

The spiritual director is a guide, the outer word of God, who, according to circumstances, helps to discover and hear his inner voice. He must therefore beware of any personal influence. “A director must be careful not to drive a soul; it’s up to God to lead her.”²¹

- *To obey the will of God.* Once the will of God is manifested in one’s life, the call must no longer be questioned. One must be wary of attractions that tend to move him out of it: “We fulfil the will of God when we observe what we have promised in the presence of angels and saints ... Nothing is deceptive like attraction, especially when it does not fit with the life in which the Divine Providence has placed us. Woe to the soul, who attaches more importance to it than to the ordinary duties of life.”²²
- *Led by the Holy Spirit.* The remark to Mr. Feret on the determination of the choice of life is worth as much for the director as for the candidate: “I have noticed that you direct vocations by reasoning a great deal on things, comparing and examining with reason a lot of even foreign circumstances, which seems to me to be highly questionable; for it is certain that divine and interior things must not be subjected to the examination of our reason.”²³

This does not mean we must despise intelligence; it remains necessary to resort to it when one does not see clearly. However: “What is the means which the director must employ to know the general conduct of God in a soul, either for the whole of his state, or for the particular attractions, if not the light of God alone which he must receive in his soul in prayer and in continual union with Our Lord?”²⁴ This light of God received in prayer is the Holy Spirit who, far from annihilating our intelligence and our

will, comes to guide and adjust them to the plan of God over us. Libermann writes:

“Your soul is the ship, the heart is the sail, the Holy Spirit is the wind; he breathes in your will and the soul walks, and it walks towards the goal that God proposes; your spirit is the tiller which must prevent that in the force and vivacity of the movement given to your heart, you will not leave the direct line determined by the divine goodness.”²⁵

This presupposes from both the director and the candidate confidence and union with God

This presupposes from both the director and the candidate confidence and union with God. However, this presumption does not prevent critical thinking in order to test the spirit that speaks in us. Hence a number of criteria for discerning the grace at work: perseverance, peacefulness, patience, humility, strength, fidelity, and joy.

- *Right intention.* One must enter religion only by the pure desire of pleasing God. Libermann wrote in 1842 to a young subdeacon: “The disposition in which to go (to ordination) is to be ready to sacrifice yourself for the glory of our Lord and to do all that you can to make him live in souls.”²⁶

Then, personal aptitudes can be supplementary criteria to determine the existence and the authenticity of the interior call to the service of God.

3. CONVERGENCES AND DIVERGENCES

3.1. Spiritual Experience is a singular Experience

For Libermann, as much as for Ignatius, the starting point of the spiritual life is personal experience. The encounter of Jesus is a personal discovery, a reality everybody feels in his own way; it varies according to time and place. It witnesses of a reality that transcends our experience, in which we must enter, even though we can never completely get hold of it. It inspires a global style of existence and of attention to the others where everyone can project himself freely and find his own way. The response to the Gospel is the conversion of the whole being.

In the Gospels, Jesus of Nazareth expresses the essence of the religious attitude in its bare, frightening, and confusing nakedness. By his example and teaching, he proclaims that nothing makes sense except by the decisive conversion to love that turns the individual simultaneously towards

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others and towards the Other, in a total and irrevocable self-donation that expresses the same love in two different aspects. Indeed, what appears common to all spiritual experience is the perception of reality and of others as revealing God's presence. For van Kaam,²⁷ it is the experience of emptying oneself to welcome grace which tells me who I am in the encounter with others. Whereas everyone has his unique way of living that experience, it will always be a matter of knowing oneself by opening up to the divine.

Then, because it is human and always opened to the ultimate reality, spiritual experience invents the words to express and communicate itself. This is why it is always new and cannot be satisfied with the formulations of the past. It requires a critical effort to confront the experience, to enlighten it from within, through a language seeking to express the integral experience of the openness of man to the world, to others, and to the Other, in a shared setting, historically located. Because it takes such a personal tone, no one can speak for others. The history of our journeys with God can only be narrated by the one who underwent the experience.

3.2. Spiritual Experience always involves a Call

The opening of a new world of relationships through religious experience involves new calls and expectations. To hear these calls supposes a listening ear for those who are searching for existential meaning and effective truth. Libermann answered God's call because he learnt how to listen and hear the voices from the depths, addressed to all and to everyone, to open new paths of experience towards a creation awaiting new achievements. This could explain why, in the process of discernment, Libermann absolutely distinguishes all that comes from the Holy Spirit from what comes from man. The specific otherness of the One who is neither world nor man is set over against the self-consciousness of one's finitude. Therefore, the last words of Libermann, "*God is all, man is nothing,*" resound as the expression of his conviction that a healthy relationship is unthinkable except in the recognition of a differentiating otherness, excluding all confusion, all compromise, all equivocation.

Libermann absolutely distinguishes all that comes from the Holy Spirit from what comes from man

Concurrently, the consciousness of being incomplete reminds of the ontological limit of one's personal power: "We are a lot of poor people ..." ²⁸ However, authentic faith sets in motion an exceptional movement that exceeds

logical evidences and historical arguments. It is an impulse of intimate evidence, of visceral hope for a spiritual future, in a burst of love which gives meaning to everything else. Without such a faith, Libermann would never have undertaken the trip to Rome, as a simple acolyte, to present the project of a missionary congregation while he was not even assured of access to the priesthood. It is this hope that makes his faith authentic. It emerges from the vital experience of “a heart-sensitive God” and nourishes an awakened, restless, caring, and self-giving conscience, justifying one’s own life and endeavors. One could make the same analysis of Ignatius of Loyola’s experience in Manresa.²⁹

3.3. Answering the Call from the Perspective of our own Life

Le Déaut³⁰ invites Spiritans to revisit Libermann’s personal history to realize that his spirituality is rooted on a symbiosis of the Jewish religious tradition and the revelation of Christ. He indicates a number of factors to be considered.

- The trauma that once represented for a Jew his passage to the church. Such an experience might partly explain why Libermann insisted so much on renunciation, asceticism, sacrifice, and the austere virtues that were foreign to Jewish spirituality.
- A conversion is a culmination, but also the beginning of a search. It implies such a fundamental choice that all life is radicalized. Like Paul, Libermann forgot the past (Phil 3:13), giving himself totally to Christ who became his life (Gal 2:20). Converts are often absolute, demanding.
- Traditional Jewish life was impregnated with prayer and the feeling of God’s presence. For the Jew, there is no non-religious act.
- The Talmud itself, while forming the spirit to the rabbinical dialectic, provided a rich teaching on the relations between Israel and her God, on how to remain constantly “connected” with the divine will. Jacob was marked by typical traits of Jewish piety: sense of divine transcendence, the absolute dependence of man, humility and surrender to God. “*God is all; man is nothing*”: this doctrine was lived before being learnt later in Saint-Sulpice.

Heikje³¹ recalls that Libermann was raised in a climate of faith in which no minute, no place, escaped the service of God and that the meaning of God is permanent in the

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Jewish soul.³² For the Jew, God is present in history and the only attitude that suits man before God is dependence and availability.³³ Unreservedly, man is at the disposal of God and has to be attentive to the moment of God, a moment always involving a definite task. This must be considered when Libermann speaks of the “moment of God,” “practical union,” and “abandonment,” or when he writes: “We are made for the works of God; the works are not made for us”³⁴; or “As with every new business, my soul rises to God to ask for his assistance; it follows that the more I have business, the stronger my union with God.”³⁵

Because of this closeness, Heikje wonders whether Libermann was not a Christian Hasid³⁶ by his attachment to the pre-eminence of the inner life and the attachment to the theological virtues, which are faith (“faith alone”) and charity (“charity above all”), or even by the sentiment of nothingness of man before God that we already pointed out.³⁷ This points towards a Jewish inheritance which has influenced the religious anthropology of Libermann, justifying his shift from Western anthropology, rooted in the Greco-Roman philosophy and centred on the subject and his freedom.

For the modern western man, the point of departure can only be his own existence in its original autonomy and its constitutive opening to the globality of the world. This existence is marked by a fundamental and intrinsic duality: dialogal articulation of the subject and structures, reason and finitude, activity and passivity. Even though the Ignatian understanding of the subject is closer to Ricoeurian “broken cogito”³⁸ than the Cartesian “*cogito ergo sum*” in its triumphant self-determination, it sprouts from the Western source where the relationship of man to God differs fundamentally from the Jewish approach. Freedom and will do not play the same role in both perspectives. That seems an obvious point of divergence in Ignatius’ and Libermann’s approach to spiritual direction. Without finding a radical separation between the two orientations, one can say that in the Jesuit tradition insistence is set primarily on the work of the intelligence, while in the other the will is more in view.

As the analysis of Laplace³⁹ shows it, both Libermann and Ignatius are attentive to the historical modalities of the individual existence, but the areas they emphasize differ, because they are rooted in distinct anthropologies.

- Ignatius, in the strict Western tradition wants to purify intentions, but does not speak of the annihilation of

the natural being. He considers natural gifts and strives to fit them into the Christian training. He assumes human nature as a condition of progress. Discernment is gradual, because there is no perceptible difference between what comes from nature and from grace at the beginning of the process.

- Libermann considers human nature insofar as it is transformed by grace. We must hit the boundaries of its “misery” in order to receive it back, transformed by the power of God. This is how Libermann speaks about human nature: the “*miserable me*” (LS, I, 341, 448), “*the old man X*” (LS, I, 24-25), or “*the sensual man,*” in struggle with “*the inner man*” for the control of the human heart (LS, I, 363). This carnal man must be brought down. No doubt we have an enemy on the outside: the world, “an object of horror and abomination,” because “the spirit of the world is a spirit of pride, of falsehood, of vanity, of ostentation and malice” (LS, I, 157-158), with its honors, pleasures and riches (LS, III, 32). He too is unmasked and denounced. However, Libermann prefers to attack the inner enemy, the most dangerous. Urging seminarians to walk the path of perfect renunciation, he gives them these pieces of advice: “Practice this renunciation especially with regard to yourself and within your soul ... Get used to ... live in a continual abnegation of yourself Why do you always think of this wretched me? ... Leave yourselves, dear brothers, and surrender to our dear Lord.”⁴⁰

Libermann prefers to attack the inner enemy, the most dangerous. Urging seminarians to walk the path of perfect renunciation

But this renunciation is only one of the two faces of spiritual experience which must, to be complete, open to total union with God who becomes thus the mover of our life and apostolate, leading to what Libermann calls practical union.

Thus, the motions of Libermann and Ignatius are reverse as to self-renunciation

Thus, the motions of Libermann and Ignatius are reverse as to self-renunciation. For Ignatius, it is not a matter of renouncing contentment but of analyzing it by means of the discernment of spirits to know if it really comes from God. This discernment comes after the election and aims to comfort it, either by discarding a contentment that would be an attempt of manipulation on the part of the bad spirit, or by welcoming a consolation from the good spirit. For Libermann, renouncing contentment is right from the very beginning. The real contentment can only be given by God as a sign of the Spirit living in us.

Regarding spiritual direction, while the Ignatian tradition seeks to lead the candidate by techniques and precise rules to the knowledge of himself and the deepening of the relation to God in order to prepare, confirm, and hold the election in time, Libermann aims rather to immediately immerse the person in the influence of the Holy Spirit by giving him criteria to recognize his voice and the psychological effects of grace in his soul. So while it is more of a reasoned choice for Ignatius, the impulse of the Spirit for Libermann acts directly on the will rather than on intelligence and imagination. Libermann writes in 1848:

Beware of any inner movement that has its principle and action in the mind. It is the heart that is the center of all that is good in us, that is to say, of all that comes from divine grace, especially when the movement stirs up the imagination, we must look at it as unhelpful, as a temptation, not to be troubled about, but to ignore and not worry about.⁴¹

Ignatius recommends to work on desires to direct them progressively towards the source. Libermann's pedagogy consists in showing at first the distant and fascinating goal to achieve

Ignatius recommends to work on desires to direct them progressively towards the source. Libermann's approach is more radical in the sense that everything is played out in the early stages of direction: his pedagogy consists in showing at first the distant and fascinating goal to achieve:

When I see a soul whose thought seemed high, I mean a soul that seems to me called to the perfection of the inner life (and there are more than one thinks), I begin by giving him a strong idea of Christian perfection, so that he is impressed and taken away. I do so because in his interior God pushes him with violence. Seeing the height and the beauty of the aim, he is delighted and feels a violent desire to reach this state so beautiful and so admirable⁴²

Hence the three moments in accompaniment: (1) initial shock of perfection that arouses desire; (2) spiritual initiation; and (3) the task of resolving difficulties and making the soul live in peace with its consent to God's action.

The ideal perfection projected from the earliest stages of spiritual accompaniment must be transformed into an existential one while respecting the law of growth and maturation, ranging from a lesser fervor to the perfection of the union, from a sensitive fervor to that of faith, from the fervor of the senses to the one of the spirit through the

purifying crises, so that, freed from the multitude of created affections and the search for oneself, the will goes straight to God and does things without hesitation, with righteousness and purity.⁴³

It is only at the end of this journey that the soul is consecrated, totally surrendered to God according to the various modes of abandonment. But first one has to go through the test of time because “patience is the first step and indifference the last moment of abandonment.”⁴⁴

Conclusion: Originality and Fecundity

For Piault,⁴⁵ spiritual direction, for Libermann as well as Ignatius, endorses a certain personalism: the conviction that each individual has his own history, his personal decisions to take, and that he cannot enter into any pre-established scheme, especially not that of the director; conviction also that time is necessary to see clearly in a soul and for this soul to mature in the will of God.

For Bouchard, “compared to the doctrine of the Exercises of Saint Ignatius on the three stages of a good election, there is no doubt that Libermann’s way resounds the same way.”⁴⁶ However, while conceding that it is an imperfect process to regulate one’s conduct, Ignatius pays greater attention to reasoned choice, while Libermann thinks that God is always ready to move and attract our will so as to guide our decision rather by the experience of the discernment of minds than by the examination of the reasons. As a result, he warns against an introspection that turns the subject towards himself rather than towards God and leaves him tormented by his faults rather than preoccupied with pleasing God. True religious quest can set the person out of the ordinary and even scandalize good souls. Libermann’s experience seems to confirm a general observation Onimus expresses this way: “We do not meet religious creativity in well-balanced wisdoms and passive obedience, but rather in impatience, enthusiasm, rejection, active resistance, wherever the attraction of transcendence is exercised.”⁴⁷

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The religious quest is a passion that must devour life. It is therefore not immune to regrettable excesses because the core of religious life is to go beyond, to risk oneself on ways that blow out the norms, to impregnate with the divine the spontaneous impulses that push towards more being, love, and creativity. It generates audacity to face the novelty of the present with its challenges and opportunities.

Even though Libermann's letters suggest that he wants to deal only with the soul and its inner movements, in a sort of supernatural sphere where the human is banished - which is not without dangers for the individual involved in situations that are not formally supernatural and yet must find meaning within God's plan of salvation - his practice appears quite different. Like for the Hasidim, the one who goes to God is sent back to the world: the presence to God is openness to, and commitment to, the world. Libermann's conversion to Christ is already openness to universality: there is no longer any race discrimination for him. As Heikje writes it, "he was baptized a missionary"⁴⁸

Libermann actually emphasizes the positive aspect of spiritual life as dialectic of presence and implication: the person in relation with God thinks first of the One of whom he is the creature before he considers his relationship to God and to others. Thus, if he seeks to know himself, it will be a knowledge in God, because the true knowledge of himself operated by divine grace produces an increase of love for God that impregnates all his human relations.

God has always the initiative. But the encounter is possible because it is through man's thirst for life that God penetrates him from within

This Jewish understanding of the human being takes into account the dimension of transcendence to achieve its completion. God alone having life in essence, man is defined by his ability to receive this life. God draws man to himself to communicate with him through his Son, who in turn draws him by his humanity imbued with divine virtue to give him fullness of life. In that sense, God has always the initiative. But the encounter is possible because it is through man's thirst for life that God penetrates him from within and dwells in the inmost and at the root of all his spiritual faculties.⁴⁹

Thus, spiritual direction for Libermann presupposes a good knowledge of what vocation is: "the knowledge of the attraction and the impression of the grace of God with respect to the state of life which a soul must embrace."⁵⁰ The answer to God's call becomes part of the progressive unfolding of a story to be written as soon as the first movement is initiated by the Lord himself.⁵¹

Despite the criticism often made to Libermann of underplaying the role of reason in spirituality, his approach is interesting as an alternative way of spiritual direction - will-centered (commitment) or relation-centered (dialogue) - because all these aspects of human life can become places of encounters that promote life and love in the manner of Jesus

Christ. And I believe that this legacy holds so much promise for the people of our century in search of a meaningful existence in a world where landmarks are collapsing that it deserves to be deepened and promoted.

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Abbreviations

- CSJ Commentaire de Saint Jean/Commentary on St. John's Gospel
- ES Ecrits Spirituels/Spiritual Writings
- LS Lettres Spirituelles/Spiritual Letters
- ND *Notes et Documents*. 13 volumes + appendices.

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Endnotes

¹L.S. IV, 30

²For this research I make use of the journal *Christus*, On
discernment, Special Edition, no. 258, Paris, May 2018.

³See Dalmases, *Ignace de Loyola*.

⁴The fourteen rules of discernment of spirits are proper
to the first week of the spiritual exercises.

⁵Texte autographe des Exercices.

⁶Quenum, « Le discernement spirituel » page 1

⁷This decision is understood as the active and free
acceptance of God’s love manifested in the life of Jesus
revealing the typical relationship of humankind to God.

⁸Rahner, *Discours d’Ignace*, 23.

⁹Piault, *la direction spirituelle* ; Laplace, *Discernement
spirituel* ; and Bouchard, *L’appel intérieur*.

¹⁰N.D., IV, 10 and III, 326.

¹¹N.D., VIII, 8.

¹²ES 480 ; ND III, 87-90, ND III, 258-268.

¹³Texts from 1838 to 1843: N.D, III, 129; IV, 181; L.S.,
I, 471; N.D., II, 182.

¹⁴Letter to Mr Feret, December 15th 1839, L. S., II, 313

¹⁵Texts from 1837 to 1843: N.D., III, 129; IV, 248,
282; L.S., I, 260.

¹⁶Blanchard, tome II, 32.

¹⁷N.D., III, 184; IV, 9; L.S., II, 81

¹⁸L.S., II, 310

¹⁹LS II, p. 468

²⁰Blanchard, tome 1, 61, 62, 88.

²¹Letter to Mr Feret.

²²N.D., IX, 369-370.

²³L.S., II, 310-313.

²⁴Letter to M. Blanpin, April 1845, N.D, VII, 148.

²⁵L.S., I, 453-455.

²⁶N.D., IV, 19-20.

²⁷Van Kaam, *Fulfilment in Religious Life*.

²⁸See ND IV, 303.

²⁹See Salin, “St. Ignace et la liberté.”

³⁰Le Déaut, “Connaissance du judaïsme et spiritualité spiritaine.”

³¹Heikje, *25 ans d’empreinte juive*.

³²Ibid., .8.

³³Ibid., 10.

³⁴N.D., XIII, 347; 29 Oct 1851.

³⁵N.D., I, 518-519.

³⁶Heijke, “25 ans d’empreinte juive,” note 21 on Hasidism.

³⁷Ibid., note 28.

³⁸Ricœur’s subjectivity is teleological and presents itself as a task, without hope of total coincidence with oneself. See Ricœur, *Soi-même comme un autre*, 1990, and idem, *Le Juste II, Autonomie et vulnérabilité*, 2001.

³⁹Laplace, *Discernement spirituel chez Libermann et Saint Ignace*, 2.

⁴⁰Letter of November 12th, 1837, L.S. I, 340-341.

⁴¹LS IV, 544.

⁴²L.S., II, 388-399.

⁴³See L.S., II, 246.

⁴⁴Blanchard, tome 1, 515.

⁴⁵Piault, “La direction spirituelle,” 3.

⁴⁶Bouchard, *L’appel intérieur de Dieu*, 17.

⁴⁷Onimus, *Chemins de l’espérance*, 184.

⁴⁸HEIJKE, *25 ans d’empreinte juive*, 15.

⁴⁹See L.S I, 296.

⁵⁰L.S. II, 312.

⁵¹CSJ 47, 107.