

Diocese of Tyler Spiritual Companion Program – March 10th, 2018

1. Welcome & Opening Prayer
2. Review of Prayer
 - Spiritual Check-In
 - The Way Things Are
 - The Way Things Can Be
3. Review of Barry & Connolly chapter 6
4. St. Teresa of Calcutta & St. Augustine
5. Rules for the Discernment of Spirits (In the First Week, there are 14)
 - What are the Rules for the Discernment of Spirits – An Introduction
 - Rule 1 – When a person moves away from God
 - Rule 2 – When a person moves toward God
 - Rule 3 – Spiritual Consolation
 - Rule 4 – Spiritual Desolation

April 'assignments'

Read: Begin reading Gallagher's "Rules for the Discernment of Spirits"

Barry & Connolly, Chapter 7

Pray: The Principle & Foundation & (if you feel like it...) Prayer on my Dossier.

Write: Prepare 1 case study that you believe is addressed by the 'Rules for the Discernment of Spirits' as we discussed in March.



The Principle and Foundation

Every person in the world is so put together that by praising, revering, and living according to the will of God our Lord he or she will safely reach the Reign of God. This is the original purpose of each human life.

Every other thing on the face of the earth is meant for humankind, to help each person come to the original purpose God has put in each of us.

The only thing that makes sense in the use of all other things, then, is that a person use everything that helps realize that original purpose deep in the self, and turn away from everything that alienates us from the original purpose in ourself.

We can push this a little further: When we are under no obligations in conscience, we

ought to keep ourselves free of any fixed preference for one or other created thing. Instead, we ought to keep ourselves at balance before anything. What does this entail? It means that before we ever face any decision we do not determine to do everything that will keep us healthy and nothing that might make us sick, to be rich rather than poor, to be considered somebody important rather than a nobody, to live to a very old age rather than to die younger. In that way, we would keep a balance before any created thing when the times come for decision.

We set ourselves to live in careful balance, to want to choose solely on the grounds of what leads more directly and more certainly to our original purpose. ♦

Rules for the Discernment of Spirits.

- **RULE 1 When a person moves away from God** (A person moving from sin to sin will be encouraged by the enemy, working in the person's imagination, while the good spirit will sting the conscience)
- **RULE 2 When a person moves towards God** (A person moving from good to better in the spiritual life will be encouraged by the good spirit, be given consolations, inspirations, tears. However, the enemy will place obstacles, bite, accuse, disquiet)

Note the rules pertain to a 'movement'. Rule 2, and all subsequent rules, refer to one who is seeking to move toward God.

- **RULE 3 Spiritual Consolation** (An interior movement is caused in the soul – inflamed for God – moved to Love of God and sorrow for sin – and increase in faith, Hope, and charity)

- **RULE 10 Spiritual Consolation -**
The one in consolation can consider how he will conduct himself in the desolation which will come after, taking new strength for that time.

Calvin and Hobbes



RULE 4 Spiritual Desolation (drawn to low, earthly things; disquiet, lack of peace, lack of hope, tepid, sad, slothful, feeling of being separated from God.

RULE 5: Spiritual Desolation – Fidelity (in a time of spiritual desolation make no changes in the spiritual proposals already in place. Be firm and constant in the proposals made before the desolation.

RULE 6: Spiritual Desolation – Change Ourselves – do not change our spiritual Proposals but commit to more prayer, Meditation, examination, suitable penance.

RULE 7: Spiritual Desolation – Resist. We come to realize God permits the trial, we grow stronger. The nature of the trial is such that the Lord removes his fervor and love, and grace but leaves us with the grace to resist. In this way, we learn to bear trials without harm.

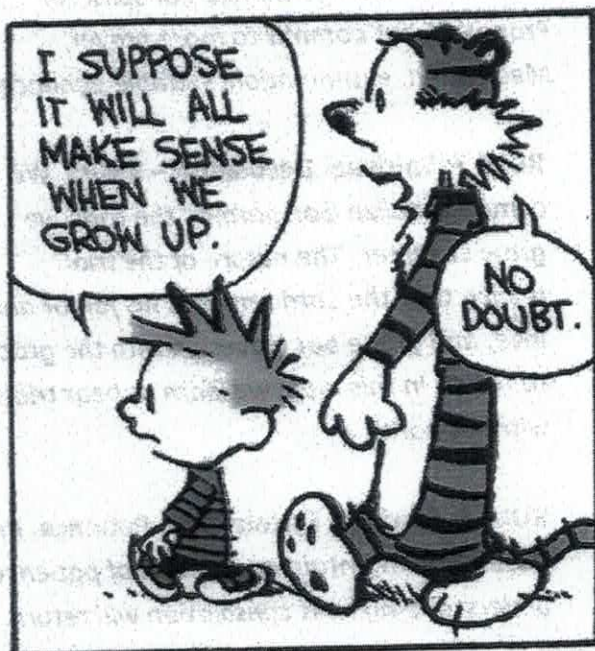
RULE 8: Spiritual Desolation – Patience. In Desolation maintain an attitude of patience; understanding that consolation will return.

RULE 9: Spiritual Desolation – 3 Causes; We Are tepid, To see how much we need his Grace. To understand our dependence.

- **RULE 11 – Consolation & Desolation; Finding Our Balance.** (Ignatius provides a rule now for both desolation and consolation. Be humble in consolation and in desolation think of how much one can do with God's grace)
 - **RULE 12 – The Enemy's Temptations.** (The enemy is weak when faced with strength; strong when faced with weakness)
 - **RULE 13 – The Enemy's Deceits.** (When one reveals temptations and challenges in confession or spiritual direction, the enemy realizes his persuasions have been revealed)
 - **RULE 14 – The Enemy's Attack's.** (Know Thyself – for the enemy will attack at the weakest point)
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Three Steps in Discerning Spirits.

- **BE AWARE** – notice what is happening in our inner spiritual experience, the stirrings of our hearts and thoughts.
- **UNDERSTAND** – reflect on these stirrings to recognize what is of God and what is not.
- **TAKE ACTION** – accept and live according to what is of God and reject and remove from our lives what we have recognized is not from God.



TYLER SPIRITUAL DIRECTION 1

Introduction to Discernment of Spirits

St. Ignatius of Loyola began to learn about the discernment of spirits while convalescing from serious battle injuries. He noticed different interior movements as he imagined his future. In his autobiography, Ignatius writes (in the third person):

He did not consider nor did he stop to examine this difference until one day his eyes were partially opened and he began to wonder at this difference and to reflect upon it. From experience he knew that some thoughts left him sad while others made him happy, and little by little he came to perceive the different spirits that were moving him; one coming from the devil, the other coming from God (*Autobiography*, no. 8).

Good and Evil Spirits

Ignatius believed that these interior movements were caused by "good spirits" and "evil spirits." We want to follow the action of a good spirit and reject the action of an evil spirit. Discernment of spirits is a way to understand God's will or desire for us in our life.

Talk of good and evil spirits may seem foreign to us. Psychology gives us other names for what Ignatius called good and evil spirits. Yet Ignatius's language is useful because it recognizes the reality of evil. Evil is both greater than we are and part of who we are. Our hearts are divided between good and evil impulses. To call these "spirits" simply recognizes the spiritual dimension of this inner struggle.

Consolation and Desolation

The feelings stirred up by good and evil spirits are called "consolation" and "desolation" in the language of Ignatian spirituality.

Spiritual consolation is an experience of being so on fire with God's love that we feel impelled to praise, love, and serve God and help others as best as we can. Spiritual consolation encourages and facilitates a deep sense of gratitude for God's faithfulness, mercy, and companionship in our life. In consolation, we feel more alive and connected to others.

Spiritual desolation, in contrast, is an experience of the soul in heavy darkness or turmoil. We are assaulted by all sorts of doubts, bombarded by temptations, and mired in self-preoccupations. We are excessively restless and anxious and feel cut off from others. Such feelings, in Ignatius's words, "move one toward lack of faith and leave one without hope and without love."

The key question in interpreting consolation and desolation is: *where is the movement coming from and where is it leading me?* Spiritual consolation does not always mean happiness. Spiritual desolation does not always mean sadness. Sometimes an experience of sadness is a moment of conversion and intimacy with God. Times of human suffering can be moments of great grace. Similarly, peace or happiness can be illusory if these feelings are helping us avoid changes we need to make.

Rules for Discernment

In the *Spiritual Exercises*, Ignatius provides various rules for the discernment of spirits (*Spiritual Exercises*, 313–336). Good and evil spirits operate according to the spiritual condition of the individual.

For people who have closed themselves off from God's grace, the good spirit disturbs and shakes up. It stirs feelings of remorse and discontent. The purpose is to make the person unhappy with a sinful way of life. On the other hand, the evil spirit wants such people to continue in their confusion and darkness. So the evil spirit tries to make them complacent, content, and satisfied with their distractions and pleasures.

For people who are trying to live a life pleasing to God, the good spirit strengthens, encourages, consoles, removes obstacles, and gives peace. The evil spirit tries to derail them by stirring up anxiety, false sadness, needless confusion, frustration, and other obstacles.

Discernment of spirits is a challenging task. It requires maturity, inner quiet, and an ability to reflect on one's interior life. Discernment takes practice. It is something of an art. Ignatius Loyola's rules for discernment provide a framework, not a program. We must be ready to improvise and adjust because God works in each of us so uniquely. That is why most counselors recommend undertaking discernment of spirits with the assistance of a spiritual director.

Discernment in a Nutshell

By Joseph A. Tetlow, SJ From *Making Choices in Christ*

Human beings are moved by a dense complex of motives, both in the things we

do from day to day and in our big decisions. What drives a young woman to become a doctor or a young man to be an engineer? Many things contribute: success, altruism, interest. Or what drives a woman who has smoked for years to quit or an obese man to get thin? Again, many things contribute: fear of death, desire for health, concern of family. But they all interact in a kind of movement that eventually drives the person to act. Master Ignatius learned to think about those dense complexes of motives—images, ideas, attractions, revulsions—as “spirits.”

We can all name many spirits. There is school spirit, in which everyone cheers together for the football team. There is fear, which can depress an entire city, and exultation, which can cause a whole nation to rise up. But spirits are not only secular. A thrill of devotion fills St. Peter's Square when a saint is canonized. A spirit of prayer drives people to make retreats. Christians under atheistic despotisms are moved to remain faithful.

Consolation and Desolation

Master Ignatius noted that these dense complexes of motives and energies take on two configurations, which he identified with consolation and desolation. He discovered that both consolation and desolation can move you toward God or pull you away from God. Then he noted that sometimes consolation comes from a good spirit and sometimes from a bad spirit, and he noted the same thing about desolation.

Ignatian spirituality applies this to interpreting major decisions and daily experience as well. The movement of spirits, obviously, involves a set of complex variables: consolation and desolation, good and evil spirits, movements to and away from God. . .

How Spirits Work

Some basic patterns are easy to grasp. For instance, as you would anticipate, the good spirit usually brings love, joy, peace, and the like; the evil spirit characteristically brings confusion, doubt, disgust, and the like. Another pattern: when you are leading a seriously sinful life, a good spirit will visit you with desolation to turn you around; an evil spirit will keep you content so that you will keep sinning. Another clear pattern is the opposite of this: when you are seriously serving God, the spirits change roles. The evil spirit clouds your day with desolation to lead you away from God, while the good spirit fills your day with trust and love of God. And a final, easily grasped pattern: a spirit that works in light and openness is good, while a spirit cloaked in secrecy and deception is evil.

What to Do about Feelings

Some basic practices are also easy to figure out. When you have made a good decision to serve God better and after awhile go into desolation, you should not change the decision; it's hardly a good spirit moving you. When you are feeling down, you would do well to pray a little more and increase the help you give to others. When, without warning or any preparatory activity, you are consoled with the love of God above all things, you can trust that it is a good spirit (particularly if it comes with tears). But when you are thinking or praying and grow consoled or disconsolate—well, test those movements. They could come from either spirit, as we have seen.

There is a good deal more to Ignatian discernment, and it gets no simpler. It is not, however, a merely human discipline. "Now instead of the spirit of the world, we have received the Spirit that comes from God, to teach us to understand the gifts that he has given us" (1 Corinthians 2:12). Serious disciples cherish this gift and put it to good use.

Excerpt from *Making Choices in Christ* by Joseph A. Tetlow, SJ.

The Difference Between Consolation and Feeling Good
By Margaret Silf From *Inner Compass: An Invitation to Ignatian Spirituality*



It isn't always obvious that there is a difference between experiencing spiritual consolation and simply feeling good, or between finding oneself in spiritual desolation and simply feeling low. The effects can be very similar, but in fact the source is quite different.

To understand this fundamental difference, we really do need to notice the *direction of our attention* as we go through the experience. The feel-good factor, as cultivated by politicians in particular, and its counterpart of feeling low, is intrinsically focused on ourselves. Things happen in our own kingdoms that trigger these ups and downs. In national terms, a reduction in taxation, for

example, is supposed to lift our hearts. At home, a family row can pitch us into the depths. If we could see the way our feelings are directed, we would notice that they are pointing in toward ourselves and the satisfaction or disruption of our own personal worlds. This is completely natural, of course, and it is part of what makes us human. However, it can very easily, as we know, be deliberately manipulated, or affected by such things as our changing body chemistry or how well we slept last night. These swings are not at all the same thing as spiritual consolation or desolation.

And the difference seems to lie in the focus of the experience. Spiritual consolation is experienced when our hearts are drawn toward God, even if...this happens in circumstances that the world would regard as negative. It is a signal that our hearts, at least for that moment, are beating in harmony with the heart of God. Consolation is the experience of this deep connectedness to God, and it fills our being with a sense of peace and joy. The epicenter of the experience lies in God and not in ourselves.

Excerpt from *Inner Compass: An Invitation to Ignatian Spirituality* by Margaret Silf.

Case Study

Alice, a professional middle-aged woman asks for some help in her spiritual life.

She is Catholic, and has always been Catholic. She attends Mass "fairly regularly" she says, but thinks she is missing something in her spiritual life. She explains that she has no direction in her life although she is successful in her business. She is unmarried with no living parents, and no siblings living close by. She does have a few close friends.

She attempted to offer some volunteer services to the local parish, but felt she was not welcomed.

When asked about her prayer life, she replies that she usually reads some inspirational book while having her morning coffee, and sometimes prays upon retiring to bed at night.

1. Where to begin with Alice?
2. What would you advise her?
3. Is there something unsaid?

Case. Bryan is a young man of 33, discerning a religious vocation. He is a bank executive who attends church regularly, receives the sacraments and has never been married. He has come to see you for spiritual direction for two months. You are impressed with his commitment to this discernment process, but you see that he is really struggling with the vocation issue. Sometimes hot and sometimes cold.

He prays the office and the rosary every day but shies away from any kind of meditative prayer, saying it makes him fall asleep. Then he worries that by falling asleep he has offended God and then feels remorse. So he doesn't pray that way.

Right in the midst of his vocation discernment, he was promoted to a well-paying position and at the same time took a keen interest in one of the young women at his church. Just when he thinks he's made a decision to join the Franciscans, God seems to tempt him with other things.

Bryan's father was very strict and never allowed Bryan to stray one millimeter from the "righteous path". Consequently, Bryan's father made most of his decisions for him. At 33, he still has a father who is controlling and rigid.

This week, Bryan tells you he had just decided to join the Franciscan order and was firm in his decision, when suddenly, he felt "this is all wrong" and changed his mind, deciding to stay at the bank. Now he is plagued with indecision, just where he was when he first came to you.

How could you help Bryan?

What do you think he needs?

November 2012, Orange County
Both

BRETT: A Case from Fr. Joe Tetlow, SJ

You have been meeting with Brett once a month for some months. He has been deciding whether to go to medical school. He shows his fine education as you speak and his self-confidence suggests that his training in computer engineering included some humanities as well as the technical training. He has been employed for about three years with a good company and gives evidence that his income is more than adequate. You know that he lives a fairly quiet life for a man his age (he might be 27 or even 32). He goes to Mass three or four times a week and sometimes stops to pray quietly at a Poor Clares convent on his back from work.

Brett is darkly good looking and was plainly well reared, as his manners are fine and he presents himself quietly and well. He is a convert, having come into the Church about 4 or 5 years ago while at his Catholic university. Several others converted during his stay there, and he was simply impressed with the Church's teaching and also by the life that it invited him to lead. His family, as you understand it, were or are some vague sort of Christian but you are pretty clear that they do not spend a lot of time or energy on their religion. Brett has grown to be an exception.

He prays regularly and after making a retreat at a Jesuit retreat house, he has been praying mentally in the morning. He says that he takes the reading of the day and spends 15 or 20 minutes thinking about it and asking what Jesus may be saying to him. He has been doing this as long as you have known him. Not long ago, he mentioned that one of his friends chivvied him into praying the rosary, which he now does sometimes and wishes he did more often (he talks vaguely about praying it as he drives). Your impression is that this friend is clearly pious and probably zealous about his religious practices. You are not sure that Brett actually finds consolation in the rosary, but you sense that he is also zealous about growing in his spiritual life.

When he first came to see you, he explained that he had felt a great desire to be a medical missionary. His sense had grown that God intended him to remain single and dedicate his life to helping really poor and helpless people. You have not been able to discover what the source of this desire might have been and you are not sure about his conviction or its spiritual roots. However, he has decided to follow this inspiration and having applied to medical schools, seems about to be accepted by the one he wants to attend.

Now jot down four or five of the more significant things you heard.

Brett comes to see you one afternoon as you had arranged, having cut out of work a bit early since this time is the only time you had free for some days. He seems his usual self, confident and calm. But you notice that when he sits down, his feet are solidly on the floor but he leans back a bit and crosses his arms as he

begins to talk. To your usual question – at that time something like, ‘Well, what’s going on?’ – he fills you in on his job and a few things that are going on in the world. Noting all this, you finally ask him, ‘And what about yourself?’

He tells you that he thinks he might be in a slight depression or maybe a desolation, he doesn’t know which. (You feel sure that he doesn’t know any great amount about either one.) Details? Well, he’s been super busy. Work is really interesting and absorbing, but there’s just a lot of it right now. He’s often pretty tired as he heads home and hasn’t stopped at the convent much in the past month. He hasn’t been as faithful to his morning prayer as he usually is. This might be, he says, because of tiredness. And there’s one thing that is really bothering him. He read in some saint’s life that he would see Jesus in everyone. That really struck Brett. So he has been trying to do that but he says he really cannot. He just doesn’t get it, and this bothers him considerably.

What have you heard now? Underline two or three things and comment on them.

At this point, Brett begins to repeat himself. This is not like him; he is usually clear and to the point. He mentions the rosary again, only vaguely connecting it to his current situation. He goes back over how busy he’s been. You note his tone and ask whether the work is boring. He says no, that’s not it. He’s just very busy – no details. He begins to talk about desolation, using words that suggest that he’s read something on the matter and is trying to think technically about his experience. And he asks – the first question this session – he asks you a question about “seeing Jesus Christ in everyone you meet.”

Thinking how to approach an answer, you summarize for him by saying, “Let me see if I’ve heard where you are.” What have you heard?

With this all straightened out, you ask him whether he has heard from any of the medical schools. He answers, yes, he has. After a significant pause, he says that the one that answered isn’t the one he would prefer. You ask whether the degree would be adequate for a medical missionary, and he shoots a glance at you as though he were a bit startled. He says, yes, of course.

You ask yourself, figuring out how to break off: What’s going on?

DARREN GOES FOR DEACON

Darren has determined that he would like to be a deacon. He is 38 and has been in his parish for twenty years. Moreover, he grew up in the small city he lives in and knows the people and its temperament very well. So he makes a careful discernment and applies.

Part of the situation is that the director of deacon formation in the diocese knows and really likes Darren, and he feels that getting him into the deaconate will make the deaconate seem better. And the Director has heard criticism about his recruiting of good deacons, and it bothers him a lot.

The reason is that Darren is an important man in the local bank. He has a good work history and became senior manager a couple years ago. Most people are of two minds: that Darren will never get to be president because the bank has been in the same family for three generations, and that Darren will have to be made president because he is clearly the smartest and best businessman on the whole staff. Part of his being so outstanding is that he is an interesting man – he reads a lot and keeps up with what's going on in the world as well as in the town – and he is a very persuasive man.

The Director adds to that two things. Darren clearly loves the Church and his parish. His children are all in the Catholic school – he wouldn't think of sending him to the local public school. And the Director, as a close friend of Darren's, knows that he and his wife practice natural family planning. Actually, everyone knows that because the couple give talks in the local movement and are well respected for it. Everyone does not know that the Director finds natural family planning not only admirable but, for himself, impracticable.

Darren, himself, is only half aware of his ambition. It matters a lot to him what "people think," as his family taught him. They were country people, rather poor, but of "good family," and parents kept up appearances. It mattered that on Sunday, they dressed for church. And Darren is honest enough to know that being a deacon would not harm his hopes of being bank president.

So, he enters program. Half-year before ordination, he finds himself very concerned. He is facing the reality that, should his wife die – well, he has three small children. He thinks: 'what will happen to these children if my wife dies? I can't remarry. I will doom them to growing up without a mother.' But it would be really hard for him to back out right now. It would reflect badly on him and his judgment. It would not do his career any good. And his wife had already given her go-ahead readily and happily. And his children. . .

So where is Darren? How did he get where he is? What role did the Director play?

Case Study Four

Gary is a deacon in a parish some distance from you. He comes to you for spiritual help from time to time, but not on a regular basis. Gary tells you that he has a great habit of prayer: each morning he spends time praying the Divine Office and then some other form of prayer. Some days he prays the rosary, some days he does lectio divina, some days meditation. You wish all your clients had this kind of prayer life.

Yet, something about his continues to gnaw at you. You can't seem to put your finger on what's going on. Today, Gary was on his soapbox about another issue in the news. In the last year you've heard him complain about Obamacare, the war in Afghanistan, teenage pregnancy, the US bishops, and so forth. He never seems to be at peace.

What might be going on with Gary? Is he in consolation or desolation? How might you help him?

CASE
The Dark Night of Mother Teresa

On October 19, 2003, Mother Teresa of Calcutta (1910-1997) will be beatified in Rome. During the three-and-a-half-year investigation into her cause, no less thorough for having been hastened by the waiver of the customary five-year waiting period, every nook and cranny of her life was studied for evidence that she is the great saint, the Christian Mahatma, that the world already believes her to be. The date chosen for her beatification, Mission Sunday, is the Sunday closest to the twenty-fifth anniversary of the pontificate of John Paul II and to the end of the Year of the Rosary. This may be taken as a sign of how close Mother Teresa's cause is to the Pope's heart. In any case, the beatification of Mother Teresa makes a fitting colophon to the era of turbulence and grace that will always be associated with his name. Since the pontificate of Gregory the Great (590-604), nearly every generation of Christians has felt itself living in a Church too old to produce heroic saints. If during the days of John Paul II we are inclined to a similar despondency, we have only to consider Mother Teresa to be reminded of how young the Church really is, how capable of fidelity and passionate witness to Christ.

One would expect the canonization process to be steady and sure and, aside from a few marginal detractors, uncontroversial, for no saint has ever been more in the public eye. In her life-long service to Christ in the poorest of the poor, and her simple and consistent teachings on the law of love, she was an open book. She tried always to be transparent to Christ, and in that very transparency her inner life was hidden, making her a difficult subject for biographers. Malcolm Muggeridge observed that when the eighteen-year-old Agnes Gonxha Bojaxhiu left her family to join the Sisters of Our Lady of Loreto, it was "the end of her biography and the beginning of her life." It is only now with the end of her life, and the beginning of her cause, that the biography resumes, and new dimensions of her character are revealed.

During November and December of last year, the ZENIT News Agency published in four installments a study of *The Soul of Mother Teresa: Hidden Aspects of Her Interior Life*, by the Postulator of Mother Teresa's cause, Father Brian Kolodiejchuk, M.C. In this study a new portrait of Mother Teresa's interior life emerges, drawn largely from letters she sent to her spiritual directors. She had wanted the letters to be destroyed, not intending to leave behind any record of her spiritual life ("I want the work to remain only His"), but they were preserved nonetheless; and who among us would willingly dispatch them to the shredder? Fr. Kolodiejchuk's study is just the tip of the iceberg—the documentation submitted to the Congregation for the Causes of Saints runs to eight volumes—but what it shows us is Mother Teresa as a classic Christian mystic whose inner life was burned through by the fire of charity, and whose fidelity was tested and purified by an intense trial of faith, a true dark night of the soul.

Fr. Kolodiejchuk sees Mother Teresa's life as unfolding in four phases:

1. Her childhood and youth, when from the time of her First Communion at age five and a half she felt her heart captivated by the love of Jesus and of neighbor, and discovered her call to join the missionary Sisters of Our Lady of Loreto. While it was difficult to leave her family, she found her time as a Loreto nun, teaching in the convent school in Calcutta, immensely rewarding. She was by all accounts a happy though not particularly brilliant nun (she is remembered, among other things, for having fumbled the candles at Benediction). The keynote of this period is youthful zeal and joy.
2. The Vow of 1942. At age thirty-two, at the end of her annual retreat, with the permission of her spiritual director, Mother Teresa made a vow to give herself utterly

and unreservedly to Christ: "To give God anything that He may ask . . . not to refuse Him anything."

3. The Call within a Call. On September 10, 1946, the day celebrated by the Missionaries of Charity as "Inspiration Day," Mother Teresa was traveling by train from Calcutta to a retreat house in Darjeeling. During this trip, the realization came to her that Jesus was calling her to serve him radically in the poorest of the poor. Only in private letters to her spiritual director, Fr. Celeste Van Exem, S.J., and (under Fr. Van Exem's cautious instruction) to Archbishop Ferdinand Périer, S.J., did she reveal that this call was more than just an inner prompting. Jesus appeared and spoke to her, in a series of interior locutions and visions. "Wouldst thou not help?" Jesus asked her. "How can I?" Mother Teresa responded, expressing her fear of incurring ridicule, loneliness, deprivation, and failure should she leave her happy life as a Loreto nun, exchange her habit for a rough sari, and take up the uncertain life Jesus was demanding of her. Repeatedly he asked her, "Wilt thou refuse? You have become my spouse for my love. You have come to India for me. The thirst you had for souls brought you so far. Are you afraid now to take one more step for your spouse, for me, for souls?" And again: "I want Indian nuns, Missionaries of Charity, who would be my fire of love amongst the poor, the sick, the dying, and the little children. . . ." The chief motivation for the Missionaries of Charity, as she would often say, was not to do social work, but to adore Christ in the littlest and weakest of his children, and to bring Christ the souls for which he thirsts.

4. The Dark Night. Throughout 1946 and 1947, Mother Teresa experienced a profound union with Christ. But soon after she left the convent and began her work among the destitute and dying on the street, the visions and locutions ceased, and she experienced a spiritual darkness that would remain with her until her death. It is hard to know what is more to be marveled at: that this twentieth-century commander of a worldwide apostolate and army of charity should have been a visionary contemplative at heart; or that she should have persisted in radiating invincible faith and love while suffering inwardly from the loss of spiritual consolation. In letters written during the 1950s and 1960s to Fr. Van Exem, Archbishop Périer, and to later spiritual directors, Fr. L. T. Picachy, S.J., and Fr. J. Neuner, S.J., she disclosed feelings of doubt, loneliness, and abandonment. God seemed absent, heaven empty, and bitterest of all, her own suffering seemed to count for nothing. ". . . just that terrible pain of loss, of God not wanting me, of God not being God, of God not really existing."

The dark night of Mother Teresa presents us with an even greater interpretive challenge than her visions and locutions. It means that the missionary foundress who called herself "God's pencil" was not the God-intoxicated saint many of us had assumed her to be. We may prefer to think that she spent her days in a state of ecstatic mystical union with God; because that would get us ordinary worldlings off the hook. How else could this unremarkable woman, no different from the rest of us, bear to throw her lot in with the poorest of the poor, sharing their meager diet and rough clothing, wiping leprosy sores and enduring the agonies of the dying, for so many years without respite, unless she were somehow lifted above it all, shielded by spiritual endorphins? Yet we have her own testimony that what made her self-negating work possible was not a subjective experience of ecstasy but an objective relationship to God shorn of the sensible awareness of God's presence.

In the history of Christian theology and spirituality, there have been many accounts of divine darkness, with a host of different implications. It is an ancient doctrine, emphasized by apophatic theologians and mystics, that God dwells in inaccessible light, a light so searingly absolute that it cancels out all images and ideas we may form of Him, veiling the divine glory in a dark "cloud of unknowing." This tradition owes much to the Christian Neoplatonist Dionysius the Pseudo-Areopagite and his liturgically

inspired vision of ascent to the divine throne; as such, it says more about divine transcendence than about human desolation.

Among the monastic writers who flourished during the sunlit years of the twelfth century, divine darkness was an essentially cheerful idea. William of St. Thierry positively delighted in our mind's incapacity to see that God is present, for he counted on love to make good the deficiencies of our feeble intellect. Love is the eye with which we see God, William said; love itself is understanding. But love is not to be confused with mere feelings. Feelings burn out too easily; they can be manipulated or seduced. The love by which we see God must be an act of the will rather than a passing affection of the heart.

Later generations of Christian mystics dwelt upon the more desolate kinds of darkness to which the spiritual life can lead: the darkness in which all modes of prayer and spiritual practice become arid, and all consolation in the love of God seems lost. Even in the desolate dark night of the soul, indeed especially there, St. John of the Cross taught, God is present, purifying the soul of all passions and hindrances, and preparing her for the inconceivable blessedness of divine union. Along with dark knowing, there is dark loving, no less ardent for being deprived of all sensible and spiritual vision of the beloved. Therefore St. John can say, "Oh, night more lovely than the dawn, Oh, night that joined Beloved with lover, Lover transformed in the Beloved!"

Yet only in the modern period has the dark night of the soul taken the form of radical doubt, doubting not only one's own state of grace, but God's promises and even God's existence. A wise Benedictine, John Chapman of Downside Abbey, made this point in a 1923 letter to a non-monastic friend: "[I]n the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries most pious souls seem to have gone through a period in which they felt sure that God had reprobated them. . . . This doesn't seem to happen nowadays. But the corresponding trial of our contemporaries seems to be the feeling of not having any faith; not temptations against any particular article, but a mere feeling that religion is not true."

For this annihilating temptation, Chapman wrote, "the only remedy is to despise the whole thing, and pay no attention to it—except (of course) to assure our Lord that one is ready to suffer from it as long as he wishes." The "feeling of not having any faith" is painful because it is an authentic purgation, during which "faith is really particularly strong all the time," and one is being brought into closer union with the suffering Christ.

This was exactly the way Mother Teresa learned to deal with her trial of faith: by converting her feeling of abandonment by God into an act of abandonment to God. It would be her Gethsemane, she came to believe, and her participation in the thirst Jesus suffered on the Cross. And it gave her access to the deepest poverty of the modern world: the poverty of meaninglessness and loneliness. To endure this trial of faith would be to bear witness to the fidelity for which the world is starving. "Keep smiling," Mother Teresa used to tell her community and guests, and somehow, coming from her, it doesn't seem trite. For when she kept smiling during her night of faith, it was not a cover-up but a manifestation of her loving resolve to be "an apostle of joy."

One can better understand, having read *The Soul of Mother Teresa*, why she insisted that adoration of Christ present in the Blessed Sacrament should occupy the center of the Missionaries' daily work; and why she felt it imperative to establish purely contemplative communities that would make the Missionaries of Charity an order of adoration as well as apostolic service. Adoring Christ in the Sacrament is also a way of dark knowing and dark loving. To all appearances he is absent, as Aquinas says in the *Tantum ergo* Sacramentum, so faith must supply what is lacking to our feeble senses. Humanly, there were times when Mother Teresa felt burnt out, but faith supplied what was lacking even to troubled faith; spiritually she was often desolate, but her vow

endured and her visible radiance—to which everyone attests—was undiminished. This lifelong fidelity should not be confused with a Stoic determination to keep going in the face of defeat. It was something else entirely: objective Christian joy.

Mother Teresa is not the only modern saint to have undergone such a trial of faith; one thinks also of precursors like St. Paul of the Cross (1694-1775), founder of the Passionists, and St. Jane Frances de Chantal (1572-1641), foundress of the Visitandines, but above all of Mother Teresa's namesake, St. Thérèse of Lisieux (1873-1897), the French Carmelite famous for her "Little Way." The parallels between Mother Teresa (Teresa of the Child Jesus) and St. Thérèse (Teresa of the Child Jesus and the Holy Face) are really quite remarkable. Thérèse also made a vow, informally as a young child, and formally on two occasions as a professed Carmelite nun, to refuse nothing to Jesus. Like Mother Teresa, she had longed to be sent forth in the missions as a herald of God's love; since her frailty prevented this, she rejoiced in being assigned missionaries for whom she prayed and whom she regarded with great affection as her spiritual brothers. She, too, felt multiple calls; indeed, she felt all calls at once: "I feel the vocation of the warrior, the priest, the apostle, the doctor, the martyr," she wrote. "I feel within my soul the courage of the Crusader, the Papal Guard, and I would want to die on the field of battle in defense of the Church." Not for feminist reasons did she say, "I feel in me the vocation of the priest," but rather because of a youthful desire to be all in all for Christ. The "Little Way" was her solution: "I understood that love comprised all vocations, that love was everything . . . my vocation is love! . . . In the heart of the Church, my Mother, I shall be Love." If love were dependent on mere feelings, however, her vocation would have foundered, for as Thérèse wrote, "Do not believe I am swimming in consolations; oh, no, my consolation is to have none on earth."

From Easter 1896 until her death from tuberculosis on September 30, 1897, at age twenty-four, Thérèse endured a trial of faith of the modern kind, which she described as like being enclosed in a dark tunnel. She seemed to hear the darkness mocking her: "You are dreaming about the light, about a fatherland embalmed in the sweetest perfumes; you are dreaming about the eternal possession of the Creator of all these marvels; you believe that one day you will walk out of this fog which surrounds you! Advance, advance; rejoice in death which will give you not what you hope for but a night still more profound, the night of nothingness." According to tradition she died trusting and loving God in the very grip of this doubt, and promising to spend her heaven doing good on earth.

Is it fanciful to consider the possibility that Mother Teresa, who died in the same month one hundred years later, who experienced the same ardent call, made the same vow of surrender, suffered the same desolation of faith, and embodied in the face of that dark night the same teaching of fidelity in small things, may have in some way been completing the mission of St. Thérèse? Could it be that this missionary contemplative and this contemplative missionary are companions in a joint work of grace?

However that may be, it was the same objective Christian joy that made Agnes Gonxha Bojaxhiu become a Saint Teresa for our time, and a saint-maker for our future. When we consider her life and the ongoing life of her community, the Church seems young again, and everything seems possible. If these days are in any sense a dark night for the Church, then Mother Teresa shows the way forward: faith that we are undergoing a purification rather than a free-fall, and fidelity, in small things as well as big, to the vows that bind in order to set free.

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