

WHAT IS MEANT BY “IGNATIAN DISCERNMENT”?

Two important Ignatian words are: spiritual consolation and spiritual desolation. These are what Ignatius calls interior movements. Natural consolation may depend on the weather or other natural causes, but spiritual consolation comes as a gift from God.

Ignatius defines spiritual consolation as “every increase in hope, faith, and love.” Because these are spiritual gifts from God, we can’t give them to ourselves, but we can do things to nurture them and increase them, or we can let them wither and dry up, so that we may *feel as though we have lost them*.

WHY DOES IGNATIUS PUT HOPE FIRST?

Ignatius puts HOPE first because this is usually the first thing to go, and this can lead to spiritual desolation. When I lose my job I can lose hope for the future. When I lose hope I can begin to feel that God is not answering my prayers and not even listening to them – I begin to lose FAITH. It can then become harder for me to love God, love myself, love others – I begin to lose LOVE.

What I’m describing here is a downward spiral into the pit of desolation. If I should find myself there, all I can do is try to pray (not easy) and wait patiently (not easy) for the return of HOPE. Eventually something may happen that gives me new hope. I may begin to feel that God *is* listening to my prayers after all – my FAITH is renewed. With new hope and faith I find it easier to love God, love myself and love others. I am again in consolation, with renewed HOPE, renewed FAITH, renewed LOVE.

WHAT DOES IGNATIUS MEAN BY “INTERIOR MOVEMENT”?

By movement Ignatius means a turning toward something. It is interior when it involves a desire or longing or feeling.

Interior movements directed toward God in prayer lead to consolation. Interior movements directed toward myself (for instance negative judgments or false pride) can lead to desolation.

SOME EXAMPLES

If I have excellent health, this may easily move me to thank God (= easy consolation), but it could just as easily lead me to think I am superior to others (pride = easy desolation: I feel good but I have distanced myself from God).

If I get sick, this may move me to call on God for help (= hard consolation: in the midst of suffering I still draw close to God), but it could also lead me into feeling sorry for myself (= hard desolation: isolated from God in my suffering).

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