

Comment on “The Law of Diversion”
in Letter VI of *The Screwtape Letters* by C. S. Lewis

Ignatius of Loyola, the founder of the Jesuit school of spirituality, spoke a great deal about the discernment of spirits in his *Spiritual Exercises*. He used the terms “consolation” and “desolation” to describe two motions of the soul, towards God and away from God, respectively. He defines the terms thus:

I call it **consolation** when there is excited in the soul some interior motion by which it begins to be inflamed with the love of, its Creator and Lord, and when, consequently, it can love no created thing on the face of the earth in itself, but only in the Creator of them all. Like-wise, when it sheds tears, moving if to the love of its Lord, whether it be from grief for its sins, or from the Passion of Christ our Lord, or from other things directly ordained to His service and praise. Finally, I call consolation every increase of faith, hope, and charity, and all interior joy, which calls and attracts man to heavenly things, and to the salvation of his own soul, rendering it quiet and tranquil in its Creator and Lord.

I call **desolation** all that is contrary to what is set down (above), as darkness and disquiet of soul, an attraction towards low and earthly objects, the disquiet of various agitations and temptations, which move it to diffidence, without hope and without love, when the soul finds itself slothful, tepid, sad, and, as it were, separated from its Creator and Lord.

Ignatius goes on to describe ways in which to move towards God and away from sin during times of consolation and desolation. Allow me to schematize these ways according to the pattern Lewis sets up in Letter VI of *The Screwtape Letters*:

God’s desire	in consolation, concentrate on the Consoler
for us:	in desolation, keep in mind that this is a feeling and a cross
Satan’s desire	in consolation, focus on the feeling of being consoled
for us:	in desolation, focus on whatever is troubling us and neglect self-awareness

As Lewis would put it:

In all virtue, God’s tactic is to assist us in self-forgetfulness and to focus on Him.
In all vice, God’s tactic is to focus us on the activity (its sinfulness) and away from the object of the temptation (however entrancing).

In all virtue, Satan’s tactic is to make us self-aware and to lose attention to the object (God).
In all vice, Satan’s tactic is to increase our self-forgetfulness and preoccupation with the object (temptation).

Perhaps a diagram would help:

	<u>in</u>	<u>to be avoided</u>	<u>to be striven for</u>
God	virtue	self-awareness	absorption in Object—God
	vice	absorption in object	self-awareness
Satan	virtue	attention to Object—God	self-awareness
	vice	self-awareness	absorption in object