

Rules for making an Election [169], [170-174], [175-188]

We call Spiritual Exercises every way of preparing and disposing the soul to rid itself of all inordinate attachments, and, after their removal, of seeking and finding the will of God in the disposition of our life for the salvation of our soul.

With commentary taken and modified from Fr. Timothy Gallagher and Fr. Ignacio Casanovas

[169] - Introduction to Making a Choice of a Way of Life

In every good choice, as far as depends on us, our intention must be simple. I must consider only the end for which I am created, that is, for the praise of God our Lord and for the salvation of my soul. Hence, whatever I choose must help me to this end for which I am created.

I must not subject and fit the end to the means, but the means to the end. Many first choose marriage, which is a means, and secondarily the service of God our Lord in marriage, though the service of God is the end. So also others first choose to have benefices, and afterwards to serve God in them. Such persons do not go directly to God, but want God to conform wholly to their inordinate attachments. Consequently, they make of the end a means, and of the means an end. As a result, what they ought to seek first, they seek last.

Therefore, my first aim should be to seek to serve God, which is the end, and only after that, if it is more profitable, to have a benefice or marry, for these are means to the end. Nothing must move me to use such means, or to deprive myself of them, save only the service and praise of God our Lord, and the salvation of my soul.

** These are what we could call the *dispositions* that we need. Casanovas says that these can be summed up in *simple* and *ordered*. *Simple* means looking at only one end, the end for which I was created, and *ordered*, meaning, it goes in order to where I need to go.

We have to keep in mind the principle and foundation, that God created us to know, reverence, and serve Him, and this because He loves us and wants us to be happy. This is foundation, we could say, of discernment. On the other hand, we must be *open to His will*. It does us no good to say that we're "discerning" something when really the only thing that we want is for God to do what I want. It's the spiritual equivalent of playing Candyland. We must be *indifferent, free from inordinate affections*. Otherwise, we can't possibly make a choice well; we

might as well light novena candles to Our Lady of Perpetual Discernment and not go anywhere.

We also have to put the means into place: one of these is or are the *Spiritual Exercises*. As Ignatius says right in the beginning, the Spiritual Exercises “have as their purpose the conquest of self and the regulation of one’s life in such a way that no decision is made under the influence of any inordinate attachment” [21].

Other useful means are prayer, daily Communion, silence, reading the Scriptures, and spiritual direction.

By listening to God and doing His will, we come to resemble what He wants us to be: in the lives of the saints we see that holiness doesn’t destroy their personalities; on the contrary, saints are more fully themselves. Sinfulness tends to bulldoze our personalities, and sins tend to make people all the same, leveling out the differences; it reduces men and women to that thing which they desire. We can think of, for example, greedy people we know: aren’t they all sort of the same? Is there really that much difference between them? We could say that “sin drains the color out of men and women, and replaces it with the color of sin which is a common property. All sinners look less like themselves and more like one another.” Saints, however, “are intensely themselves.”¹ God created us all as individuals, and all of us are something special. Since holiness means growing close to God, the holier we are, the closer we are to the God who created us, and the closer we become to that perfect individual that He created us to be.

[170] Matters About Which a Choice Should Be Made

The purpose of this consideration is to afford information on the matters about which a choice should be made. It contains four points and a note

First Point

It is necessary that all matters of which we wish to make a choice *be either indifferent or good in themselves, and such that they are lawful within our Holy Mother, the hierarchical Church, and not bad or opposed to her.*

** Again, there’s no debate about whether or not I want to decide to go to Mass on Sunday, or whether or not to murder someone. Those aren’t things that are indifferent or good in themselves. However, many things in this life are good: to get married or to enter religious life, or enter the seminary for the diocese or for

¹ The intro of Frank Sheed’s *Saints are not sad* for this point, 11.

a religious order, to keep working at my present job, or to cut back some to take up volunteer work. All are good or at least indifferent in themselves. The question is: what does God want?

[171] Second Point

There are things that fall under an unchangeable choice, such as the priesthood, marriage, etc. There are others with regard to which our choice may be changed, for example, to accept or relinquish a benefice, to receive or renounce temporal goods.

** This distinction is important, because some decisions I can change and re-examine, but others, not so much.

[172] Third Point

With regard to an unchangeable choice, once it has been made, for instance, by marriage or the priesthood, etc., since it cannot be undone, no further choice is possible. Only this is to be noted. If the choice has not been made as it should have been, *and with due order, that is, if it was not made without inordinate attachments*, one should be sorry for this, and take care to live well in the life he has chosen.

Since such a choice was inordinate and awry, it does not seem to be a vocation from God, as many erroneously believe. They make a divine call out of a perverse and wicked choice. For every vocation that comes from God is always pure and undefiled, uninfluenced by the flesh or any inordinate attachment.

** Interesting. I've met a lot of people who lived wild lives, but still felt that God was calling them to be priests. Most of them ignored it, and instead got married and had kids. Not a bad thing, getting married, but the point is what is God's will. Most of these, I might add, have families with a lot of problems.

Remember, again, those dispositions we talked about earlier: this is the key for a good discernment.

[173] Fourth Point

In matters that may be changed, if one has made a choice properly and with due order, without any yielding to the flesh or the world, there seems to be no reason why he should make it over. But let him perfect himself as much as possible in the one he has made.

[174] Note

It is to be observed that if a choice in matters that are subject to change has not been made sincerely and with due order, then, if one desires to bring forth fruit that is worthwhile and most pleasing in the sight of God our Lord, it will be profitable to make a choice in the proper way.

[175] Three Times When a Correct and Good Choice of a Way of Life May Be Made

First Time

When God our Lord so moves and attracts the will that a devout soul without hesitation, or the possibility of hesitation, follows what has been manifested to it. St. Paul and St. Matthew acted thus in following Christ our Lord.

** Casanovas notes that *time* here doesn't mean months, weeks, days, or hours, but rather to the diverse spiritual situations in which man might find himself. All are suitable times for making a choice, but each one has a different situation and hence different rules that apply to it.

The first thing that calls our attention, says the Jesuit, is the mystical or passive environment of this first time of election. It is really an extraordinary grace, one that calls our attention, and often the impression remains for years after the fact, if it ever goes away. It is extraordinary.

God calls, and I answer. There's no way that I can doubt that it's Him who has called me to do something. The key here is that something is shown or revealed to the individual, the will is invariably drawn to it, moved towards it, and there can *be no doubt* that it comes from God.

Again, in this case, there's no need to wait and see if God does it again (He's not obligated to!). That's it: we've seen and that's that.

The response is still free; it's not that God imposes it on us or makes us do it. Yet, what is shown gives such peace, joy, confidence, direction, and a sense of being loved by God that that impression remains for years after the fact.

I don't know if there's anyone who has a running tally of these experiences, but I think we can probably say that this is the most uncommon of the three times. Oftentimes God allows us to struggle so that we can really make the decision ours. (*Example of Sister*).

Just as a sort of conclusion, though, I think the words of Saint John Bosco merit some consideration (they sort of summarize what we've been saying). He writes: "I think it is a grave mistake to say it's hard to know if you have a vocation or not. The Lord put us in such circumstances that we don't have to do anything more than go forward; we only have to respond to Him. A vocation is difficult to know when one does not want to follow it, when those first inspirations are rejected. It is there that the tangle gets confusing. . . . Look, when a person is indecisive about whether or not to become a religious, I tell you openly that that person already heard their calling; they didn't follow it immediately, and now they find themselves confused and indecisive."

(176) Second Time

When much light and understanding are derived through experience of desolations and consolations and discernment of diverse spirits.

** In this second mode of discernment, *discernment of spirits* and *discernment of God's will* coincide: through the discernment of consolations and desolations a person attains "sufficient clarity and understanding" for the discernment of God's will.

In a further document, Ignatius amplifies his description of this second mode:

Among the three modes of making a choice, if God does not move a person in the first mode, one should dwell persistently on the second, that of recognizing his vocation by the experience of consolations and desolations; in such manner that, as he continues with his meditations on Christ our Lord, he observes, when he finds himself in consolation, to which part God moves him [meaning, to which option in the choice], and likewise when he finds himself in desolation. And what consolation is should be well explained: that is, spiritual joy, love, hope in things of above, tears, and every interior movement which leaves the soul consoled in our Lord. The contrary of this is desolation: sadness, lack of confidence, lack of love, dryness, etc.

We need to remember, from the rules of the first week, that "in consolation the good spirit guides and counsels us more, so in desolation the bad spirit" (318), and so now this mode of discernment emerges.

Again, Casanovas mentions that this is supernatural, although it is to be counted among the "ordinary" supernatural graces, the usual way of acting.

In reviewing my personal experiences of consolation and desolation, I should ask myself the following: in times of *spiritual consolation*, to which option do I feel inclined? Has the inclination *recurred? Enough* so that I can see a clear pattern of inclination? Enough so that, since in consolation the *good spirit* guides and counsels us more, I may confidently judge, with the help of my spiritual director, that God is calling me to this option? Is this judgment further confirmed by the opposite inclination in time of *spiritual desolation* – the time when the *bad spirit* guides and counsels?

Again, we need to look and see the *pattern* that emerges. For instance, if I notice that whenever I'm in consolation, I feel the desire to become a priest, and that fills me with joy, but, when I'm in desolation, I feel like there's nothing I'd rather do less than become a priest, probably God wants me to be a priest. Of course, this is a gross simplification of a process that takes time and prayer, but this is the gist of it.

Again, too, we really need to pay attention: in the rules for the second week, we spoke about how the devil can actually cause consolation for a bad end. We need to be attentive, and see the pattern. If there's an *odd man out*, then something is up.

Lastly, remember, again, those dispositions we talked about earlier: this is the key for a good discernment.

[177] Third Time

This is a time of tranquility. One considers first for what purpose man is born, that is, for the praise of God our Lord and for the salvation of his soul. With the desire to attain this before his mind, he chooses as a means to this end a kind of life or state within the bounds of the Church that will be a help in the service of his Lord and for the salvation of his soul.

I said it is a time of tranquility, that is, a time when the soul is not agitated by different spirits, and has free and peaceful use of its natural powers.

** Ok, so, now, when there's no clear sign from God, and no consolation and desolation to work with, we come to reason. Remember that our reason, too, is a gift from God, and we need to use it well. Here we are saying that it is a time that is peaceful; there are no different movements of the soul, but that we rely on our natural powers, as it were.

Of course, it goes without saying that those dispositions we talked about earlier must be in place. Otherwise, we can't discern well.

What do we do? We set before ourselves the Principle and Foundation. That needs to be the guiding principle of our lives. It needs to be a *calm* time: if we're bounding through consolations and desolations, that's not the right time for the third mode of discernment.

(178) If a choice of a way of life has not been made in the first and second time, below are given:

Two Ways of Making a Choice of a Way of Life in the Third Time

First Way of Making a Good and Correct Choice of a Way of Life

This contains six points

First Point

This is to place before my mind the object with regard to which I wish to make a choice, for example, an office, or the reception or rejection of a benefice, or anything else that may be the object of a choice subject to change.

** What is it we're trying to discern between (again, they must both be good or at least indifferent in themselves)?

(179) Second Point

It is necessary to keep as my aim the end for which I am created, that is, the praise of God our Lord and the salvation of my soul. Besides this, I must be indifferent, without any inordinate attachment, so that I am not more inclined or disposed to accept the object in question than to relinquish it, nor to give it up than to accept it. I should be like a balance at equilibrium, without leaning to either side, that I might be ready to follow whatever I perceive is more for the glory and praise of God our Lord and for the salvation of my soul.

** Elsewhere, Ignatius recalls that, when he made decisions this way, he would "first empty himself of any passion or attachment which often confuses and obscures judgment so that it cannot discover as easily the radiance and light of the truth, and he placed himself, *without any fixed inclination or predetermined direction*, like *matter ready to take any shape*, in the hands of God our Lord."

(180) Third Point

I should beg God our Lord to deign to move my will, and to bring to my mind what I ought to do in this matter that would be more for His praise and glory. Then I should use the understanding to weigh the matter with care and fidelity, and make my choice in conformity with what would be more pleasing to His most holy will.

** Again, we need to remember that we ask from God a mind that sees clearly, and a will that will choose faithfully. We need to ask God for this grace.

(181) Fourth Point

This will be to weigh the matter by reckoning the number of advantages and benefits that would accrue to me if I had the proposed office or benefice solely for the praise of God our Lord and the salvation of my soul. On the other hand, I should weigh the disadvantages and dangers there might be in having it. I will do the same with the second alternative, that is, weigh the advantages and benefits as well as the disadvantages and danger of not having it.

** This means to make a chart. Literally. Write it out and see. As Ignatius' biographer put it: "*He considered with great attentiveness and weighed the reasons which presented themselves for one option and for the other, and the strength of each, and he compared them among themselves.*"

Option 1 +	Option 1 -
Option 2 +	Option 2 -

We're talking here about spiritual reasons, **BUT** sometimes when we make this list, we see that some reasons we've given aren't actually that good, and that others reflect something about us, that we're attached to this, that, or the other.

(182) Fifth Point

After I have gone over and pondered in this way every aspect of the matter in question, I will consider which alternative appears more reasonable. Then I must come to a decision in the matter under deliberation because of weightier motives presented to my reason, and not because of any sensual inclination.

(183) Sixth Point

After such a choice or decision, the one who has made it must turn with great diligence to prayer in the presence of God our Lord, and offer Him his choice that the Divine Majesty may deign to accept and confirm it if it is for His greater service and praise.

** His biographer described it this way: "Finally, Ignatius turned again to our Lord with what he had thought and what he had found, and recently placed it all before his divine gaze, beseeching him that he would give him light to choose what would be most pleasing to him."

Devotion, great tranquility, the absence of an opposed desire, and the sense of completion in the process could be the first indication of how God wishes to confirm the decision.

(184) Second Way of Making a Correct and Good Choice of a Way of Life

This contains four rules and a note

First Rule

The love that moves and causes one to choose must descend from above, that is, from the love of God, so that before one chooses he should perceive that the greater or less attachment for the object of his choice is solely because of His Creator and Lord.

** Again, this is the affirmation of the basic rules we talked, the basic setting for discernment.

(185) Second Rule

I should represent to myself a man whom I have never seen or known, and whom I would like to see practice all perfection. Then I should consider what I would tell him to do and choose for the greater glory of God our Lord and the greater perfection of his soul. I will do the same, and keep the rule I propose to others.

** This little exercise does two things: first, it helps us to view the situation more objectively, but Ignatius also knows that it's easier for us to give advice than to take it! Hence, oftentimes looking at things this way really helps us to decide what it is we should do.

(186) Third Rule

This is to consider what procedure and norm of action I would wish to have followed in making the present choice if I were at the moment of death. I will guide myself by this and make my decision entirely in conformity with it.

** Again, these things I'm decided between aren't evil and good, but all good or indifferent. Which would be a better decision at my moment of death?

(187) Fourth Rule

Let me picture and consider myself as standing in the presence of my judge on the last day, and reflect what decision in the present matter I would then wish to have made. I will choose now the rule of life that I would then wish to have observed, that on the day of judgment I may be filled with happiness and joy.

** Same comment as above. Which choice shows a deeper, more profound love of the One who first loved me?

(188) Note

Guided by the rules given above for my eternal salvation and peace, I will make my decision, and will offer it to God our Lord as directed in the sixth point of the First Way of Making a Choice of a Way of Life.

** Again, I must always put the final decision before the Lord.

189) Directions for the Amendment and Reformation of One's Way of Living in His State of Life

It must be borne in mind that some may be established in an ecclesiastical office, or may be married, and hence cannot make a choice of a state of life, or, in

matters that may be changed and hence are subject to a choice, they may not be very willing to make one.

It will be very profitable for such persons, whether they possess great wealth or not, in place of a choice, to propose a way for each to reform his manner of living in his state by setting before him the purpose of his creation and of his life and position, namely, the glory and praise of God our Lord and the salvation of his soul.

If he is really to attain this end, during the Exercises and during the consideration of the ways of making a choice as explained above, he will have to examine and weigh in all its details how large a household he should maintain, how he ought to rule and govern it, how he ought to teach its members by word and example. So too he should consider what part of his means should be used for his family and household, how much should be set aside for distribution to the poor and other pious purposes.

Let him desire and seek nothing except the greater praise and glory of God our Lord as the aim of all he does. For every one must keep in mind that in all that concerns the spiritual life his progress will be in proportion to his surrender of self-love and of his own will and interests.