



The Ignatian Way of Discerning God's Will. The Second Time for Making Election According to St. Ignatius of Loyola

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Abstract: Man was created to fulfill God's will by following Jesus Christ. St. Ignatius of Loyola (1591–1556), through his famous *Spiritual Exercises*, proposes a path of spiritual development in which the retreatant comes to know oneself, comes to deeply know Jesus Christ and desires to love and follow Him more in the given state of one's life. The *Spiritual Exercises* contain profoundly deep and effective Rules of Discernment of Spirits and Rules for Making a Good and Reasonable Election, aiding in the discernment of God's specific will. In the latter, St. Ignatius identifies three times, as if periods, in which a reasonable and good election can be made. The purpose of the article is to scientifically analyze the second time for election. As St. Ignatius states, this occurs "when much light and understanding from the experience of consolations and desolations and from experience in the discernment of different spirits." In the text, I use an analytical method and demonstrate that receiving much light and understanding from God regarding His will is accomplished by properly discerning spiritual consolations and desolations and by skillfully discerning the actions of different spirits, which is to be helped by an experienced spiritual director. In conclusion, I show that the Ignatian second time of election is immensely practical and helpful for anyone desiring to discern the specific will of God in order to follow Jesus Christ in the best way possible.

Keywords: spiritual discernment, election of God's will, *Spiritual Exercises*, rules of St. Ignatius of Loyola

Man was created in the image of God: "So God created mankind in his own image, in the image of God he created them" (Gen 1:27), that is, in the likeness of Jesus Christ: "For those God foreknew he also predestined to be conformed to the image of his Son" (Rom 8:29). Jesus Christ is the most perfect example of discerning and fulfilling God's will: "My food is to do the will of him who sent me" (John 4:34). Therefore, a Christian desires to discern and fulfill God's will in the likeness of Jesus Christ. The need for such discernment and obedience to God's will is revealed in the Scriptures of the Old and New Testaments, especially in the letters of St. Paul the Apostle,¹ various documents of the Church throughout the centuries,² as well as many saints

¹ Cf.: Gouvernaire, *La práctica*; Guillet, "Discernement des esprits" 1231–1247; Mazur, "Rozeznanie w Piśmie Świętym," 15–44; Ruiz Jurado, *Rozeznawanie duchowe*, 13–36; Schiavone, *Il discernimento evangelico oggi*; Tornos, "Fundamento bíblico-teológicos del discernimiento," 319–329. For more on discernment in Scripture, see: Mazur, "Rozeznanie w Piśmie Świętym," 15–44.

² Cf. Drzyżdżyk – Gilski, "Sobory pierwszego tysiąclecia," 65–80.

and blessed.³ Pope Francis also emphasizes that spiritual discernment is particularly necessary in today's Church in order to make proper decisions. In the apostolic exhortation *Gaudete et Exultate*, we read: "The gift of discernment has become all the more necessary today" (GE 167). Elsewhere in this document, he adds:

We are free, with the freedom of Christ. Still, he asks us to examine what is within us – our desires, anxieties, fears and questions – and what takes place all around us – "the signs of the times" – and thus to recognize the paths that lead to complete freedom. [...]. Discernment is necessary not only at extraordinary times, when we need to resolve grave problems and make crucial decisions. It is a means of spiritual combat for helping us to follow the Lord more faithfully. We need it at all times, to help us recognize God's timetable, lest we fail to heed the promptings of his grace and disregard his invitation to grow (GE 168–169).

One of the saints of the Church of Christ to whom God granted special grace in the field of spiritual discernment is St. Ignatius of Loyola (1491–1556). In his famous *Spiritual Exercises* (SE 115–322), he included both the Rules of Discernment of Spirits (cf. SE 313–336) and the Rules for Making a Good and Reasonable Election (cf. SE 169–189).⁴ In the rules concerning choice, he speaks of the so-called "Three times when a correct and good choice of a way of life may be made" (SE 175) Ignatian "three times of election" are like three periods, "three signs, or kinds of evidence, by which God shows his will"⁵; three privileged moments, "spiritual dispositions,"⁶ three "opportunities for decision-making,"⁷ or three ways in which God's will is manifested, "in which one can make an election" (SE 173) in accordance with God's will.

As St. Ignatius explains, the first time of election takes place "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" (SE 175). The second time of election is "when much light and understanding are derived through experience of desolations and consolations and discernment of diverse spirits" (SE 176). And the third time of election, called "peaceful," "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" (SE 177).

³ Cf.: Bardy, "Discernement des esprits," 1247–1254; Kasprzak, "Rozeznawanie duchów," 45–63; Pegon, "Discernement des esprits," 1266–1281; Ruiz Jurado, *Rozeznawanie duchowe*, 71–147; Vandenbroucke, "Discernement des esprits," 1254–1266. For more on the need for spiritual discernment, see: Królikowski, "Rozeznanie woli Bożej," 5–24, esp. 7–10.

⁴ Cf. Królikowski, *Jak dokonać wyboru*; Sampaio Costa, *Los tiempos de elección*.

⁵ Ivens, *Understanding the Spiritual Exercises*, 128.

⁶ Iparraguirre, *Introduzione*, 74.

⁷ Lefrank, *Przemiana w Chrystusa*, 253.

In this article, I undertake an analysis of the second time of election, during which a person wishing to follow Christ receives from him “much light and understanding” regarding God’s will. This occurs through two integrally related spiritual processes, that is, first, “through experience of desolations and consolations” and second, through proper discernment of spirits ministering to these states, that is, “through discernment of diverse spirits” (SE 176).

1. Spiritual Consolations and Desolations as Help in Discerning God’s Will

St. Ignatius lists the first time of election as the most certain time for discerning God’s will. It is at that time that God, our Lord, “moves and attracts the will that a devout soul without hesitation, or the possibility of hesitation, follows what has been manifested to it” (SE 175). However, if a person seeking to discern what God’s will is could not find a basis for making an election in it (in the first time), as we read in the Ignatian Directory for the *Spiritual Exercises*, they should proceed to the second time,⁸ in which “much light and understanding are derived through experience of desolations and consolations” (SE 176).

The purpose of the second time of election is to obtain from God spiritual certainty, great “light and understanding” regarding His most holy will. Among the means to achieve this goal are the experienced states of spiritual consolation and desolation. These states of spiritual consolation and desolation serve as a kind of language of communication between the God and the believing person. St. Ignatius emphasizes that through these spiritual states, one can receive “much light and understanding” (SE 176) regarding God’s will during the second time of election. He similarly states in his first Directory for the *Spiritual Exercises*. Ignatius points out that the second way of making election is to know one’s vocation through the experience of consolation and desolation. He advises the retreatant to pay attention to what stirs within them during consolation and desolation while contemplating Christ. Therefore, it is important to provide a clear explanation of what spiritual consolation and desolation entail.⁹ Understanding these spiritual states, recognizing them within oneself, and interpreting them correctly are key elements in the process of spiritual discernment and making decisions in accordance with God’s will.

⁸ Cf. Palmer, *On Giving*, I, no. 10.

⁹ Cf. Palmer, *On Giving*, I, no. 18; see also no. 11–12.

1.1. Spiritual Consolation

St. Ignatius experienced spiritual consolations many times in his life, especially after his conversion. His testimonies regarding these spiritual consolations and divine visitations are present especially in his *Autobiography*¹⁰ and *Spiritual Diary*.¹¹ These mystical experiences aided him in providing an adequate description of the state of spiritual consolation. He does so, among other instances, in the *Spiritual Exercises*.

Spiritual Consolation. I call it consolation when an interior movement is aroused in the soul, by which it is inflamed with love of its Creator and Lord, and as a consequence, can love no creature on the face of the earth for its own sake, but only in the Creator of them all. It is likewise consolation when one sheds tears that move to the love of God, whether it be because of sorrow for sins, or because of the sufferings of Christ our Lord, or for any other reason that is immediately directed to the praise and service of God. Finally, I call consolation every increase of faith, hope, and love, and all interior joy that invites and attracts to what is heavenly and to the salvation of one's soul by filling it with peace and quiet in its Creator and Lord (SE 316).¹²

Elsewhere in the *Exercises*, St. Ignatius adds that “it is characteristic of God and His Angels, when they act upon the soul, to give true happiness and spiritual joy, and to banish all the sadness and disturbances which are caused by the enemy” (SE 329).¹³ “God alone can give consolation to the soul without any previous cause. It belongs solely to the Creator to come into a soul, to leave it, to act upon it, to draw it wholly to the love of His Divine Majesty” (SE 330).¹⁴

In his first Directory for the *Spiritual Exercises*, he points out that consolation is spiritual joy, love, hope placed in heavenly things, tears, in addition to any inner stirrings that make the soul feel consolation in God.¹⁵ All these feelings come from God and are gifts of the Holy Spirit.¹⁶

In a letter to Sister Teresa Rejadell, written in Venice on June 18, 1536, St. Ignatius lists the fruits of spiritual consolation. According to him, true consolation

¹⁰ Tylenda, *A Pilgrim's Journey*.

¹¹ Decloux, *The Spiritual Diary*.

¹² We recognize and judge spiritual consolation by its salvific effects: true joy, peace, inner rest, etc. Cf.: Bertrand, “J'appelle consolation...,” 335–348; Corella, “La consolación en los Ejercicios,” 319–337; Fiorito, *Discernimiento y lucha espiritual*; Kotlewski, “Pocieszenie duchowe,” 119–133; Mądrzyk, “Przyczyny i właściwe postawy,” 169–181; Molina Molina, “Discernir la presencia,” 229–240; Zollner, *Trost – Zunahme an Hoffnung*; Zollner, “Core, Criteria and Consequences,” 52–65.

¹³ Cf. Corella, “Consolación,” 413–425.

¹⁴ Cf. Gallagher, *Pocieszenie duchowe*.

¹⁵ Cf. Palmer, *On Giving*, I, no. 18; see also no. 11–12.

¹⁶ Cf. Palmer, *On Giving*, I, no. 11.

[...] casts out all disturbance and draws us into total love of the Lord. There are some whom the Lord lights up in such consolation, and there are others to whom he uncovers many secrets, and more later. With this divine consolation, all hardships are ultimately pleasure, all fatigues rest. For anyone who proceeds with this interior fervour, warmth and consolation, there is no load so great that it does not seem light to them, nor any penance or other hardship so great that it is not very sweet. This shows to us and opens the path with the direction we are to follow, and the opposite we are to avoid.¹⁷

Experiencing spiritual consolation, which is a gift of the Holy Spirit, enables the recognition and fulfillment of God's will. That is why St. Ignatius emphasizes that spiritual consolation "shows to us and opens the path with the direction we are to follow, and the opposite we are to avoid."¹⁸ A similar role in discerning and fulfilling God's will is played by the state of spiritual desolation, which needs to be discerned correctly.

1.2. Spiritual Desolation

In addition to spiritual consolations, St. Ignatius also experienced many spiritual desolations, torments of the spirit, and scruples, especially during his stay in Manresa, as testified in his *Autobiography*.¹⁹ Through these painful and purifying spiritual experiences, he understood how God could use them to better prepare a person for discerning and fulfilling God's will. That is why, in describing the second time of choice, he emphasizes that "much light and understanding are derived" regarding God's will not only "through experience of consolations" but also through "desolations" (*SE* 176). In this context, Father Jérôme Nadal (1507–1580), one of Ignatius' early companions and close collaborators, as well as an excellent connoisseur of his spirit, provides a general principle that "if someone experiences consolation in something and later encounters desolation, the latter often confirms the former."²⁰

How does St. Ignatius describe the state of spiritual desolation? In the *Spiritual Exercises*, we read that spiritual desolation is the "darkness of soul, turmoil of spirit, inclination to what is low and earthly, restlessness rising from many disturbances and temptations which lead to want of faith, want of hope, want of love. The soul is wholly slothful, tepid, sad, and separated, as it were, from its Creator and Lord" (*SE* 317).²¹ During this time, a person experiences "the sadness and disturbances

¹⁷ Ignatius of Loyola, "Steps in Discernment," 137.

¹⁸ Ignatius of Loyola, "Steps in Discernment," 137.

¹⁹ Cf. Tylenda, *A Pilgrim's Journey*, 47–52.

²⁰ Nadal, *Epistolae*, 644.

²¹ Scientific commentaries on the state of spiritual desolation described by St. Ignatius, taking into account the spiritual, psychological, social, or cultural dimension, can be found in: Aufavre, "Depression and

which are caused by the enemy. It is characteristic of the evil one to fight against such happiness and consolation by proposing fallacious reasonings, subtleties, and continual deceptions” (SE 329).²²

In the first Directory to the *Spiritual Exercises*, St. Ignatius adds that spiritual desolation, being a gift of the evil spirit, is as opposite to consolation as war is to peace, sadness is to spiritual joy, hope placed in lowly things is the opposite of hope in lofty things; similarly, as earthly love opposes lofty love, dryness opposes tears, and the wandering of the mind in lowly things opposes the elevation of the mind.²³ According to him, spiritual desolation entails sadness, lack of hope, lack of love, dryness, etc.²⁴

On the other hand, in the aforementioned letter to Sister Teresa Rejadell, St. Ignatius explains the essence of spiritual desolation as follows:

[...] our old enemy places before us every possible obstacle to divert us from what has been begun, attacking us very much. He acts completely counter to the first lesson, often plunging us into sadness without our knowing why we are sad. Nor can we pray with any devotion, or contemplate, or even speak and hear of things about God Our Lord with any interior savour or relish. And not stopping there, if he finds we are weak and let ourselves be subjected to such tainted thoughts, he brings us to think that we have been completely forgotten by God, and we end up with the impression that we are completely separated from Our Lord. Everything we have done, everything we were wanting to do, none of it counts. In this way, he tries to make us lose trust in everything. But we can see from all this what is the cause of so much fear and weakness on our part: at one stage we spent too long a time with our eyes fixed on our own miseries, and subjected ourselves to his deceptive lines of thought.²⁵

Since, according to the second time of election, discernment and election of God’s will be accomplished through “much light and understanding [which] are derived through experience of desolations and consolations and discernment of diverse spirits” (SE 176), it is important to properly experience spiritual desolation and pay attention to what stirs the God’s impulse.²⁶ Therefore, not only spiritual consolation but also desolation is a crucial spiritual experience through which God can reveal

Spiritual Desolation,” 47–56; Corella, “La desolación espiritual,” 325–344; Font – Guillén, “Desolación,” 570–580; García Domínguez, “Desolación,” 359–375; García Domínguez, “Discernir la desolación,” 93–96; Sampaio Costa, *Los tiempos de elección*, 121–132; Tornos, “Dimensiones culturales de la desolación,” 377–388; Wielgus, “Strapienie duchowe a depresja,” 135–147.

²² Cf. Homa, “Jak działa Bóg,” 50–68; Teixidor, “La primera de las reglas,” 28–44.

²³ Cf. Palmer, *On Giving*, I, no. 12.

²⁴ Cf. Palmer, *On Giving*, I, no. 18.

²⁵ Ignatius of Loyola, “Steps in Discernment,” 138.

²⁶ Cf. Palmer, *On Giving*, I, no. 18.

His most sacred will. The terms “consolations” and “desolations” are used in the plural because “the Second Time is a process not a single event. Ultimately the decision is made on the criterion of tested consolation, but the process can be a difficult and stressful one, for election is a moment of conversion, entailing change, relinquishment and cost, and these are liable to produce desolate reactions. Working through these is an important element of the process.”²⁷ That is why St. Ignatius expects the one giving the *Exercises* to always ask the retreatant not only about consolations but also about desolations. We read in the first Directory to the *Spiritual Exercises* that the one giving the *Exercises* should always ask the retreatant about consolation and desolation and about what they experienced within themselves during the exercise or exercises performed since the last conversation with them.²⁸

The aim of the second time of election is to receive much light and understanding of God’s will, both “through experience of desolations and consolations” and through the experience of “discernment of diverse spirits” (SE 176).

2. Discerning Different Spirits to Understand God’s Will

According to the Ignatian second time of election, a Christian who desires to discern and fulfill God’s will, following the example of Jesus Christ, receives “much light and understanding” in the Holy Spirit not only “through experience of desolations and consolations” but also through proper discernment of these states and the spirits acting in them, “through experience of [...] discernment of diverse spirits” (SE 176). Particularly helpful in this regard are the Ignatian Rules for the Discernment of Spirits (cf. SE 313–336), which, as St. Ignatius emphasizes in their title, “[are] for understanding to some extent the different movements produced in the soul and for recognizing those that are good to admit them, and those that are bad, to reject them” (SE 313).²⁹ All these rules are divided into two series. The rules of the first series (cf. SE 313–327) are “more suited to the first week” [of the *Exercises*] (SE 313),³⁰ while the rules of the second series (cf. SE 328–336) “[are] for understanding the different movements produced in the soul. They serve for a more accurate discernment of spirits and are more suitable for the second week” [of the *Exercises*] (SE 328).³¹ In both series of rules, we find not only the aforementioned description

²⁷ Ivens, *Understanding the Spiritual Exercises*, 137.

²⁸ Cf. Palmer, *On Giving*, I, no. 5.

²⁹ A more extensive analysis of the title of these rules can be found in: Królikowski, “Tytuł ignacjańskich Reguł,” 41–66.

³⁰ A scientific analysis of these rules, specific to the so-called first week of the *Spiritual Exercises*, can be found in: Królikowski, *Rozeznawanie duchowe*.

³¹ Cf. Królikowski, “Dla większego rozeznania duchów,” 37–50.

of spiritual consolation and desolation and tactics of different spirits but also a profound analysis of different spiritual stirrings, their causes, and invaluable guidance for their proper experience in order to ultimately make an election in accordance with God's will. This entire spiritual process forms the foundation of the second time of election.³²

2.1. Causes and Proper Attitudes During Spiritual Desolation

In the first series of rules, St. Ignatius lists three causes of spiritual desolation: (1) due to our own faults and negligence, (2) as a test, and (3) to make us aware that everything is His free grace and not our own merit:

The principal reasons why we suffer from desolation are three:

The first is because we have been tepid and slothful or negligent in our exercises of piety, and so through our own fault spiritual consolation has been taken away from us.

The second reason is because God wishes to try us, to see how much we are worth, and how much we will advance in His service and praise when left without the generous reward of consolations and signal favors.

The third reason is because God wishes to give us a true knowledge and understanding of ourselves, so that we may have an intimate perception of the fact that it is not within our power to acquire and attain great devotion, intense love, tears, or any other spiritual consolation; but that all this is the gift and grace of God our Lord. God does not wish us to build on the property of another, to rise up in spirit in a certain pride and vainglory and attribute to ourselves the devotion and other effects of spiritual consolation (SE 322).³³

How should one behave during spiritual desolation? The fundamental principle of behavior is not to make any changes regarding previous decisions during that time.

St. Ignatius explains it as follows: "In time of desolation we should never make any change, but remain firm and constant in the resolution and decision which guided us the day before the desolation, or in the decision to which we adhered in the preceding consolation. For just as in consolation the good spirit guides and counsels us, so in desolation the evil spirit guides and counsels. Following his counsels, we can never find the way to a right decision" (SE 318).³⁴

Based on this fundamental principle of behavior during spiritual desolation, St. Ignatius recommends three subsequent attitudes that are proper responses in

³² Sampaio Costa, "Elección," 728.

³³ Cf. Corella, "La desolación espiritual," 325–344.

³⁴ Cf.: Biel, "Jak się zachować," 147–156; García Bonasa, "En tiempo de desolación," 227–234; Pietrasina, "Przyczyny i właściwe postawy," 149–167.

such a spiritual situation. The first one is his recommendation to change oneself, one's attitude, by showing courage, fidelity, resourcefulness, and resisting the suggestions of the evil spirit, armed with prayer, penance, and examination of conscience, to determine whether the desolation is by any chance due to the fact that "we have been tepid and slothful or negligent in our exercises of piety" (SE 322). Although "in desolation we must never change our former resolutions," "it will be very advantageous to intensify our activity against the desolation. We can insist more upon prayer, upon meditation, and on much examination of ourselves. We can make an effort in a suitable way to do some penance" (SE 319).³⁵

The second proper attitude is to realize that a given spiritual desolation can be a spiritual trial that, with the help of God's grace, can be survived victoriously: "When one is in desolation, he should be mindful that God has left him to his natural powers to resist the different agitations and temptations of the enemy in order to try him. He can resist with the help of God, which always remains, though he may not clearly perceive it. For though God has taken from him the abundance of fervor and overflowing love and the intensity of His favors, nevertheless, he has sufficient grace for eternal salvation" (SE 320).

The third proper attitude towards spiritual desolation is to persevere in patience and hope that consolation will soon be experienced: "When one is in desolation, he should strive to persevere in patience. This reacts against the vexations that have overtaken him. Let him consider, too, that consolation will soon return, and in the meantime, he must diligently use the means against desolation" (SE 321).³⁶

Spiritual direction is of great help in accurately discerning spiritual desolations, their causes, and adopting the appropriate attitude during their duration. In spiritual direction, a person who discerns God's will receive "much light and understanding" (SE 176) from God, which enables them to accept and fulfill God's will. Similar spiritual fruits can be achieved when one discerns states of spiritual consolation correctly.

2.2. Causes and Proper Attitudes during Spiritual Consolation

St. Ignatius emphasizes that the primary cause of spiritual consolation is the God Himself and the good spirits. In the first rule of the second series of the Rules for Discernment of Spirits, we read: "It is characteristic of God and His Angels, when they act upon the soul, to give true happiness and spiritual joy, and to banish all the sadness and disturbances which are caused by the enemy" (SE 329).³⁷ In the

³⁵ Cf. Guillén, "El valor pedagógico," 345–357.

³⁶ St. Ignatius gave similar advice and guidance to Sister Teresa Rejadell in letters written from Venice in 1536. Cf. Ignatius of Loyola, "Steps in Discernment," 136–138.

³⁷ Cf.: Corella, "La consolación en los Ejercicios," 319–337; Fiorito, *Discernimiento y lucha espiritual*.

second rule, he adds: “God alone can give consolation to the soul without any previous cause. It belongs solely to the Creator to come into a soul, to leave it, to act upon it, to draw it wholly to the love of His Divine Majesty” (SE 330).³⁸

Although consolation without any preceding cause comes directly from God, it is still accompanied by certain dangers and the need for spiritual discernment. Specifically, St. Ignatius distinguishes two periods within this consolation – the actual time of the ongoing consolation and the period that follows. In the second time, there is a risk of yielding to illusions rather than to the will of God. St. Ignatius writes as follows:

When consolation is without previous cause, as was said, there can be no deception in it, since it can proceed from God our Lord only. But a spiritual person who has received such a consolation must consider it very attentively, and must cautiously distinguish the actual time of the consolation from the period which follows it. At such a time the soul is still fervent and favored with the grace and after-effects of the consolation which has passed. In this second period the soul frequently forms various resolutions and plans which are not granted directly by God our Lord. They may come from our own reasoning on the relations of our concepts and on the consequences of our judgments, or they may come from the good or evil spirit. Hence, they must be carefully examined before they are given full approval and put into execution (SE 336).³⁹

The second cause of consolation can be both a good and an evil angel, but both acting for opposite purposes: “If a cause precedes, both the good angel and the evil spirit can give consolation to a soul, but for a quite different purpose. The good angel consoles for the progress of the soul, that it may advance and rise to what is more perfect. The evil spirit consoles for purposes that are the contrary, and that afterwards he might draw the soul to his own perverse intentions and wickedness” (SE 331).⁴⁰

The danger of “consolation” that the evil spirit can give arises from the fact that it has the power to transform itself into an angel of light: “It is a mark of the evil spirit to assume the appearance of an angel of light [cf. 2 Cor 11:14]. He begins by suggesting thoughts that are suited to a devout soul, and ends by suggesting his own. For example, he will suggest holy and pious thoughts that are wholly in conformity with

³⁸ A comprehensive analysis of spiritual consolation “consolation to the soul without any previous cause” (SE 330) can be found in: García de Castro, “Consolación sin causa precedente,” 425–428; García de Castro, *El Dios emergente*; Gil, *La consolación sin*; Gouvernaire, *Quand Dieu entre*; Kotlewski, “Pocieszenie bez uprzedniej przyczyny,” 69–82; Mendiboure, “La consolation,” 71–84; Sampaio Costa, *Los tiempos de elección*, 265–287.

³⁹ More on this topic in: Dyrek, *Poznać, wybrać i ukochać Jezusa*, 65–86; Homa, “Właściwe przeżywanie,” 189–208.

⁴⁰ Cf. Mądrzyk, “Pocieszenie duchowe,” 83–98.

the sanctity of the soul. Afterwards, he will endeavor little by little to end by drawing the soul into his hidden snares and evil designs" (*SE* 332).⁴¹

So, what should one do to properly experience spiritual consolations and discern God's will through them? First and foremost, one must examine the course of thoughts associated with a particular consolation – their beginning, middle, and end. St. Ignatius speaks about this as follows:

We must carefully observe the whole course of our thoughts. If the beginning and middle and end of the course of thoughts are wholly good and directed to what is entirely right, it is a sign that they arc from the good angel. But the course of thoughts suggested to us may terminate in something evil, or distracting, or less good than the soul had formerly proposed to do. Again, it may end in what weakens the soul, or disquiets it; or by destroying the peace, tranquillity, and quiet which it had before, it may cause disturbance to the soul. These things arc a clear sign that the thoughts are proceeding from the evil spirit, the enemy of our progress and eternal salvation (*SE* 333).⁴²

In this context, St. Ignatius wrote to Sister Teresa Rejadell (June 18, 1536): "the enemy is making you upset [...] in the sense of separating you from His greater service and your greater tranquillity. The first of these ways is that he insinuates a false humility, the second is that he introduces an extreme fear of God, in which you remain too long and become too occupied."⁴³ As we can see, the accompanying person, that is, the spiritual director, plays a very important role in properly discerning the actions of different spirits. It is their task to assist in recognizing the effects of the good and evil spirits.⁴⁴

If we discern that a particular "consolation" did not come from the God but from the evil spirit, then St. Ignatius advises us to reflect on the entire course of our thoughts and consider how it happened, so that we may better guard ourselves against future dangers:

When the enemy of our human nature has been detected and recognized by the trail of evil marking his course and by the wicked end to which he leads us, it will be profitable for one who has been tempted to review immediately the whole course of the temptation. Let him consider the series of good thoughts, how they arose, how the evil one gradually

⁴¹ Cf.: Augustyn, "Zaszczyt doznawania pokus," 99–108; González-Quevedo, "Quando o mal se disfarça de bem," 84–96; Mendiboure, "La tentation," 229–238.

⁴² The importance of studying the course of thought, as discussed by St. Ignatius, but also as early as the 4th century by Evagrius Ponticus, is brought closer by Piotr Ślabek ("Zwracać uwagę na przebieg myśli," 109–141).

⁴³ Ignatius of Loyola, "Steps in Discernment," 136. Cf. Guerrero, "La práctica del discernimiento espiritual," 187–210.

⁴⁴ Cf. Palmer, *On Giving*, I, no. 19.

attempted to make him step down from the state of spiritual delight and joy in which he was, till finally he drew him to his wicked designs. The purpose of this review is that once such an experience has been understood and carefully observed, we may guard ourselves for the future against the customary deceits of the enemy (*SE* 333).⁴⁵

The Ignatian Rules for Discernment of Spirits, their proper understanding and application, are excellent tools that effectively facilitate discerning God's will. Through them, the discernment person can receive "much light and understanding" from God regarding His most holy will.

Conclusions

A believer in Christ who desires to imitate Him in daily life and discern His specific will can benefit greatly from using the Ignatian Rules for Making a Good and Reasonable Election. The Three Times of Election contained in them facilitate making "a correct and good choice" (*SE* 175) in accordance with the most holy will of the God. In the second time of election, which is analyzed, "much light and understanding are derived through experience of desolations and consolations and discernment of diverse spirits" (*SE* 176). St. Ignatius proposes in it an incredibly clear and fruitful method for discerning God's will. The application of the Ignatian Rules for Making a Good and Reasonable Election, including the second time of election, assumes the assistance of a companion in this process, the spiritual support of a mature and experienced spiritual director. St. Ignatius provides a series of guidelines for the spiritual director, among others in the Annotations to the *Spiritual Exercises* (cf. *SE* 6, 7, 8, 9, 10, 12, 14, 15, 16, 17).⁴⁶ With his help, the person discerning God's will better understand the states of consolation and desolation and properly assesses the different spirits working in him, resulting in having "much light and understanding" regarding the most holy will of God.⁴⁷

⁴⁵ Cf. Augustyn, "Retrospekcja grzechu," 153–164.

⁴⁶ A scholarly analysis of these Annotations can be found in: Królikowski, *Adnotacje do Ćwiczeń duchowych*.

⁴⁷ For more on Ignatian spiritual direction, see in: Charmot, "Rozpoznawanie duchowe," 293–299; García Domínguez, *La entrevista en los Ejercicios espirituales*; Królikowski, *Kierownictwo duchowe*; Špidlik, "Ignacjański model," 189–202.

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