

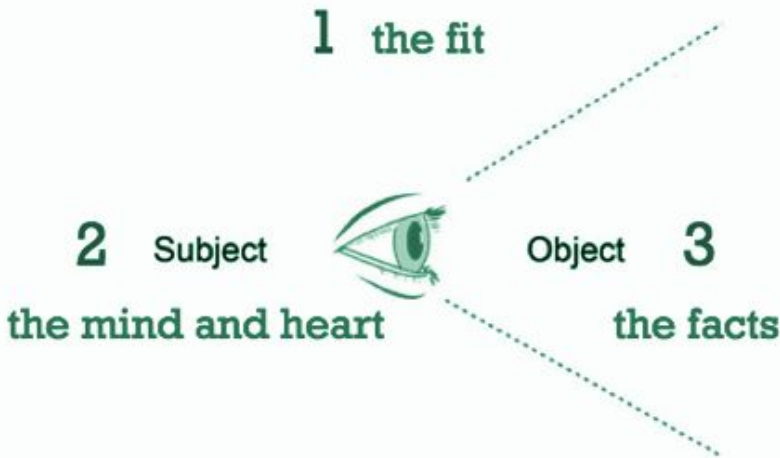
DISCERNMENT - HANDOUT

DISCERNMENT AND THE THREE TIMES OF ELECTION

Whenever a decision is to be made, there is an interaction between the person who is making the election (Subject) and what the Object of his choice might be.

Ignatius has three times of making a decision (election) that come from different directions:

1. The Fit (between the subject and the object)
2. The mind and heart (the subject thinks about himself and reactions)
3. The facts (looking at the external reality/object)



The First Time of Election: The Fit

In the first time of election, it just happens. Explaining the first time is quite hard because we have got very little evidence about it, but Ignatius seems to think that there's a point when you say "This option appears and I am completely incapable of doubting that I want to follow it." That's closely his language there. The soul follows what it is shown without being able to doubt.

- "when God our Lord so moves and attracts the will, that without doubting, or being able to doubt, the devout soul ... follows what is shown it, as St. Paul and St. Matthew did in following Christ our Lord". (Exx 175)
- "... there appeared to him meat for the eating, as if he could see it with his bodily eyes, without any desire for this having been there before. And together with this there also came upon him a great assent of the will that, from then on, he should eat meat. And although he could still remember his intention from earlier, he was incapable of being doubtful about this: rather he could not but make up his mind that he had to eat meat (Autobiography 27)

- If all by a common inspiration should choose someone without waiting for the methodical voting, let that one be the superior general. For the Holy Spirit, who has moved them to such an election, supplies for all methods and arrangements. (VIII.6.5 [700])

The Second Time of Election: The Mind and Heart

Before going down the spirits language of consolation/desolation too quickly, think more about Saint Ignatius readings his books on his sick bed. He has got the data coming to him, he is a sensible and reflective person and he notices that there is a difference in the reactions and a difference in the kinds of influences that these books have on him. It is that kind of reality, noticing what fits and what doesn't fit.

What is specific to the second time is precisely that we are looking at what goes on in ourselves as we confront the data.

- ... when enough light and knowledge is received by experience of consolations and desolations, and by the experience of the discernment of various spirits. (Exx 176)
- On this journey the pilgrim had, as it were, a representation of when they took Christ, although this was not a vision like the others. He was taken through three big streets, and he went with no sadness, rather with happiness and contentment. It was his custom to speak, whoever the person might be, using the word vos, having this as a matter of devotion, in that Christ and the apostles etc. used to speak in this way. Going thus through these streets it occurred to his imagination that it would be good to desist from that custom at that juncture, and address the captain as Sir - this together with some fears of the tortures that they could give him etc.. But when he recognized it was a temptation, 'Since that's what it is', he said, 'I won't call him Sir, nor do him any reverence, nor doff my cap at him'. (Autobiography 52)

The Third Time of Election: The Facts

The third time of election is simply looking at the particular option and trying to see what would that lead to. It is a way of thinking about the decision while focusing not so much on how I am responding but on what is actually out there. In the third time, there are no spiritual movements and the focus is placed on the object of the choice, weighing the advantages and disadvantages of following each option "for only the praise of God and the salvation of my soul".

- The third time is quiet, when one considers, first, for what man is born -- namely, to praise God our Lord and save his soul -- and desiring this chooses as means a life or state within the limits of the Church, in order that he may be helped in the service of his Lord and the salvation of his Soul. I said time of quiet, when the soul is not acted on by various spirits, and uses its natural powers freely and tranquilly. (Exx 177)
- To consider, reckoning up, how many advantages and utilities follow for me from holding the proposed office or benefice for only the praise of God our Lord and the salvation of my soul, and, to consider likewise, on the contrary, the disadvantages and dangers which there are in having it. Doing the same in the second part, that is, looking at the advantages and utilities there are in not having it, and likewise, on the contrary, the disadvantages and dangers in not having the same. (Exx 181)

Examples:

- One said: 'It seems that, on account of our failures and sins, the words "religious" or "obedience" have unseemly connotations among the Christian people' ... others spoke to the point in other ways ... explaining the disadvantages which occurred to them as reasons against obedience. On the next day we argued for the opposite side of the question. ... 'Obedience issues in an uninterrupted life of heroic deeds and in heroic virtues. ... Nothing so casts down all pride and arrogance as does obedience'. (Deliberation of the First Fathers)
- After each one has seriously pondered his opinion and commended it to God our Lord, he ought to put it in writing. And after he has spoken it he may place the written paper in the centre, that those who desire to see it may state what they think in the following session. (VIII.7.3)

In the Spiritual Exercises, Ignatius tries to help people undergoing this third type of election answer the question: "How do I know that I did not get it wrong?" He says things like "Imagine what I would have wanted to have done on my deathbed". That is a way of distancing yourself from any possible things that might be quite noisy at the moment, which really do not matter.

Note: There are some who think the second and third times of election contrast (heart/head or faith/reason). There are different opinions about the relative value of these distinctions. And there are different opinions about whether one is enough, or whether you need all three.

Helpful considerations: taking care during the three times of election

"Therefore the superior general, or whoever holds this authority from him, ought to bestow much careful thought on missions of this kind in order that that procedure may always be used which is conducive to the greater service of God and the universal good". (Const. 618)

Taking care during the first time of election:

Although the first time has often been treated as marginal or even near-miraculous and many commentators would simply ignore it, sharing the choice with a superior or spiritual director helps confirm that one did not get it wrong. In his Autobiography (27), Ignatius does 'take care' about a "first time" choice and check his abandonment of vegetarianism with his confessor.

"And when he recounted this afterwards to his confessor, the confessor was telling him he should consider whether perhaps this was a temptation. But he, examining the matter well, was incapable of ever being doubtful about it."

Ignatius reasserts the claim, not because he has changed his mind about meat, or because he has thought about the bad spirit, but because he is psychologically incapable of feeling doubt.

Taking care during the second time of election:

The second time involves learning to perceive and know the different spirits, evaluate these influences, accepting the good and rejecting/discounting the bad (Exx 313). A good question to ask during a second time election is: 'Is this really me, or am I being pushed in a certain way?'

Consider the following example:

Anne, a lay woman in her fifties, had long been devoted to the rosary. She spent much time during a weekend retreat connecting with Mary at the foot of the cross. During one period of prayer, she imagined Mary going home from Calvary with John. On the way, they saw a woman at the side of the road distraught. Mary went across to comfort the woman, and just sat there with her arms around her, amid much remonstrance from John, who was suggesting that she had had quite enough trauma for one day. 'But don't you see', Mary had said: 'This is the mother of Judas. She too has lost her son today. She needs our help—perhaps she had better come with us.'

Is Anne feeling good a real consolation? Answering this question requires asking: What kind of tendency is the experience confronting?

YES	NO
<p>Anne had been in her early life a successful career woman, but had, after taking a break to bring up children, become a social worker. Though she and her family were conscious that she was earning a great deal less than she otherwise might, she found real fulfilment in her work. Her children noticed that she wasn't around for them as much as their friends' mums were, but they too were aware that something special was happening for their mother.</p>	<p>When Anne was 17, her father died. Her mother went into psychological collapse, and subsequently contracted multiple sclerosis. There had been no alternative but for Anne to stay at home and look after her mother, who was very demanding, and resisted 'having strangers in the house'. She had finally died when Anne was 35. All that had kept Anne from desperation was her faith; she rather idolized a succession of young curates that had come to her parish.</p>

Taking care during the third time of election:

During this time, we are invited to take care of undue influence from others and watch out for inappropriate self-interest. This can be achieved by various ways:

- Prayer – that God should move my will and put in my soul' what is more conducive to salvation (Exx 180)
- The pros and cons of both possible options (Exx 181)
- Imagining someone else in my position, myself when dying, myself on the day of judgment (Exx 185-187)
- Supplementing the reflection by anything else you can think of, such as appropriate research regarding the facts ...

During deliberations in common, various rules of procedure help keep the deliberation calm. At some point for meetings, Ignatius suggests that rather than let everybody talk in the order that the spirit moves them (or have the discussion carried out by certain charismatic persons), actually to go around in a fixed order (by order of age or seniority, or surname) as a way to limit undue influences from others. Fathers at the Congregation currently speak in a fixed order as well. For more on Discernment in common refer to the Module 3.