



# An Overview of Discernment

Ignatian Spirituality Course, Year 2

*What God is waiting for is not a right conclusion about a matter but for our suppleness in falling into his hands for him to work in us.*

Benedicta Ward, *Way Supplement No. 64* (Spring 1989) p. 14

*“I think most serious students of the Exercises would agree with me,” he said, “that the real heart of what is going on there is that although they are exercises, the whole point of them is to create a receptivity and openness; and what happens in that openness is the principle thing”*

Daniel O’Hanlon SJ in Jacob Needleman, *Lost Christianity*, p. 146

# Prayer

Preparatory prayer [46]

Centre

Ground

Open to God

Body

Review [77]

Breathe

# Discernment in the *Exercises*

Annotations [1*f*]

## **Key Meditations**

## **Election**

First Principle and  
Foundation [23]

Two Standards  
[136*f*]

Limits of  
discernment  
[169*f*]

Examen [24*f*]

Three Classes of  
Person [149*f*]

3 Times for Choice  
[175*f*]

Review of Prayer [77]

Three Kinds of  
Humility [166*f*]

Amendment of life  
[189]

Rules for Discernment  
of Spirits [313*f*]

# Annotations (1)

*Just look at the title of the **Exercises**. These are **exercises** in order to **dispose** us to be free of attachments. The exercises are ways to reveal to yourself all the ways you are attached, helping you gradually to loosen your clinging to all sorts of things, with the confidence that that is much more effective than simply directing you to, say, acts of love.*

Needleman, p. 148

# Annotations (2)

[6] if there are no movements of spirits

[7] when in desolation and tempted

[8/9] when to give First Week Rules (“tempted grossly”)

[10] when to give Second Week Rules (“tempted under the appearance of good”)

[14] when “going on in consolation and in great fervour”

[15] to be “as a balance at equilibrium”

[16] dealing with attachments

[17] openness with the director about movements of spirits

# First Principle and Foundation [23]

## **Aim**

*“[We are] created to praise, reverence, and serve God our Lord, and by this means to save [our] soul.”*

Repeated references to this, e.g. “It is necessary to keep as my aim the end for which I am created...” [179]

## **Indifference**

*“Therefore, we must make ourselves indifferent to all related things...”*

freedom from attachment

this is *the* stance that allows discernment



*“Indifference,” he continued, “is not a very good word in the English language. In the Ignatian sense, it does not mean a kind of blasé or uncaring attitude. It refers to non-attachment, to not being ruled by your own self-centred desires.”*

Needleman, p. 150

# Examen

## **Particular Examen** [24*f*]

attending to a habit we wish to form

## **General Examen** [43*f*]

a habit of daily discernment cultivating a moment by moment attentiveness to God

# Review of Prayer [77]

Hour by hour learning of how I pray best

Noticing how God is drawing me to God's self

Trial and error / trial and success

Noticing movements of the spirits and spiritual appreciation for *Repetition* [62]

*For any self to be free to enable another's freedom means that it must be in some way aware of the actuality, not only the possibility, of a **regard beyond desire** – and so of its own being as a proper cause of joy, as a gift.*

(Rowan Williams, *Lost Icons*, p. 161)

*Once having understood Hell, researched it, so to speak—particularly your own individual Hell—you could decide against going there or creating that. You could aim elsewhere. You could, in fact, devote your life to this.*

Jordan Peterson, *12 Rules for Life*, p. 63

# Key Meditations

*“While continuing to contemplate His life, let us begin to investigate and ask in what kind of life or in what state his Divine Majesty wishes to make use of us.” [135]*

**Two Standards** [136f]: knowledge

**Three Classes of Person** [149f]: indifference

**Three Kinds of Humility** [166f]: love

# Election: limits

## **Reminder** [169]

The end for which I am created

Freedom from inordinate attachments

## **Limits of discernment** [170*f*]

“for me”: I can only discern for myself, not for another

“for now”: I can only discern what wishes me to *choose* now

“for good”: I can only discern something good

# Election: scope

Personal Vocation (Herbert Alphonso SJ)

Major life choice

“...amendment and reformation of one’s way of ... life” [189]



Prayer

Repetition

What do you (really (*really* (**really**))) want?

Review

# Election: Three Times for Choice

**First time:** I just know

**Second time** (Discernment of Spirits)  
when do I experience consolation – an  
increase in love for and trust in God?

**Third time** (tranquility)  
what is the best act of love, all things  
considered?

Second and Third may be combined

# Election: First Time [175]

Something is shown

The will is moved and  
attracted by God

Follow without the  
possibility of hesitation

# Election: Second Time [176]

The Rules for the Discernment of Spirits [313*f*]

Takes time to sift through experience

When do I experience consolation i.e.  
= an increase in love for and trust in God?

# Rules for Discernment of Spirits

“Rules” = guidelines for understanding “to some extent”

## **First set of Rules** [313*f*]

more suited to the First Week, before knowing oneself as a ‘loved sinner’ (e.g. trust in God disturbed by “folly done and said”)

## **Second set of Rules** [328*f*]

more suited to one who has experience of being a loved sinner (e.g. less tempted by thoughts of unworthiness)

# Election: Third Time (1)

What is the best act of love, all things considered?

## **Tranquility** [177]

no movements of spirits

no emoting, e.g. not hungry, angry, lonely or tired

free use of natural powers:

memory, understanding, will, thought, rationality,  
emotion, feeling, sensation, intuition...

# Election: Third Time (2)

## **Four columns way** [178*f*]

Pros and cons for choosing and not choosing

## **Imaginative way** [184*f*]

How would I advice another?

At the moment of death

On the day of judgment

# Confirmation (1)

At the end of the Third Time for Choice [183/188]

Asking for confirmation: consolation  
(*Second Time* evidence)?

Confirmation is only for now, not related to  
subsequent events.



# Confirmation (2)

During the Third and Fourth Weeks

Not verifying the choice but strengthening the chooser (Ivens p. 147)

*Confirmation of the election thus means to make firm, to 'strengthen' internally as well as to 'ratify' externally through an experience of divine consolation. The experience of the Third Week allows the retreatant to proceed in [their] chosen state or style of life with some foreknowledge and acceptance of the cost of [their] discipleship. [They] will not later have to complain, 'I did not bargain for this hardship ; had I known that this much would be demanded, I would not have chosen as I did'. ... Such an internal confirmation of the election is the purpose of the third week.*

Peter J. Fennessy: *The Third Week of the Spiritual Exercises* in Way Supplement 34

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