

TEXT OF ST. IGNATIUS

Three Times in which a Sound and Good Choice May Be Made

The first time is 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 to it, as St. Paul and St. Matthew did in following Christ our Lord.

The second time is when sufficient clarity and understanding is received through experience of consolations and desolations, and through experience of discernment of different spirits.

The third time is one of tranquility, when one considers first for what purpose man is born, that is, to praise God our Lord and save his soul, and, desiring this, chooses as a means to this end some life or state within the bounds of the Church, so that he may be helped in the service of his Lord and the salvation of his soul. I said a tranquil time, that is, when the soul is not agitated by different spirits, and uses its natural powers freely and tranquilly.

If the choice is not made in the first or second time, two ways of making it in this third time are given below.

The First Way to Make a Sound and Good Choice Contains Six Points

First point. The first point is to place before me the thing about which I wish to make a choice, such as an office or benefice to be accepted or refused, or any other thing that may be the object of a choice that can be changed.

Second Point. The second. It is necessary to have as my objective the end for which I am created, that is, to praise God our Lord and save my soul. In addition, I must be indifferent, without any disordered attachment, so that I am not more inclined or disposed to accept the thing before me than to refuse it, nor to refuse it rather than accept it, but that I find myself like a balance at equilibrium, ready to follow whatever I perceive to be more for the glory and praise of God our Lord and the salvation of my soul.

Third Point. The third. To ask God our Lord that he be pleased to move my will and place in my soul what I ought to do in the matter before me that would be more for his praise and glory, using my intellect well and faithfully to go over the matter, and choosing in accord with what is pleasing to his most holy will.

Fourth point. The fourth. To consider by way of reasoning how many advantages or benefits accrue to me if I have the office or benefice proposed, solely for the praise of God our Lord and the salvation of my soul; and, on the contrary, to consider in the same way the disadvantages and dangers there would be in having it. Then to do the same in the second part, that is, to look at the advantages and benefits in not having it, and, in the same way, at the disadvantages and dangers in not having it.

Fifth point. The fifth. After I have thought and reasoned in this way about every aspect of the matter before me, I will look to which alternative reason inclines more; and, in this way, according to the greater movement of reason, and not through any sensual inclination, I should come to a decision in the matter under deliberation.

Sixth point. The sixth. Having made this choice or decision, the person who has made it should, with much diligence, turn to prayer before God our Lord and offer him this choice, so that his Divine Majesty may be pleased to receive and confirm it, if it is for his greater service and praise.

The Second Way to Make a Sound and Good Choice Contains Four Rules and a Note

First Rule. The first is, that the love which moves me and causes me to choose this thing must descend from above, from the love of God; so that the one who chooses should first of all feel in himself that the love, greater or lesser, that he has for the thing he chooses, is solely for the sake of his Creator and Lord.

Second Rule. The second, to look at a man whom I have never seen or known, and, desiring all perfection for him, 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; and, doing myself the same, follow the rule that I propose to the other.

Third Rule. The third, to consider, as if I were at the point of death, what procedure and norm of action I would then wish to have followed in making the present choice; and, guiding myself by this, make my decision entirely in conformity with it.

Fourth Rule. The fourth, looking and considering how I will find myself on the day of judgment, to think of what decision I would then wish to have made about the present matter; and to adopt now the rule that I would then wish to have followed, so that then I may find myself in full satisfaction and joy.

Note. Guided by the rules given above for my salvation and eternal peace, I will make my choice and my offering to God our Lord, in accordance with the sixth point of the first way of making a choice.

(Spiritual Exercises, 175-188)