

RULES FOR THE GREATER DISCERNMENT OF SPIRITS

More proper to the Second Week

These rules are intended for the person who has so ordered his/her life that the desire to follow Christ is predominate, though, of course, the person may still sin. If the person is still struggling with First Week issues, it is best to keep on using the First Week Rules.

These rules below are more subtle than are the First Week rules. This subtlety reflects the more subtle action of both the good spirits and the adversarial spirits as they try to influence the soul which has itself grown more in spiritual freedom and is therefore more immune to grosser attacks.

The Rules [329-336]¹

First Rule: The Holy Spirit and God's angels operate so as to remove sadness and upset in the person. As they act, they bring the person happiness, joy, support and encouragement. Contrariwise, the Adversary and his spirits upset the person: they bring on doubts and confusion, undermine the person's confidence and desire to grow in love and propose all sorts of arguments which may look good on the surface but which, upon careful examination, are faulty and deceptive.

Second Rule: [Please refer to the description of consolation given in the First Week Rules for Discernment, Third Rule {316}]

The experience of consolation often comes to the person by means of the person's own actions (for example, prayers, good intentions, good deeds) or the actions of other people who are kind, generous, forgiving and so forth. We call these sorts of consolations *mediated*, for they come to the person through a medium which the person can usually identify. These sorts of consolations may come from God....or they may not.

But only God, Who is Master and Creator of the soul, may give consolation to the person without any discernible mediated cause. We call these sorts of consolation *unmediated*: there is no event, action or person who is the means by which the consolation comes. Only God can enter into the soul directly to and so bring the soul His love. This is an experience of the immediacy of God and is self-evident, something like the experience a person has of him/herself.

Third Rule: In the case of any *mediated* consolation, its source may be a good spirit or an adversarial spirit. So, the person may experience the feeling of consolation but the consolation's spiritual source could be good or adversarial. Good spirits give consolation for the person's good, to enable the person to grow and to rise from good to better while adversarial spirits give

¹The wording is adapted for use with adolescents from St. Ignatius's text as in David L. Fleming, S.J., *The Spiritual Exercises of St. Ignatius: A Literal Translation and a Contemporary Reading*, St. Louis, The Institute for Jesuit Sources, 1978, pp.214-218. The help of John English, S.J. is also particularly acknowledged here.

energy, insight or drive in order to wound the person and to slowly draw the person onto the wrong path. So, the person might start with a sense of dynamic purpose for Christ but later on find that s/he has ended up along an entirely wrong path.

Fourth Rule: For the person striving to follow Christ, the adversarial spirit first presents himself as an “angel of light” in order to gain access to the person. For example, he begins by stimulating holy thoughts or good intentions which would be attractive to the person. However, little by little, the adversarial spirit draws the person away from his original intention, which is to follow Christ. The person starts to become proud of his/her accomplishments or selfish in his/her intentions or in some other way is veered away from focussing on Christ.

Fifth Rule: The person needs to stay awake and test any inspirations, thoughts or desires which arise in us, for these might come either from God or from the Adversary. It is good practice to examine closely the history of such inspirations, thoughts and desires at sometime after the person has had them and has acted on them.

If they were good to begin with, stayed good as the person started acting on them and ended up with a good effect, then this is strong evidence that they come from God. But, if they ended up with bad results, or if the result is *less good* than what the person had previously decided to do, or if the result is to weaken or upset the person’s devotion to God, then this is a clear sign that the inspiration came from the Adversary. The desolation of discouragement is a clear sign of the influence of the Adversary.

“In terms of social forces operating on us from beyond, we might consider what the media of the secular world does to us. Upon reflection we see that the news presented to us by the secular press, the violence portrayed in music and drama leave us with no hope for this world. And the immediate gratification and success offered to us by advertising are not fulfilled. And so we are totally discouraged and experience the desolation of separation from God. The secular media does not indicate that our world is on a pilgrimage to a destination that make take centuries and that each one of us is destined to rise and be with Christ Risen.”²

Sixth Rule: When the person does testing as the Fifth Rule indicates, s/he does so in the confidence that the Adversary cannot completely impersonate a good spirit: there is always an indication of “the serpent’s tail” however good he might seem to be. This “serpent’s tail” is usually seen in the bad or *less good* results. So, the person should carefully review all the stages s/he went through from the time when s/he discovers the deceit all the way back to the initial good intention. In carefully reviewing and understanding how the Adversary has tricked the person, the person becomes then more aware of the deceits which the Adversary uses against the person. So, the person becomes more able to recognize these deceits in the future.

Seventh Rule: *As the person makes progress in following Christ*, the good spirit moves very gently and delicately with the person, like a drop of water landing on a sponge: the sponge readily absorbs and admits the water as the soul readily welcomes the good spirit. However, the adversarial spirit moves in noise and aggression, like the drop of water landing on a rock. The

²CLC Manual Phase III p.86.

point is that the good spirit is “at home” in the person while the adversarial spirit is an intruder.

As the person falls away from following Christ, these spirits operate in the opposite ways. In this case the good spirit alarms and stirs up the person while the adversarial spirit calms and delights him/her in order to encourage the downward spiral.

Eighth Rule: Let’s go back to the case of an *unmediated* consolation, one which is given directly by God. Even in this case, the person must be attentive to distinguish the actual consolation from whatever might follow it. Anything given in such a consolation must truly be from God and so a decision inspired in the person must also come from God. However, the person must carefully distinguish the actual consolation from whatever “afterglow” might follow it. For at such a time the person is open and suggestible: ideas, decisions or inspiration *may come* from the good spirit...or they may come from the person’s own desires and habits or they may come from the adversarial spirit. Therefore, such ideas must be carefully examined, before they are acted upon.