

Rule 1

Moving Away from God

Last week I gave some introductory remarks on St. Ignatius' *Rules of Spiritual Discernment*. The Rules are practical guidelines helping us to become aware, understand, and respond to the spiritual movements in our hearts. They answer key questions such as, "Who is speaking to me," "Where is the spirit leading me?" and "How do I respond to what is happening in my heart?"

The 14 Rules are part of the great spiritual treasure given to the Church. They have helped millions experience spiritual freedom. This week I will provide **Rule 1** with some commentary. Again, Fr. Timothy Gallagher's *The Discernment of Spirits* is a great resource to learn more about Ignatius' Rules.

First rule: *In persons who are going from mortal sin to mortal sin, the enemy is ordinarily accustomed to propose apparent pleasures to them, leading them to imagine sensual delights and pleasures in order to hold them more and make them grow in their vices and sins. In these persons the good spirit uses a contrary method, stinging and biting their consciences through their rational power of moral judgment.*

First, it is helpful to explain some basic terminology. Ignatius uses terms such as "enemy" and "good spirit." In later rules, he will use the phrase "bad spirit." Ignatius draws from the testimony of Sacred Scripture and Sacred Tradition that there is an "enemy" who actively seeks to thwart God's plan of salvation. We typically identify this enemy as a fallen angelic being called Satan.

For Ignatius, the "good spirit" includes God (Father, Son, and Holy Spirit), the angels, redeemed humanity (that part of us which is in accord with God), and the Church/sacraments. On the other hand, the "evil spirit" not only includes Satan, but also demons (fallen angelic beings), fallen human nature (tendencies against God), and the world (institutions and/or patterns of thinking contra God).

In short, there are two kingdoms: God's Kingdom and the enemy's. God wills our perfect union with Him, while the enemy uses his intelligence and all his energy to thwart that union.

Rule 1 concerns a category of persons, i.e., those going from mortal sin to mortal sin. They are moving further and further away

from God. In this case, the enemy is "ordinarily accustomed" to propose apparent pleasures. Ignatius does not speak about every case, but rather a typical tactic used by the enemy.

For those moving away from God, the enemy proposes apparent pleasures *in order to hold them more and make them grow in their vices and sins*. The enemy's goal is simple: keep those moving away from God on the same path. He does this by presenting apparent pleasures so as to hold them in their vices and sins.

For those moving away from God, the good spirit acts in a contrary method. The good spirit "stings" and "bites" their consciences through their rational power of moral judgment. In this case, the goal of "stinging" and "biting" is conversion. "Stinging" and "biting" is expression of love. God wills that those moving away from Him "turn around" so as to seek and embrace Him.

Practically: We have all met or heard about people moving from "pleasure to pleasure." Those seeking the next satisfaction through sexual promiscuity, drugs, alcohol, and theft often experience emptiness and discontent below immediate pleasures. In love, God invites them to turn around by biting and stinging their consciences. St. Augustine, who lived a life of vice as a young man, said that he lived "on the outside" while God was crying to Him within.

God never gives up on anyone and neither should we. Let us pray for those moving away from the Lord that by our witness of a life of faith, charity, and joy, they will listen to their consciences and turn back to God, who is true Love.



Goldy telling Baby Eliot about Rule 1 and how to stay close to Jesus.