

to feel within my soul his most holy will...

Discernment in Francis Xavier

by PAUL ROLPHY PINTO S.J.*

Discernment played a vital role in the life of Ignatius of Loyola. He often concludes his letters asking for God's grace to "know his most holy will and entirely fulfill it". Francis Xavier, his "least son [from] farthest exile",¹ concludes his letters in a similar way, asking that "we may feel within our souls his most holy will and perfectly fulfill it".² Ignatius and Francis, sincere seekers of God's will, fulfilled in their lives the necessary conditions of humility, discretion and love for the Church in order to discern well.³ They also fulfilled the discerned will of God "more perfectly".

The focus of this article is discernment in the life of Francis Xavier. How did he discern the will of God? How did he make his decisions? Can we observe a development in his process of discernment? I will attempt to answer these questions by examining closely some major decisions of his life, which include his decision to embrace the Ignatian ideal and his decisions to go on three path-breaking missions, namely, to the Malay Archipelago, Japan and China. To exemplify his decisions with regard to missionary strategies, I will also consider the case of Francis's encounter with the duke of Yamaguchi.

The letters of Francis Xavier will be the principle source of this work. The primary purpose of the letters of Francis was not to give an account of how he discerned the will of God for his life. The letters were intended to communicate what was taking place in the mission and to resolve the emerging conflicts in the field. He often wrote or dictated his letters in a great hurry with the ship ready to weigh anchor from the shores. He narrates what is uppermost in his mind and heart without systematically ordering the concerns regarding the evangelising mission.⁴ In the midst of his narrations and descriptions

* PAUL ROLPHY PINTO S.J., docente di teologia presso l'Istituto di Spiritualità della Pontificia Università Gregoriana, pinto@unigre.it

¹ *Doc.* 97.23. Letters and instructions of Francis are designated as *Documents* (*Doc*) in M. Joseph Costelloe, ed., *The Letters and Instructions of Francis Xavier* (St. Louis: The Institute of Jesuit Sources, 1992).

² *Doc.* 20.15. (*Doc.* 52.4). Other similar endings, *Docs.* 52.4, 61.5, 70.15, 71.13, 76.5, 83.5. In other contexts, *Docs.*

50.2, 51.2, 55.1, 59.21, 70.10, 83.1, 129.4.

³ These are the conditions named as necessary for discernment to happen by Pope Francis in Post-Synodal *Apostolic Exhortation Amoris Laetitia*, 300.

⁴ Cf. Alfredo Verdoy, *San Francisco Javier: El Molinero de Dios* (Bilbao: Desclée de Brouwer, 2006), 21-22; Xavier Añoveros Trías de Bes, 'Cartas y Documentos Escritos Por San Francisco Javier', *Príncipe de Viana* 64, no. 230 (2003), 600.

one also comes across instances where he shares his spiritual experiences. It is in these sharings that one has a glimpse of the desires emerging in his soul and how he discerns them. This article closely analyses some such passages in their historical context.

1. Francis, man of great Ambitions

Peter Favre writes in his *Memoriale* of how in Paris Ignatius, Francis and he lived in the same room, sharing the same food and purse. He goes on to say that finally they also came to desire and will the same thing.⁵ It is not entirely clear in the paragraph whether Peter is including Francis in the verb *llegamos*, but the “*por fin*” seems to indicate the inclusion. In any case, Ignatius won over Peter to the Lord far more easily than he did Francis. Ignatius was very tenacious in his intent of winning Francis over to the service of the Lord. It took Ignatius about three years to persuade Francis to take part in his vision. Well known are the words that Auger put into the mouth of Polanco, “I have heard our great molders of men, Ignatius, say that Francis Xavier was the lumpiest dough he had ever kneaded”.⁶ Manuel Teixeira, the first biographer of Francis, tells us that Francis was harder to win over than was Peter. Francis posed greater difficulty to change. Though he liked to converse with Ignatius and enjoyed his friendship, Francis but resisted risking a change in the state of life because he was naturally inclined to the honour and splendor of the world.⁷

What brought Francis to Paris? It was the precarious situation of the Castle of Xavier and the helplessness of the family.⁸ The military carrier of his elder brothers Miguel

⁵ “Por fin llegamos a tener los mismos deseos y el mismo querer”. Antonio Alburquerque, ed., *En El Corazón de La Reforma: «Recuerdos Espirituales» Del Beato Pedro Fabro, S.J.*, Manresa [Sal Terrae] (Bilbao: Ediciones Mensajero, 1999), 116.

⁶ *Fontes Narrativi* III, 282 [now on *Font. narr.*]. Cf. James Brodrick, *Saint Francis Xavier (1506-1552)* (London: Burns Oates, 1952), 43.

⁷ Cf. *Monumenta Xaveriana* II, 818 [now on MX]; Alburquerque, *En El Corazón de La Reforma*, 27.

⁸ His father, Don Juan de Jaso, had died in 1515. Three year prior, around 1512, Castile had taken possession of Navarre. In 1516 there was an attempt to free Navarre which failed, and the nobles who had taken part in the rebellion were punished by the Spanish crown. The castle of Xavier was among those which bore the brunt. The watchtower was halved in height, and the privilege of collecting taxes was annulled. Francis was ten at the time. He witnessed the insult and the disgrace to the family. In 1521, Miguel and Juan, the two brother of Francis, fought with the French in the siege that captured Pamplona. Ignatius was hit by the cannon ball while trying to defend the city. The French hold over Pamplona did not last long. The Spanish defeated the French in July of the same year. Miguel was taken prisoner, and Juan fled to the fort of Fuenterrabia. (Miguel, who escaped from prison of Pamplona, also later took refuge in the same fort) . Here the Navarre-French resistance held on till February, 1524. In April of the same year King Charles I of Castile granted an ample amnesty to the rebellious nobles of Navarre. Miguel and Juan returned to the Castle and recovered the lost status of nobility, but the family's financial status was still in tatters. In this context, Francis, now eighteen, was sent to the University of Paris. Cf. José Enrique Ruiz de Galarreta, *Francisco de Javier, Biografía Crítica* (Pamplona: José Enrique Ruiz de Galarreta, 2006), 18-21.

and Juan met with disaster. Francis now was the hope of the family to restore its prestige and honour. The family invested its meagre resources in Francis and chose for him the most prestigious university of the time, the Sorbonne in Paris. By custom, the youngest male of the family was destined for studies. Studies in those days meant an ecclesiastical carrier. Francis had taken his tonsure as a cleric of the diocese of Pamplona.⁹ He, more than his brothers, wanted to prove himself and to attain honour for his family.¹⁰ He was clearly ambitious. He had obtained the certificate of nobility in order to procure a canonical benefice in Pamplona, to which, in all likelihood, he was elected.¹¹ His goal was even beyond that, a bishopric.

Francis left his native land in the summer of 1525 and never returned. He renounced in 1536 the canonical benefice which he had so ardently sought, all in favour of “the way of poverty and the cross of Christ”.¹² This was the first major and crucial decision he took. It is true that Ignatius played a pivotal role in Francis’s decision, but the decision was that of Francis. How did he discern? And why?

The purpose for which Francis had come to Paris, chasing his ambitions, was “normal” for any youth in his place. His ambition was considered legitimate in his cultural context. He would not have felt any demand to reconsider his goal. Ignatius had to begin by making Francis aware of a choice between the good he was determined to attain and a greater good, the way of Christ. Francis did not even take Ignatius seriously. On the contrary, he did not let slip any opportunity to ridicule the Basque nobleman.¹³ Ignatius opted to enter through Francis’s door to exit through his own.¹⁴ Finances arriving from the Castle of Xavier were barely sufficient to maintain the type of lifestyle to which Francis was accustomed. Ignatius supported him with the money¹⁵ procured from his fund raising visits to the Low Countries. Moreover, when Francis was teaching philosophy as a regent,¹⁶ Ignatius recommended Francis’s classes to the pupils and made sure that his classroom was full.¹⁷ The attitude of Francis towards Ignatius changed

⁹ Cf. Georg Schurhammer, *Francis Xavier, His Life, His Times, Vol. I Europe 1506-1541*, trans. M. Joseph Costelloe, vol. I, 4 vols (Rome: The Jesuit Historical Institute, 1973), 74.

¹⁰ Cf. José María Recondo, *San Francisco Javier: Vida y Obra* (Madrid: La Editorial Católica, 1988), 145.

¹¹ Schurhammer, *Francis Xavier I*, 155-158, 272.

¹² *Font. narr.* I, 100. Cf. Schurhammer, *Francis Xavier I*, 272.

¹³ Cf. Schurhammer, *Francis Xavier I*, 172.

¹⁴ In the third instruction to Alfonso Salmerón and Paschase Broët regarding their mission to Ireland, composed in early September 1541, Ignatius writes, “In any conversation where we are trying to win a person over and ensnare him for the greater service of God our Lord, we should adopt the same procedure the enemy uses with a good soul [*SpEx* [332]]—he always for evil and we always for good. The enemy enters through the other’s door and comes out his own”. John W. Padberg and John L. McCarthy, eds., *Ignatius of Loyola: Letters and Instructions*, trans. Martin E. Palmer (Saint Louis (MO): Institute of Jesuit Sources, 2006), 66. *SpEx* = *Spiritual Exercises*. Text in George E. Ganss, ed., *The Spiritual Exercises of Saint Ignatius* (St. Louis: The Institute of Jesuit Sources, 1992).

¹⁵ Cf. *Doc.* 1.6.

¹⁶ He started the teaching as a regent in the Collège de Beauvais in 1530.

¹⁷ Cf. Schurhammer, *Francis Xavier I*, 159.

gradually. He won Francis over to himself, but that was not Ignatius's main objective. Ignatius wanted Francis to dream the dreams that God had in store for him.

Traditionally it is said that Ignatius won Francis over to God with these words, "What does it profit a man if he gain the whole world and suffer the loss of his own soul?" (Mt 16: 26). The tradition goes back to one of the early biographies of Francis by Tursellinus, *Vita Francisci Xaverii*.¹⁸ It is both probable and possible that Ignatius made use of these words of our Lord in his spiritual conversations with Francis. The impact of these words is notable in Francis as, years later, he would use the very same gospel verse to exhort King John III of Portugal. The verse is cited three times in his Letters¹⁹ and is one of the very few Scripture quotations in his entire literary corpus.

What transpired between the start of the friendship which developed between Francis and Ignatius and the making of the vows of Montmartre in 15th Aug 1534?²⁰ One could infer that the continuing spiritual conversations, supposedly involving Scripture verses such as Mt 16: 26, would have initiated a process of discernment in Francis. The gospel verse "what does it profit..." is a practical criterion or rule for discernment within the gospels. An authentic discernment questions prior convictions—things once taken for granted and considered natural and normal—and it places one's life in a crisis.²¹ Francis wanted to earn name and fame in the world and to re-establish the honour and prestige of his family. What was at stake now was the salvation of his own soul. He must have felt the inner tension caused by two types of spiritual movements, some inducing him to hold onto the passing worldly ambitions and others inspiring him to set his heart on lasting, other-worldly realities. From the decision he took, that of making the vows, it can be further inferred that the prospect of serving the Lord in radical poverty caused enduring consolation in his soul.

There is no record of this discernment process in Francis's own words. What we do possess is a letter of Francis to his brother Juan dated 25 March 1535. Ignatius himself was the bearer of the letter. He was visiting his hometown, Loyola, for health reasons. Francis makes an allusion to the change he had gone through and to the accompaniment of Ignatius in that process. From the content of the letter, it is also clear that Francis's family was receiving conflicting reports from Paris, some of which held Ignatius in a bad light. Francis defends Ignatius and affirms how beneficent God has been to him through Ignatius:

In order that your Grace may clearly know what a great favor our Lord has done to me by having me come to know Lord Master Ignatius, I give you my word of honor through this

¹⁸ Cf. Schurhammer, *Francis Xavier I*, 178, note 219.

¹⁹ *Docs.* 63.4, 90.25.

²⁰ Cf. *Autob* [85], Schurhammer, *Francis Xavier I*, 212. *Autob* = *Autobiography*. Text in Parmananda Roque Divarkar, ed., *A Pilgrim's Testament: The Memoirs of Ignatius of Loyola* (Saint Louis: Institute of Jesuit Sources, 1995).

²¹ Cf. Toni Català, 'Discernimento y Vida Cotidiana', *Cristianisme i Justícia*, no. 22. Available at https://www.cristianismeijusticia.net/sites/default/files/pdf/eies22_0.pdf, 2.

letter that I shall never, as long as I live, be able to repay the great debt which I owe him, both for his having frequently assisted me in my needs with money and friends, and for having been the reason why I abandoned some evil companions whom I, through lack of experience, did not recognize as such. [...] I do not know when I can ever repay Lord Master Ignatius for this alone, that he was the reason why I did not converse, or have any dealings, with persons who outwardly appeared to be good but were inwardly full of heresies, as has been shown by their works.²² I therefore entreat your Grace to receive him as you would my own self, since through his good services he has placed me so greatly in his debt.

I earnestly entreat you not to fail to converse freely with Lord Ignatius and to believe what he tells you. His advice and conversation can be of great advantage to you, since he is a great man of God and of a very good life. I again ask you as a favor not to fail to do this; and whatever Lord Master Ignatius will tell your Grace on my behalf, do me the favor of giving as much credit to him as you would to me in person. Your Grace can learn more about my needs and difficulties from him than from any other person in the world, for he knows more about my poverty and wretchedness than anyone else in the world.²³

It becomes clear from the Letter that Ignatius accompanied Francis very closely. Francis laid his heart open before Ignatius. An adequately accompanied discernment process renders a high degree of authenticity to the process. At the end of the process, Francis, with six others, made the vows of poverty, chastity and a pilgrimage to the Holy Land.²⁴ Francis made his “Election” even before he made his Spiritual Exercises.²⁵ He did not change his determination professed through the vows after making the Exercises, which implies that the experience of the Exercises confirmed his Election.

2. Chance or Providence?

Ignatius chose his second Parisian companion as his first secretary. He and his first companions, after the Deliberations of March to June 1539, chose to institute the new order. After the oral approbation of the Society by Pope Paul III on 9 September 1539 and until his departure from Rome to Lisbon on 14 March 1540, for less than a year, Francis served Ignatius as his secretary. The missioning to India came suddenly. King John III of Portugal requested that the Pope give to him men of the newly founded order to be sent to India in order to “increase our holy Catholic faith”.²⁶ The Pope commissioned two priests to go India, leaving Ignatius to choose them. The choice fell on Rodrigues and Bobadilla. Rodrigues was sent to Portugal by sea. Bobadilla was to join Dom

²² A distinction between good and apparent good is made, bearing resemblance to the fifth and sixth rules of the Second Week. *SpEx* [332-333].

²³ *Doc.* 1, 6-7.

²⁴ Cf. Schurhammer, *Francis Xavier I*, 214.

²⁵ Francis made his Exercises in September 1534, soon after the vows of Montmartre. He couldn't make them earlier as he could not interrupt his teaching assignment in the Collège de Beauvais. Cf. Schurhammer, *Francis Xavier I*, 216.

²⁶ Schurhammer, *Francis Xavier I*, 543.

Pedro Mascarenhas, the Ambassador of John III, returning from Rome to Lisbon overland. Bobadilla took ill. The day before the departure of Mascarenhas, who could not wait any longer, Ignatius summoned his secretary and said, “*Esta es vuestra empresa!* (This is a task for you!)” To this Xavier replied with great joy and readiness: “*Pues, sus! Héme aquí* (Good enough! I am ready)”.²⁷ Francis *decided* to obey. The great joy he felt in his soul is an indication that the joy was caused by an interior movement coming from the good spirit. Francis’s discernment in this case was instantaneous. Could this be considered as a case of the First Time of making a sound election? In the First Time, “a devout person, without doubting or being able to doubt, carries out what was proposed”.²⁸

Was this missioning a chance happening or providential for Francis? About two years prior, in May 1537, Francis was returning to Venice from the Eternal City and had Laynez as his travel companion. During the journey, he had a recurring dream which he recounted to his companion: “Jesus, how exhausted I am! Do you know what I dreamt? I dreamt that I was carrying an Indian on my back, and he was so heavy that I was almost crushed.”²⁹ At this point, the intention of the First Companions was that they would go on pilgrimage to the Holy Land. Yet, God was “revealing” his will to Francis through a dream which was at variance with the intent of the Companions. In the gospel of Matthew, Joseph, who wanted to dismiss Mary discreetly, after a dream, decides to take her as his wife (Cf. Mt 1: 18-25). The Magi, after a dream, returned home through a different route (Cf. Mt 2: 1-12). Dreams of this revelatory nature are a sort of *locus theologicus* for discernment.

The dream of carrying an Indian³⁰ on his back was a sort of premonition of what God had in store for Francis. In this sense, the improvised missioning of Francis to India was not by chance. He would have seen it as providential, a fulfilment of what he had seen in the dream. Further, it can be affirmed that God was instilling in the heart of Francis, without his being aware, a desire to go on mission to the Far East. The category of “desire” is something that appears in the Letters of Francis when he is speaking of the processes of discernment, as will be seen later. The experience of the recurring dream occurring in the span of roughly two years (birth of the desire) and his being sent on mission (confirmation of the desire) would have further introduced Francis into the school of discernment. He would have learnt to pay attention to the movements of the spirits in the form of desires. Did he nurture the desire placed in his heart by God in the two year period? It is difficult to say. However, his ready and joyful acceptance of the mission seems to hint at an affirmative answer.

²⁷ *Font. narr* II, 381; Schurhammer, *Francis Xavier* I, 554.

²⁸ *SpEx* [175].

²⁹ *Font. narr.* II, 381-382; Schurhammer, *Francis Xavier* I, 339.

³⁰ Whether an Indian of the Orient or an Indian of the Occident, i.e., a native American, is not immediately clear.

3. To the “Islands of Hope in God”³¹

Being sent to India is equivalent to being sent nowhere! India in the XVIth century did not mean the present Indian subcontinent. It meant also the entire territory to the east of the Indian subcontinent.³² Francis’s first destination was Goa, the headquarters of the Portuguese colony in India. In his first leg of the ministry, Francis laboured largely in the eastern Fishery Coast, with the Paravas and Macuas. He was again *sent* there,³³ to take care of the Christians baptised between 1536 and 1537, around six years before his arrival in Goa.

Francis laboured lovingly and intensely for over two years with the Paravas. Gradually he began taking stock of the situation in which he found himself. The Paravas, the pearl fishers, were at the receiving end from all quarters—the local kings, the merchants, and other people of influence, both local and foreign (Arabs and Portuguese). They were perhaps most exploited by the Portuguese themselves, the supposed protectors of the poor baptised Christians. The immoral conduct of the Portuguese and their greed for money,³⁴ far from being a help in the spread of the Kingdom, were a huge hindrance to Francis’s apostolic labours. Like Ignatius, his true father,³⁵ who, at a similar crossroads of life, asked the crucial question *quid agendum*,³⁶ Francis too paused to ask a similar question. From Nagapatam on 7 April 1545 he wrote to Mansilhas,

Since I do not know what will happen in Jaffnapatam, I am undecided as to whether I should go to Malacca or remain here. During the whole month of May I shall consequently deliberate on whether I should go there or not.³⁷

The word “deliberate” (the Portuguese *determinare*) is a technical word in the Ignatian vocabulary for an explicit process of discernment. A discernment process culminates in a deliberation. In order to deliberate, Francis retired to a lonely place, to the cave of the martyrdom of St. Thomas at Mailapur (present day Chennai).

What were Francis’s options?³⁸ Some of the available options were continuing the missionary activity in the Fishery Coast, going to Abyssinia (Ethiopia), going to Ceylon,

³¹ *Doc.* 59.4. Francis says that it is better to call the Islands of Moro “Islands of Hope in God”.

³² “For Portuguese India in the fullest sense extended from ‘the Cape to China’”. Schurhammer, *Francis Xavier II*, 135.

³³ The “instruction and strengthening” of over fifty-thousand Paravas who had been baptised on the Malabar Coast was the principal reason why John III sent Francis to India. Though Goa was the first destination in India, it was just a temporary one. Francis, who reached Goa in May, had to wait until the end of September for better weather in order to sail to Cape Comerin. Cf. Schurhammer, *Francis Xavier II*, 158.

³⁴ Francis spoke of wrongdoings of the Portuguese officers with emphasis in his letters to John III: “I am amazed at seeing how those who come from there find so many moods, tenses, and participles for this poor verb ‘*Rapio, rapis*’”. *Doc.* 49.7.

³⁵ Cf. *Doc.* 4.4.

³⁶ Cf. *Autob* [50].

³⁷ *Doc.* 50.3.

³⁸ Cf. *SpEx* [178].

and going to the Macassar Islands.³⁹ The Fishery Coast was being looked after by Mansilhas and four other secular priests.⁴⁰ Franciscans were active in the major Portuguese strongholds such as Goa, Cochin, Cannanore and Cranganore.⁴¹ In a letter to Mansilhas from Manapar on 11 September 1544, Francis expresses his desire of going to the land of Preste, i.e., Abyssinia.⁴² The desire for martyrdom may have been latent in that request.⁴³ This desire was nothing more than a mirage. The conquest of the ruler of Jaffnapatam (Ceylon), the persecutor of the neophytes,⁴⁴ did not take place as Francis had hoped.⁴⁵ Meanwhile, on 26 January 1545, Antonio de Paiva brought extensive official news of the conversion of two kings of the Macassar Islands.⁴⁶ Amidst this scenario, Francis expresses his uncertainty to Mansilhas (7 April 1545): “I am not as yet certain about my own future”.⁴⁷

In the spring of 1545 Francis was in Negapatam, north of the Fishery Coast. The Christians were being persecuted in Cape Comerin, in the south. He could not even go there to join Mansilhas due to strong contrary winds. He wrote to Master Diogo and Micer Paulo in Goa on 8 May 1545, from Mailapur, that he was compelled to go to San Thomé.⁴⁸ Here Francis spent four months, between April and August 1545, in prayer, penance and discernment, seeking light and clarity from God. In the same letter he says,

In this holy house [of St. Thomé] I deemed it my duty to engage myself in asking God our Lord to grant me to feel within my soul his most holy will, along with a firm resolve to fulfill it and a sure hope that “he who has given the desire will also grant its execution”.⁴⁹

The choice was narrowed down to the Macassar Islands. Francis had gathered rudimentary information about the region. The situation was favourable there for evangelisation. In the above mentioned letter to Mansilhas he also says,

I have been definitely informed that the people in the regions of Malacca are well disposed for the service of God, and that many fail to become Christians and our holy faith to be increased for the lack of someone to work there.⁵⁰

In the Fishery Coast, the Christians were being persecuted and exploited. Unable to bear their pain, was Francis escaping to Macassar?⁵¹ When he retired to San Thomé, did

³⁹ Cf. Luis M. Bermejo, *Unto the Indies: Life of St. Francis Xavier* (Anand: Gujarat Sahitya Prakash, 2000), 115.

⁴⁰ Cf. *Doc.* 51.2.

⁴¹ Cf. Bermejo, *Unto the Indies*, 117.

⁴² *Doc.* 41.4.

⁴³ Cf. Schurhammer, *Francis Xavier II*, 508.

⁴⁴ Cf. Schurhammer, *Francis Xavier II*, 471.

⁴⁵ Cf. *Doc.* 51.1, Bermejo, *Unto the Indies*, 117.

⁴⁶ Cf. Schurhammer, *Francis Xavier II*, 521-522, 588.

⁴⁷ *Doc.* 50.1.

⁴⁸ Cf. *Doc.* 51.1.

⁴⁹ *Doc.* 51.1.

⁵⁰ *Doc.* 50.3.

⁵¹ Cf. Xavier Léon-Dufour, *San Francisco Javier: Itinerario Místico Del Apóstol*, trans. Felipe Aguirre (Mensajero-Sal Terrae, 1998), 204.

he know that Simão Vaz was murdered by the people of Morotai in 1535?⁵² Did he also know that the people of Moro were extremely treacherous and mixed poison in the food they served? It is difficult to say. But he definitely had this information when he was writing from Amboina to his Companions in Europe on 10 May 1546.⁵³

“At the tomb of the apostle [St. Thomas], Master Francis sought for light in the painful darkness. Where was God calling him?”⁵⁴ Gaspar Coelho, the Chaplain of the tomb of St. Thomas, was Francis’s confidant. He opened his heart to Coelho in spiritual conversation and sacramental confession.⁵⁵ This was a time of ongoing purification for Francis. In the midst of confusion⁵⁶ and mixed motivations, one can find it difficult to perceive with clarity the will of God. Francis was agitated by assaults of the Evil One, who places many obstacles in the path of the soul that sincerely seeks God’s will. Francis fought with the devil during this period, even receiving physical blows.⁵⁷

The letter of 8 May gives more details of the proceedings of Francis’s discernment process:

In keeping with his usual mercy, God has been pleased to be mindful of me; and with great interior consolation I have felt, and have come to know, that it is his will that I go to those regions of Malacca, where some have recently become Christians, in order to give them the reasons for, and the teachings of, our true and holy faith [...]. Since they have of their own free will become Christians, it is fitting, my dearest brothers, that they should receive much help from us.

I hope in God our Lord that he will grant me much grace on this voyage, for he has granted me, with great satisfaction to my soul and spiritual consolation, the favor of making me feel that it is his most holy will that I go to those regions of Macassar which have recently become Christian. I am so determined to carry out what God gives me to experience within my soul that it seems to me that I would be going against God’s will if I did not do so, and that he would not grant me his grace either in this life or in the next. If no Portuguese ships are sailing this year for Malacca, I shall go on a Moorish or pagan ship. I have so much faith in God our Lord, dearest brothers, for whose love alone I am making this voyage, that even if there were no ship sailing this year from this coast but only a *catamaran* [a raft made of three or four logs lashed together], I would confidently go on it, placing all my hopes in God.⁵⁸

Francis had discerned the spiritual movements within his soul. The movements he felt when he thought of going to the Macassar regions caused great spiritual consolation in his soul. He discerned that this consolation which he felt was so authentic and deep that it served to confirm that the desire to go Macassar was placed in his soul by God.

⁵² Cf. Schurhammer, *Francis Xavier III*, 274.

⁵³ Cf. *Doc.* 55.4.

⁵⁴ Schurhammer, *Francis Xavier II*, 588.

⁵⁵ Cf. Schurhammer, *Francis Xavier II*, 589.

⁵⁶ Cf. *SpEx* [140]. The smoke mentioned here by Ignatius is a symbol of confusion.

⁵⁷ Cf. Schurhammer, *Francis Xavier II*, 591.

⁵⁸ *Doc.* 51. 1-2.

What was a “sign of God” for Ignatius in order to determine whether the decision he made was the will of God? The uncontested sign was the mission indicated by the Vicar of Christ.⁵⁹ The missioning of Francis Xavier to India is one such case. Francis, in his turn, was convinced that he was fulfilling the will of God when he obeyed his superior, Ignatius. Once in the mission field, Francis often had to make many decisions by himself. Ignatius, after entrusting a difficult mission to his companions in the faraway lands, gave them the freedom to make decisions depending on the context of the place.⁶⁰ The decision Francis made to go to the Macassar region is in this purview. How, then, does one know that the decision made is also the will of God? What are the signs?

According to Ignatius, there are three preliminary steps to the interpreting of a sign of God which result in an authentically spiritual decision: to have authority or responsibility for making the decision or participating in it, to pray to God to bestow his light, and to be inwardly free of all preference and of all personal passion.⁶¹

Francis fulfilled these conditions. The decision to go to the Macassar region was not a participative decision, but Francis was endowed with the authority to make the decision. According to Ravier, for Ignatius the decision-making passes through five major phases.⁶² Francis’s decision-making passes through those phases, except for the consultative phase, as he did not have any companions around. Even through correspondence such consultation would have been almost impossible due to the large distance between Europe and Asia and the time taken in receiving a reply (a minimum of two years, in the best of conditions). Nonetheless, there are instances of Francis’s seeking advice from Ignatius on how to conduct himself in the mission lands.⁶³

Francis gathered as much information as he could about the various options at his disposal. He weighed the pros and cons of every option.⁶⁴ Some options had to be discarded because their execution was practically not possible. Of those that were possible, Francis felt that the option of going to the Macassar region would best *serve* the Lord. He would place this option before the Lord in total interior purity and personal disinterest, in other words, *indifference*.⁶⁵ This is a necessary condition before one can

⁵⁹ Cf. André Ravier, *Ignatius of Loyola and the Founding of the Society of Jesus*, trans. Maura Daly, Joan Daly, and Carson Daly (San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 1987), 332.

⁶⁰ Cf. Padberg and McCarthy, *Ignatius of Loyola: Letters and Instructions*, 81, 574; Ravier, *Ignatius of Loyola and the Founding of the Society of Jesus*, 245.

⁶¹ Ravier, *Ignatius of Loyola and the Founding of the Society of Jesus*, 340.

⁶² 1. *The information phase*; 2. *The deliberation phase*: the responsible parties examine the advantages and disadvantages of adopting or rejecting the plan; 3. *The interrogation of God in prayer phase*: [...] the one responsible and each of his advisers pray again and strive to perceive with total interior purity and personal disinterest [...]; 4. *The decision phase*; 5. One last time, the one who has made the *decision offers it to God in prayer*. Cf. Ravier, *Ignatius of Loyola and the Founding of the Society*, 340-341.

⁶³ Cf. *Doc.* 11.6; 15.15.

⁶⁴ Cf. *SpEx* [181].

⁶⁵ Cf. *SpEx* [179].

begin an authentic discernment process.⁶⁶ Though Francis did not have Jesuit companions around, he conversed with Coelho. The confessions he made are an indication of his desire to attain internal purity and indifference. Confiding in someone trustworthy reduces the risk of being deceived by the Evil One and of confusing one's own will for God's will. Finally, the intense spiritual consolation that accompanied the thought of going to Macassar served him as a sign and confirmation from God to decide to go to Macassar. He was convinced that, if he did not execute the desire he had experienced, he would be disobeying God.

"Human beings are created to praise, reverence, and serve God..."⁶⁷ are the opening words of the Principle and Foundation. The principal purpose of Francis in going to the Macassar region was for the praise and service of God. In order to serve better one needs to choose or to decide better, and in order to take a decision in accordance with God's will, one needs to discern well. Through a patient and careful discernment, Francis felt Christ the King calling him to Macassar, and Francis responded readily and diligently.⁶⁸ He saw his mission as one of opening the path for others to follow, and so he became the spearhead.⁶⁹ The young, nineteen year old Francis who had arrived in Paris had great dreams for oneself, but now he was dreaming even greater things for God.

4. Japan. Many Strings in the Harp⁷⁰

Francis laboured in the Malay Archipelago for about two years (1545-1547). He waited in Malacca between July and December 1547 to embark back to Cochin, India. The Portuguese had discovered Japan five year earlier.⁷¹ Towards the end of the first week of December, a Portuguese captain, Jorge Alvares, introduced to Francis a Japanese fugitive he had brought along from Japan, Anjiro (Paul of the Holy Faith would later become his baptismal name). Anjiro (then age 35) had two other companions. He had learnt sufficient Portuguese to be able to converse by this time. Francis had eight more days to get acquainted with the new friends. They opened up before him a new world with great prospects for evangelisation. Francis learnt from Anjiro that the Japanese were a highly cultured people, guided by reason, and that if Francis answered their questions intelligently, they would embrace Christianity. The Portuguese merchants who

⁶⁶ Letter of Fr. General Arturo Sosa to the Whole Society On Discernment in Common, 27 September 2017. See <http://www.sjweb.info/adusum/documents/docslstLCt2.cfm> [access 14.02.2018]. The contents of the letter are similar to the phases of decision-making mentioned by Ravier.

⁶⁷ *SpEx* [23].

⁶⁸ Cf. *SpEx* [91-100].

⁶⁹ Cf. *Docs.* 98.9, 107.18, 137.4; Bermejo, *Unto the Indies*, 115; Léon-Dufour, *San Francisco Javier*, 238, 243.

⁷⁰ Cf. Léon-Dufour, *San Francisco Javier*, 115.

⁷¹ Cf. *Doc.* 59.15; Nuno da Silva Gonçalves, 'Francesco Saverio, Missionario al Di Là Dei Confini', *Civiltà Cattolica*, no. 4061 (2019), 423.

had come from Japan told Francis that if he went to Japan he would draw more profit for God there than he had among the Indians. The first seeds of the desire to God Japan were sown in Francis's soul. Anjiro and his companions sailed to Goa by a different ship and were admitted in the College of St. Paul.⁷²

The desire to go to Japan was conceived in December 1547. Francis set sail for Japan in April of 1549. The idea had matured during the one and half year period with discernment and with consultation with the companions in India. On returning from Malacca, Francis wrote to his Companions residing in Rome from Cochin on 20 January 1548,

All the Portuguese merchants coming from Japan tell me that if I go there I shall do great service for God our Lord, more than with the pagans of India, for they are a very reasonable people. From what I have experienced within my soul, it seems to me that either I or another of the Society will go within two years to Japan, even if the voyage there is full of dangers because of the violent storms and the Chinese pirates who sail that sea in search of booty and cause the loss of many ships.⁷³

On the same day he wrote to Ignatius,

I have not as yet definitely decided on whether a year and a half from now I should go myself to Japan with one or two of the Society, or whether I should first send two of our Society there. But it is certain that I shall either go myself or send others. At the present time, I am more inclined towards going myself. I am asking God to let me know clearly what is more in keeping with his holy will.⁷⁴

Also, on the same day he wrote to King John III in similar fashion, expressing what was going on within his soul.⁷⁵ The doubting indicates the presence of different movements he was experiencing within his soul. From what Francis wrote it becomes clear that he spent time, mostly likely during his voyage, praying and discerning about the mission to Japan.

After dispatching those letters, Francis got busy supervising missionary activities on the Fishery Coast. He travelled to Goa and Bassein. Amidst the governmental concerns, it is likely that he discussed his plans with the fellow companions. Meanwhile, Lancilotto (superior at Goa) had gathered more information regarding the geography, religion and culture of Japan from Anjiro and his two companions in the College of St. Paul. While in Goa, Francis had access to the report about Japan drawn up by Lancilotto for the Governor Garcia de Sá⁷⁶ and had occasion to converse more at leisure with Anjiro. Francis's discernment would have been influenced by the facts that polygamy was not in practice in Japan and that there were no competing religions there, as there were in

⁷² Schurhammer, *Francis Xavier III*, 268-272, 336, 384; *Doc.* 59.15-19.

⁷³ *Doc.* 59.18.

⁷⁴ *Doc.* 60. 4.

⁷⁵ Cf. *Doc.* 61.9.

⁷⁶ Cf. Schurhammer, *Francis Xavier III*, 479-491. For example, from what Francis learnt from Anjiro, he would decide not to eat meat and fish in Japan in order not to scandalize the priests there. Cf. *Doc.* 85.14.

India.⁷⁷ Besides, there was no Portuguese presence in Japan. The bad example of the Portuguese was a negative influence in India.⁷⁸ From Anjiro Francis had learnt that the Japanese valued the example of life highly. In April of 1548, he wrote to his friend Diogo Pereira in Cochin about the voyage and pilgrimage he hoped to make to Japan.⁷⁹ Back in Cochin at the beginning of 1549, he wrote to Ignatius on 12 January:

I shall not refrain from going to Japan because of what I have so keenly felt within my soul, even though I were certain that I would see greater dangers than I have ever encountered before, for I have great hopes in God our Lord that our holy faith will be greatly increased in those regions.⁸⁰

Francis gives more details about how he arrived at the decision to go to Japan in his letter to King John III, writing from Malacca on 20 June 1549 while en route to Japan:

Because of the abundant information which I had received about the excellent prospects in the islands of Japan for the increase of our holy faith, and because I had been informed by many reliable persons who had been on those islands of Japan, I decided to ask God our Lord that, if it were to his greater service for me to go to those regions, he might grant me the great grace to experience his holy will within my soul and the strength to perfectly fulfill it. It pleased His Divine Majesty to grant me to experience within my soul that it would be to his service for me to go to Japan, and I thus left India to fulfill what God our Lord granted me many times to experience with respect to my going to serve him in Japan.⁸¹

Ignatius writes in the *Spiritual Exercises*:

The Second Time [for making a sound Election] is present when sufficient clarity and knowledge are received from the experience of consolations and desolations, and from experience in the discernment of various spirits.⁸²

Francis says, “our Lord granted me many times to experience”, indicating that he experienced a repeated and enduring consolation when he felt the spirit moving him to go to Japan. This consolation was a sign that the movement was caused by the good spirit. The purpose of the mission, once again, is clear: for the greater glory and service of God.

A paragraph from the *Autography Directory* of Ignatius sheds some more light on the *Second Time* for making a sound election and, consequently, on the discernment of Francis. Ignatius writes,

Among the three modes [times] of making an election, if God does not move him in the first he should dwell on the second, that of recognizing his vocation by the experience of

⁷⁷ Cf. Leela D’Souza, “Saint Francis Xavier and the Jesuits in Goa: The Socio-Political Context”, in *Jesuits in India: History and Culture*, ed. Délio de Mendonça (Anand-Goa: Gujarat Sahitya Prakash—Xavier Centre of Historical Research, 2007), 46.

⁷⁸ Cf. Alfredo Verdoy, *San Francisco Javier: El Molinero de Dios* (Bilbao: Desclée de Brouwer, 2006), 146.

⁷⁹ Cf. *Doc.* 65.1.

⁸⁰ *Doc.* 70.10.

⁸¹ *Doc.* 83.1. Here Xavier is also weighing the pros and cons of going to Japan.

⁸² *SpEx* [176].

consolations and desolations. Then, as he continues with meditations on Christ our Lord, he should examine, when he finds himself in consolation in which direction God is moving him; similarly in desolation.⁸³

Is Francis taking recourse to the experience of consolation only as a confirmation of the decisions he took? Though he does not make a clear cut distinction between the movements experienced during the time of consolation and consolation experienced while thinking about going to Macassar and Japan, there are indications to show that he did examine in which direction God was moving him while he found himself in consolation. Two instances can be highlighted from what is already quoted above: With respect to Macassar, "... with great interior consolation I have felt, and have come to know, that it is his will that I go to those regions of Malacca",⁸⁴ and with respect to Japan, "It pleased His Divine Majesty to grant me to experience within my soul that it would be to his service for me to go to Japan".⁸⁵ Francis paid attention to the counsels received during the experience of consolation because in the time of consolation it is chiefly the good spirit who guides, while in desolation chiefly the evil spirit.⁸⁶

To Japan, Francis was not going alone. The availability of more missionaries allowed him the freedom to take along a couple of Jesuit companions, Father Cosme de Torres and Brother Juan Fernández. Anjiro and the two Japanese, of course, joined Francis, and they mediated the mission.⁸⁷ Francis had mentioned about sending or taking "one or two of our Society" to Japan in his letter to Ignatius on returning from Malacca. Thus, considering going as a team had formed part of his discernment.

The mission to the Malay Archipelago and Japan are two cases of discernment with regard to the choice of a mission. Francis also had to discern with regard to mission strategy. One illustrative case is that of the audience with the duke of Yamaguchi. Becoming all things to all people (Cf. 1Cor 9: 19-23) was a principle that governed the activity of the Apostle of the Indies. He adopted the poor lifestyle of the poor of India and Indonesia. On arriving in Goa, Francis, the Apostolic Nuncio, took residence in the hospital. He asked Dom Luis, the overseer of the hospital, for a *loba* (a cotton sleeveless cassock) and was given an elegant silk *loba*. Francis refused it and insisted upon wearing the cotton one, like the rest of simple clergy in Goa.⁸⁸ Francis lived a life of radical poverty, service and prayer. People around him immediately recognised in him a man of God.⁸⁹

⁸³ *Autography Directory of St. Ignatius* [18] in Martin E. Palmer, ed., *On Giving the Spiritual Exercises: The Early Jesuit Manuscript Directories and the Official Directory of 1599* (St. Louis (MO): The Institute of Jesuit Sources, 1996), 9. "recognizing his vocation" in this context would mean the mission to which the Lord is calling.

⁸⁴ *Doc.* 51.1.

⁸⁵ *Doc.* 83.1.

⁸⁶ Cf. *SpEx* [318]; Brian O. McDermott, 'Spiritual Consolation and Its Role in the Second Time of Election', *Studies in the Spirituality of Jesuits* 50, no. 4 (2018), 41-42.

⁸⁷ Cf. Schurhammer, *Francis Xavier III*, 630.

⁸⁸ Cf. MX II, 842-845; Schurhammer, *Francis Xavier II*, 205.

⁸⁹ Cf. Valignano, *Historia del Principio*, 48; MX II, 844.

In Japan, Francis continued with the same lifestyle, even in the midst of extremely cold weather conditions. He gave up eating meat and drinking wine in order not to cause scandal to the priests of Japan.⁹⁰ The people in Japan were not impressed by the example of life of Francis. On the contrary, he was despised and ridiculed.⁹¹ The doctrine he was preaching was barely appreciated.

Towards the end of August 1550, Francis set out for the royal court at Miyako. On the way, in the beginning of November, he came across the large city of Yamaguchi. His presence there attracted a lot of attention from the many nobles of the city, as the news spread that foreign preachers had come from Tenjiku, the land of Shaka (the Buddha). So Francis interrupted the journey to Miyako to proclaim the Gospel in Yamaguchi until mid-December. The powerful duke of Yamaguchi, prince Ôuchi Yoshitaka, came to know from his secretary, Naitô Okimori, of the sensation Francis and Fernández had caused in the city. He wished to see them. On the day destined for the audience, Francis and Fernández went in their poor clothes to the palace of the duke. Their message failed to impress the duke, and they were quickly dismissed. Undeterred, Francis hoped that he would obtain permission from the king of Japan at Miyako to preach the Gospel. On arriving in Miyako, he was disappointed by the grim reality of the capital. King Ô of Miyako was king in only name. He had no actual authority over Japan. What is more, he even refused to see the preachers from Tenjiku. During the journey, along the way, they had received nothing but contempt. Their foreign garb was a laughing stock. After a brief eleven days stay in the Miyako, Francis and his companions began the journey back to Yamaguchi.⁹²

Francis was convinced that the lifestyle he had adopted was the best way of living out the evangelical counsel of poverty, but he had to consider whether he was really “becoming all things to all people” in Japan. Discernment challenged his convictions. He soon realised that the new context necessitated a change. The way he fulfilled the vow of poverty had to go beyond material poverty. Francis was a man given to making his daily examination of conscience. He began to pay keen attention to the reality around him. Questioning his convictions, i.e., discerning, may have shaken him up and even placed his life in a crisis. But he was not afraid to make changes. He realised that the vow of poverty had a spiritual dimension, deeper and more interior than the merely material. His past convictions became an obstacle to his finding and fulfilling the will of God. He would have realised that it was the Evil One who was moving him interiorly to hold on to his convictions with regard to material poverty, even though such actual poverty is laudable. He had to give up those convictions and what he thought were the time-tested methods of evangelisation and to become poor spiritually. He had to empty himself and to adopt new strategies. New wine, new wineskins (Cf. Mt 9: 14-17).

⁹⁰ Cf. *Doc.* 85.14.

⁹¹ Cf. Ferdinand Tournier, ‘S. François Xavier d’Après Un Manuscrit Inédit Du P. Auger’, *Études* 109, no. n.a (1906), 667; Schurhammer, *Francis Xavier IV*, 193, 196.

⁹² Cf. Schurhammer, *Francis Xavier IV*, 152, 158, 161, 212-213.

Francis's harp had more strings than one. He came up with a new plan. He sought a fresh audience with the duke of Yamaguchi through Naitô. The audience was granted. By end of April 1551, they were back in the court of Yoshitaka. This time they went better dressed, in silk and satin, and were carrying copious gifts and letters. Francis went as the ambassador of the governor of India.⁹³ He related the story in his letter to his Companions in Europe written from Cochin on 29 January 1552:

The duke was delighted with the present and the letter. He offered us many things, but we refused to accept any of them, even though he tried to give us much gold and silver. We then told him that if he wished to grant us a favor, all that we wanted was that he would give us his permission to preach the law of God in his lands and that those who wished to accept it might do so. He very graciously granted us permission for this [...] He also gave us a monastery, like a college, so that we might stay there.⁹⁴

Francis entered through the duke's door and came out of his own. Though Francis does not make mention of an explicit process of discernment, it is implicit in his way of proceeding and change of strategies.

5. The Blue Mountains Beckon

Francis knew of China well before he came to know of Japan. In his letter to his Companions in Europe written from Amboina on 10 May 1546 he mentions China. While he was in Malacca in the previous months he had met a Portuguese merchant who had been in China. From that moment on, he began urging various people to gather information about the cultures and religions of China.⁹⁵ By January 1548 he sent reports of China and Japan to Rome.⁹⁶ He established contacts with people travelling to China. On 2 April 1548, from Goa, he wrote to his friend Diogo Pereira in Cochin who was going to China, encouraging him and giving him spiritual advice.⁹⁷

However, the desire to go to China began to galvanise him when Francis was on Japanese soil. He speaks about it in his Great Letter about Japan to his Companions in Europe written on 29 January 1552, on his return to Cochin. He had found that the Japanese held the Chinese in high esteem, and from this Francis deduced that Chinese were highly cultured. Further, he felt that, if the Chinese embraced the Christian faith, the Japanese would follow suit⁹⁸:

I believe that I shall go this year of 1552 to where the king of China is residing, since it is a land where the law of our Lord Jesus Christ could be greatly increased. If it is accepted

⁹³ Cf. Schurhammer, *Francis Xavier IV*, 216-217.

⁹⁴ *Doc.* 96.16.

⁹⁵ *Doc.* 55.15-16.

⁹⁶ Cf. *Doc.* 60.2.

⁹⁷ Cf. *Doc.* 65.

⁹⁸ Cf. *Docs.* 96.50; 97.19.

there, this will be of great assistance in Japan for confounding the sects in which they believe. From Liampo, which is one of the main cities of China, the crossing to Japan by sea is only eighty leagues.⁹⁹

On the same day he wrote to Ignatius,

If there should be no obstacles here in India to prevent me from leaving this year, 1552, I hope to go to China for the great service of our God which can be rendered both in China and Japan; for, if the Japanese learn that the Chinese have accepted the law of God, they will more quickly lose their faith in their sects. I have great hopes that both the Chinese and the Japanese, through the Society of the name of Jesus, will abandon their idolatries and [will] worship God and Jesus Christ, the Savior of all nations.¹⁰⁰

At this stage, Francis was using expressions such as “I believe that I shall go” and “I hope to go to China”. This could indicate that he had not come to a final decision. Weeks before sailing for China from Goa, he communicated his decision to go China to Gonçalo Rodrigues and Simão Rodrigues.¹⁰¹ Few days later, on 9 April 1552, he wrote to Ignatius from Goa what was destined to be his last letter to the General of the Society, saying,

Six days from now [...], three of us of the Society, two priests and one lay brother, are going to the court of the king of China which is near Japan, a land that is extremely large and inhabited by a very gifted race and by many scholars. From information which I have received, they are greatly devoted to learning; and the more learned one is, the more noble and esteemed he is. All the paganism of the sects in Japan has come from China. We are going with great confidence in God our Lord that his name will be manifested in China.¹⁰²

Six years went by between the first mention of China in the Letters of Francis and the actual decision to go to China. What we know from his surviving Letters is his decision to go China. Did he go through a process of discernment before making the decision to go to China? With regard to his going to the Macassar region and to Japan, as has noted above, there was process of discernment involved before making the decision. He gathered as much information as he could about the places he wished to visit. To a certain extent, he weighed the advantages and disadvantages of the various options available to him. More importantly, he spoke of how the desire was born, of the various movements that he experienced within his soul and of how the intense experience of spiritual consolation led him to take the final decision. The beginning of the process of discernment was the birth of the desire. The middle was a gathering of information, sifting it out, and then taking up the matter in prayer before God. The end was the making of a final decision based on his experiences of spiritual consolation or desolation. In the case of the mission to China, the beginning is present and the middle is partially present, but there is hardly any mention of the spiritual movements in the soul. He plainly communicates only his final decision.

⁹⁹ *Doc.* 96.51.

¹⁰⁰ *Doc.* 97.15.

¹⁰¹ Cf. *Docs.* 102.8; 103.2. On 22 and 27 March 1552 respectively.

¹⁰² *Doc.* 110.2

Could one conclude, from the contents of his Letters, that Francis did not go through a process of discernment before deciding to go to China? One should keep in mind that the main purpose of the Letters was to communicate news of the missions and affairs of the Society's government. The genre of the letters is not that of a spiritual journal. Though Francis often spoke of his spiritual experiences, he obviously did not record all of them in his Letters. Considering this, it is difficult to say whether Francis took up a process of discernment prior to deciding to go China. The letters do not speak of such a process of discernment. That does not mean that, in fact, there was no process. The letter Francis wrote to Father Francisco Pérez in Malacca from Sancian on 22 October 1552 does make a veiled reference to his habitual way of perceiving the will of God:

The first [danger] is to cease to trust and confide in the mercy of God, since it is for his love and service that we are going to manifest his law and Jesus Christ his Son, our Redeemer and Lord, as he well knows. Since, through his holy mercy, **he gave us these desires**, it would now be a much greater danger to distrust his mercy and power through fear of the dangers which we could incur in his service—for, if it is to his greater service, he will protect us from the dangers of this life—than it would be to endure all the evils which could be inflicted upon us by the enemies of God, since without the leave and permission of God the demons and their ministers cannot harm us in any way.¹⁰³

Once Francis was convinced that a particular desire was placed in his heart by God, nothing stopped him from executing it. Not fulfilling the will of God which he had so perceived was, for him, tantamount to disobeying God.¹⁰⁴ From the human point of view, the mission to China was disastrous. Many questions arise with regard to Francis's discernment and with his subsequent decision with regard to the mission to China.

Did Francis make a sound election? The idea of going to China was conceived while Francis was in Japan. On his return, he found in Malacca that the letter from Ignatius appointing him Provincial of the Indies was waiting for him. Given this new status, should he not have remained in Goa in order to govern, sending someone else to China? This was the opinion of Ignatius, as was made known in his famous letter recalling Francis to Rome.¹⁰⁵

Was Francis's decision taken hastily? Francis has won the title *El Divino Impaciente*.¹⁰⁶ Is a virtue made of his impatience by adding to it the prefix "*divino*"? He had meticulously planned a Portuguese embassy to the king of China from Malacca. His heart was afire with zeal to continue the voyage to China when he reached Malacca from Goa (mid-June 1552). What a disappointment when he discovered what had come to be of

¹⁰³ *Doc.* 131.4. Emphasis mine. See also 131.6.

¹⁰⁴ Cf. *Doc.* 51.2.

¹⁰⁵ Cf. *Doc.* 137a.1. The letter was written on 28 June 1553. Francis was dead over six month prior. Yet, Ignatius, the writer of *SpEx* [22], believed that it was the divine wisdom guiding Francis. Lancilotto, meanwhile, had already opposed Francis's going to Japan and had written about it to Ignatius. Cf. Verdoy, *San Francisco*, 147.

¹⁰⁶ A theatrical work by José María Pemán, 1933.

the embassy! Due to the conflict between two brothers, Alvaro da Ataide (the first captain of the sea of Malacca) and Pedro da Silva (the captain of the ship *Santa Cruz* that was to take the embassy to China), the embassy had completely fallen apart.¹⁰⁷ Should he have persisted on going even after the embassy fell apart?¹⁰⁸ Was he carried away by his enthusiasm to introduce Christian faith in China without considering “to which side reason more inclines”?¹⁰⁹ Nothing could extinguish the fire in his soul. His trust in God was indomitable.

Further, once in Sancian, by early November, those who were to sail with him to Canton abandoned him one after the other. The confrere Alvaro Ferreira, after hearing the horrifying stories of the dungeons of China from the fugitive Manuel de Chaves, backed out. Pero Lopes, the voluntary interpreter, followed suit.¹¹⁰ When all human support was waning, Francis’s trust in God was waxing. On 12 November 1552 he wrote, “We, Antonio, Cristovão and I, are going with the help of God.”¹¹¹

Once again, going by human logic, it might seem that Francis did not make a sound discernment about going to China. God’s ways, though, are mysterious. The zeal for the Lord’s mission had consumed Francis (Cf. Ps 69: 9). He undertook every mission purely motivated by the love of God and for his service and greater glory. What seemed a disaster, humanly speaking, brought much glory to God. “All things work together for good for those who love God, who are called according to his purpose” (Rm 8: 28), writes St. Paul. The grain of wheat fell to the ground on the Island of Sancian, but it produced much fruit across the blue mountains that had beckoned Francis. God did not let Francis down. God made Francis his channel, the grace he had most desired. He opened the door for the preaching of the Gospel.¹¹² Moses did have a view of the Promised Land from Mount Nebo, but he did not cross over (Cf. Dt 34: 1ff). His descendants did. Francis was only three leagues away from his destination, breathing his last while waiting for the Chinese agent to take him across. Matteo Ricci and Michele Ruggieri, Francis’s “descendants”, crossed over, fulfilling the dream he had harboured for God.

Francis’ mission was purely motivated by the love of God. The mission, concretely, meant for Francis “the propagation of the faith”.¹¹³ The desire to carry the faith to the ends of the earth is an underlying common denominator that guided all of Francis’ discernment processes.¹¹⁴

¹⁰⁷ Cf. *Doc.* 124.1; Schurhammer, *Francis Xavier IV*, 584-586.

¹⁰⁸ Cf. J. Enrique Ruiz de Galarreta, “Francisco Javier, ¿arquetipo de Misionero?”, *Manresa* 78, no. 306 (2006), 39-40.

¹⁰⁹ *SpEx* [182].

¹¹⁰ Cf. Schurhammer, *Francis Xavier IV*, 635.

¹¹¹ *Doc.* 135.9. Cristovão backed out a day before Francis’s death, 3 December.

¹¹² Cf. *Doc.* 99a.1.

¹¹³ *Formula of the Institute 1540* [1] in John W. Padberg, ed., *The Constitutions of the Society of Jesus and Their Complementary Norms* (Saint Louis: Institute of Jesuit Sources, 1996).

¹¹⁴ Francis mentions this motivating principle in the excerpts I have quoted from his letters in this article: “our holy faith will be greatly increased” (*Doc.* 50.3), “for the increase of our holy faith” (*Doc.* 83.1), “that

Conclusion

The early discernment processes of Francis were slow and prolonged. He explicitly took time out to discern. In making the unchangeable election of a state of life,¹¹⁵ his discernment process was assisted by Ignatius. In all likelihood, Gasper Coelho assisted Francis when he was discerning about sailing to the Malay Archipelago. The language used by Francis to speak about discernment, though the term discernment itself is not explicitly used, indicates that he discerned according to the mind of Ignatius. The later discernment processes were faster and briefer. It is but natural that, with experience, he became familiar with God's habitual way of dealing with him. This may explain why he employed less time in discernment and perceived God's will more quickly. In a way, with time and the experiences of life, he became expert in the art of discernment.

Luis Bermejo writes, "It is always the second mode of making an election as outlined by Ignatius in the Spiritual Exercises that Francis utilizes exclusively".¹¹⁶ For Bermejo, this is unfortunate because, according to him, Francis does not make use of the First Method of the Third Time of Making a Sound and Good Election.¹¹⁷ In this method, one has recourse to the use of reason. Bermejo does not seem to be fully justified in this critique. It has been seen that Francis took keen interest in gathering information about the various possibilities he was considering and spoke with people who had been to the lands that he would possibly visit. Based on what he learnt, he discarded certain possibilities, considering only the "reasonable" choices. Francis does not clearly distinguish the different times for making an Election. It should be kept in mind that Francis was writing *letters* and not a *spiritual journal*¹¹⁸ in which one would probably make those distinctions. In any case, whether proceeding in the Second Time or using the First Method of the Third Time, one needs to seek confirmation from the Lord with regard to the decision made. The confirmation is often *felt* through the experience of either spiritual consolation or desolation. In the *Spiritual Diary* Ignatius sought confirmation of the decision he had made with regard to the radical poverty in the Society in the experience of spiritual consolation. Fr. General Arturo Sosa writes, "Discernment needs these elements [information, capacity to argue rationally] but it is not limited to them.

our holy faith will be greatly increased in those regions" (*Doc.* 70.10), "where the law of our Lord Jesus Christ could be greatly increased" (*Doc.* 96.51), they "will abandon their idolatries and [will] worship God and Jesus Christ, the Savior of all nations" (*Doc.* 97.15), "his name will be manifested in China" (*Doc.* 110.2).

¹¹⁵ Cf. *SpEx* [172].

¹¹⁶ Bermejo, *Unto the Indies*, 195. See also pp. 117-118.

¹¹⁷ Cf. *SpEx* [178-183].

¹¹⁸ Did Francis keep a spiritual diary? In two of his letters, he highly recommends the practice to others. To Barzaeus he says, "What you should do most of all while meditating on these points is to note very attentively the things which God our Lord gives you to feel within your soul" (*Doc.* 116.8). Francis give similar instructions to Antonio de Heredia (Cf. *Doc.* 120.8). Both these instructions are composed prior to navigating to China. Could this not indicate that Francis taking note of his own spiritual movements?

Discernment ultimately has to do with spiritual movements”.¹¹⁹ Francis certainly stood out in perceiving the will of God “from the experience of consolations and desolations, and from the experience in the discernment of various spirits”.¹²⁰

On 5 July 1553 Ignatius wrote the following to Francis:

Your Reverence should be well advised about two things which from experience have been found to be very useful, even necessary, in these regions. One is that each provincial, or local superior, or rector of a college where there are a certain number, should have a collateral [...]. The second is that the said provincials and rectors should have some individuals, from among those who are more mature and discreet, designated as a council, with whom they should consult about things of some importance that they are dealing with.¹²¹

It can be inferred from the content of the letter that Ignatius was writing to Francis after he got reports of his way of proceeding in India. The will of God one *clearly* feels in the soul needs be authenticated. One may be deceived. If one relies fully on personal convictions, he runs the risk of becoming a norm unto himself. Other than Gaspar Coelho, we do not know of any other person in whom Francis confided in the Indies. With regard to Francis’s discernments to go to Japan and to China, there is no explicit evidence indicating whether he consulted regarding his decision with someone “mature and discreet”.¹²² In this particular aspect, Francis’s model of discernment is certainly not imitable. A process of discernment, to be authentic, needs to be accompanied by someone “mature and discreet”.

Francis was exploring an uncharted terrain, both physically and spiritually. His way of discernment offers us several insights. The possible flaws in his discernment processes alert us. With near certainty we can affirm one thing: that Francis acted with purity of intention. He did not seek his own glory or interest. He only sought God’s greater glory. “But not every action is truly for God’s greater glory”, says Fr. Kolvenbach:

Consequently, Ignatius offers a way to discover and choose God’s will. “Discernment” is pivotal [...]. With all the competing values that bombard us today, making free human choice is never easy. We very rarely find that all of the reasons for a decision are on one side. There is always a pull and tug. This is where discernment becomes crucial. Discernment requires getting the facts and then reflecting, sorting out the motives that impel us, weighing values and priorities, considering how significant decisions will impact on the poor, deciding, and living with our decisions.¹²³

These words of Kolvenbach resonate with the praxis of Francis.

¹¹⁹ Letter of Fr. General Arturo Sosa to the Whole Society On Discernment in Common, no. 7.

¹²⁰ *SpEx* [176].

¹²¹ *Doc.* 137b.3.

¹²² Bermejo writes, “I do not recall ever reading in his correspondence that he consulted others before deciding, even when he was Provincial. It was surely a serious drawback in his character”. *Unto the Indies*, 118.

¹²³ Peter-Hans Kolvenbach, “Ignatian Pedagogy: A Practical Approach”, An address delivered to the participants at the International Workshop (Villa Cavalletti, 1993), available at <https://kolvenbach.jesuitgeneral.org/en/archive?view=archivo&id=8, 5>.