

1-1-2013

# From decision making to discernment: using Ignatian and Friends models of discernment in a Baptist context

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## Recommended Citation

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GEORGE FOX UNIVERSITY

FROM DECISION MAKING TO DISCERNMENT:  
USING IGNATIAN AND FRIENDS MODELS OF DISCERNMENT  
IN A BAPTIST CONTEXT

A DISSERTATION SUBMITTED TO  
THE FACULTY OF GEORGE FOX EVANGELICAL SEMINARY  
IN CANDIDACY FOR THE DEGREE OF  
DOCTOR OF MINISTRY

BY

LEON KENDELL CAMERON, JR.

PORTLAND, OREGON

MARCH 2013

George Fox Evangelical Seminary  
George Fox University  
Portland, Oregon

CERTIFICATE OF APPROVAL

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DMin Dissertation

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This is to certify that the DMin Dissertation of

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has been approved by  
the Dissertation Committee on March 11, 2013  
for the degree of Doctor of Ministry in Leadership and Spiritual Formation.

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## ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

To the First Baptist Church of Mount Holly, I am thankful for all the ways you helped shepherd me through this process. From time to write, places for spiritual retreat, and words of encouragement, you helped make this a possibility. To dear friends in my former pastorates at Benson Baptist Church and First Baptist Church of Whiteville, thank you for the encouragement to finish this process.

To the staff at First Baptist Church of Mount Holly, thank you for the times when you had to sacrifice to give me time to write. Thanks Kim, Beth, Jeff, Marie, and Brian, I appreciate you sincerely, and I am thankful I serve our Lord with you.

To the faculty at George Fox Evangelical Seminary, especially Drs. Chuck Conniry and Carole Spencer, I cannot tell you how much this program has meant to me. I am especially appreciative of my academic adviser Dr. Phillip Carnes; thanks for the ways you have helped shape this work. Your timeliness and your insights and opinions have been deeply appreciated. I am also thankful to Dr. Deborah Lloyd for her insights as my second advisor.

To LSF Cohorts H, I, and J, thank you for all the times in either chat or in Cannon Beach when you challenged me and strengthened me. I am especially appreciative of the two times you all had to nurse me through illnesses! Although I do not connect with you all often, I count you as dear friends, and I thank God for you often.

To my family, thanks for your prayers and support through this process. I am indebted to my three sisters: Nancy, Martha, and Sarah. Being your little brother, I am thankful for many things you have done for me, but I am probably most thankful you did

not kill me when I deserved it as a kid! We are Buck and Dorothy's children, and I wish they were with us to celebrate. To the Poindexter clan, thanks for your support. To Bill and Sims Poindexter, you are more than in-laws to me.

To Amanda Dorothy Cameron, you are precious to me. As I finish this process, it has probably been a nuisance to you for the most part, but I hope it has taught you how much your parents value education. You are an amazing young woman, and I love you deeply.

Most of all, to my beloved wife of over two decades, Jan Poindexter-Cameron, words cannot express my thanks. You have been a constant support in this process, and you have made many sacrifices to make it a reality. For all the pots of coffee, the times of solitude to write, your gifts in editing, and your listening ear, I am grateful. You are as beautiful as you are brilliant, and, between you and Amanda, I think I am doing well to be the third most intelligent member of my family.

Finally, "Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who has blessed us with all spiritual blessings in heavenly places in Christ" Eph. 1:3. This work has drawn me closer to You, and I pray it will help others do the same.



## ABSTRACT

This dissertation addresses the question: For Baptist congregations that have been frustrated with winner-take-all majoritarian models, how can the Church move away from making best the decision between alternatives and toward discernment as a spiritual process of seeking after God's will? This writer argues that majoritarian models often lead to church strife and then posits a model of discernment for contemporary Baptist practice that utilizes both the discernment practices of Ignatius of Loyola in *The Spiritual Exercises* and of the Society of Friends.

Chapter One surveys problems with majoritarian models of decision making and explores caveats and clarifications to the author's thesis. The author also gives a short overview of certain biblical models of discernment and their applicability.

Chapter Two identifies concerns in the secular world with majoritarian and authoritarian models of decision making. The chapter depicts consensus as a possible model for decision making with caveats to that model.

Chapter Three focuses on the history of discernment. This chapter includes an excursus on the use of the term *diakrisis* in the New Testament and its historical applications thereafter. The author then illustrates the movement of defining *diakrisis* from a specific charism to a general charism.

Chapter Four focuses in-depth on the discernment practices in *The Spiritual Exercises* of Ignatius of Loyola. The chapter shows how Ignatius' focus on confession and the life of Christ leads to discernment.

Chapter Five explores discernment models of the Society of Friends, specifically, the counterpoint offered by the Friends' focus on consensus and communal prompting through the work of the Holy Spirit.

Chapter Six discusses ways in which contemporary Baptist churches might synthesize Ignatius' model with certain Friends practices. Finally, the author proposes a discernment model that can be used by churches—Baptist or other denominations—exploring alternatives to the majoritarian model.

## CHAPTER ONE

### INTRODUCTION: FROM DECISION MAKING TO DISCERNMENT

#### Decision Making Gone Awry

I received the call in my college dorm room. It was my mother.

“You need to come home for the church business meeting Wednesday night.”

“Why Mom? I have class early the next morning.”

“I just know it’s going to be contentious. We need you there.”

My home church was in the middle of a project to build a new, larger sanctuary.

Every decision had become more contentious than the last, and now the church was in the process of making decisions about the interiors. Like many Baptist churches, the meetings were governed by *Robert’s Rules of Order*, and majority rule carried the day.

Being a good, Southern son, I drove the 70 miles to the meeting. I made my way into the meeting and sat on the back row. The moderator called for the chairperson of the building project to make a presentation. He dutifully carried two small model church pews to the microphone. He carefully explained how the committee had reviewed hundreds of types of pew ends, and these two possibilities were their recommendations. The church needed to choose between these options.

After some initial conversation that became more and more contentious, his wife raised her hand. She said that she had reviewed the books of pew ends as they came to their house, and she was convinced the committee had made the wrong recommendation. She had a third option that she wanted the congregation to consider. She then lifted a blanket to reveal another model of a different pew end.

The room erupted. An hour of irritation and recrimination followed. Agendas hardened, and anger grew. My mother leaned forward and whispered, “Do something.”

After being recognized, I stood and asked, “Have we even prayed about all of this?” Some scoffed, some yelled, “Amen!” and others laughed. I heard a man a few rows ahead of me whisper, “Dumb kid,” as I looked at Mom and whispered, “I tried.” Another stood after me and said, “We prayed at the beginning of the meeting when the preacher opened in prayer. I call the question.” We then voted to vote, and then voted on a pew end.

The meeting ended after a few hours, but the hurt lasted for years. The committee chair and his wife eventually left the church, and many others were scarred by the words that night. Community was irreparably damaged, and the church struggled afterward. By the time the sanctuary was completed, attendance had decreased, and when the pastor left a little over a year later, more families left. A small group struggled almost two decades to pay the debt.

### **Limitations of Majority Rule Governance**

After serving twenty years in ministry positions in multiple churches, I continue to see problems created by contentious majority rule decisions. Church and denominational meetings have been filled with coalition building, manipulative tactics, and hard-nosed politics to find more votes. In my experience, such church governance leads to divisions in Christian community and hurt feelings that can persist many years. My present congregation has been plagued by this in the past. Ultimately, the majority rule model yields winners and losers which can lead to a disruption in the church

community. Our challenge, as it pertains to this particular work, may be stated as follows:

*How can First Baptist Church, and others like it, move past majority rule and find a discernment process that is faithful to our tradition, faithful to the Holy Spirit, and faithful to a communal sense of God's leading?*

I have often found myself struggling with whether or not our decision making in the church has been a spiritual process. A typical majoritarian meeting in many Baptist churches unfolds along predictable lines. A meeting is called to order, and the moderator turns to the attending minister and invites her or him to open the meeting in prayer. The “business” of the meeting is then accomplished like many businesses and organizations in the community conduct their work – with a strict adherence to *Robert's Rules of Order*. Finally, after all the decisions have been made, someone turns to the pastor and invites him or her to close in prayer.

In this example, “business” is placed in quotation marks because it is the tacit assumption of such a meeting that “business” consists of the decision making that occurs between the opening and closing prayers. However, one should ask whether such a scenario diminishes the Holy Spirit's role. Instead of listening for the Holy Spirit as the primary goal of the meeting, the practice of listening and discerning is reduced to mere formality. Instead of perfunctory prayer, which serves as bookends to the meeting, discerning God's will should be central to the process of decision making for the people of God. What if our “business” were also the work of prayer, both speaking and listening, to discern God's desire for the congregation? What if that were the goal for church meetings?

In this work, I will focus particularly on this question and suggest some discernment practices that both the Society of Friends (Quakers) and Jesuits (following Ignatius of Loyola) have practiced for centuries. I propose a consensus model for ecclesial leadership for Baptist congregations like mine that have been frustrated with winner-take-all majority rule models. However, one caveat should be noted: Throughout this paper, the term *consensus* should never be confused with acquiescence.<sup>1</sup> Long meetings can end because strong personalities can dominate in ways that compel others simply to submit in the name of “consensus.” The term *consensus* in the truest sense is an instance of spiritual discernment, to which Friends refer as “the sense of the meeting.”<sup>2</sup>

### **Caveats**

No decision process in the Church is perfect because no decision process is conducted by perfect people. Any church decision making process can be short-circuited by the tug of war of politics and personal agendas.<sup>3</sup> Power struggles can pervade any human process. Reasoned discourse can prevail or can be sidetracked by the personal issues of the participants. No process will completely immunize the Church from the carefully plotted ploys of those that wish to impose their agendas on others. This can be true with any system of governance.<sup>4</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Danny E. Morris and Charles M. Olsen, *Discerning God's Will Together: A Spiritual Practice for the Church* (Herndon, VA: Alban Institute, 1997), 12.

<sup>2</sup> Barry Morley, *Beyond Consensus: Salvaging Sense of the Meeting*, Pendle Hill Pamphlet 307 (Wallingford, PA: Pendle Hill, 1993), 8.

<sup>3</sup> Morris and Olsen, 23.

<sup>4</sup> *Ibid.*, 12.

Furthermore, one should not immediately assume that one system is more explicitly spiritual or God-ordained than another. Many churches utilize hierarchical models of leadership that are led by a spiritual leader. For example, Benedictine monasticism has flourished for well over a millennium with an autocratic model based on an abbot as the spiritual leader of an abbey. Indeed, the Rule of Benedict is based on an autocratic system, but that system also has at its core a covenant agreement in which the abbot commits to follow God and the oblate enters into discipline to the abbot to learn more about how to follow God.<sup>5</sup>

In the corporate world, such leaders are often heralded for their insight and bold leadership. Coach Bill Parcells of the National Football League has won many regular season games and multiple Super Bowls with a succession of different teams. He has taken teams that were considered to be perennial losers and won with them. His leadership style is quite autocratic, but it is a style that works well for him. Also, though an autocrat, Parcells knows how to listen and knows how to gain insight from others.<sup>6</sup> In the Church, as in business, autocratic leadership styles can be successful.<sup>7</sup>

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<sup>5</sup> Dwight Longenecker, *St. Benedict and St. Thérèse: The Little Rule & the Little Way* (Huntington, IN: Our Sunday Visitor, 2002), 89.

<sup>6</sup> Michael Roberto, *Why Great Leaders Don't Take Yes for an Answer: Managing for Conflict and Consensus* (Upper Saddle River, NJ: Wharton School Publishing, 2005), 17. Roberto also notes, "In general, however, success often proves difficult to sustain over the long haul for those who employ this leadership pattern. Perhaps that explains why Parcells has chosen to shift frequently from one team to another during his coaching career."

<sup>7</sup> Henry J. Schmidt, "Portraits of Pastoral Leadership: From Floating Logs to Preying Storks," *Direction* 8, no. 2 (April 1979), <http://www.directionjournal.org/article/?304> (accessed May 14, 2009); Thom S. Rainer, *Breakout Churches: Discover How to Make the Leap* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2005), 46. Schmidt makes a helpful distinction between different forms of hierarchical leadership that he describes as "Big Daddy" leaders, those that lead as the dominant father figure in a group, and "Preying Stork" leaders, those that lead as authoritarians that make all the decisions for the group. It is the Preying Stork that Thom Rainer describes when he notes "autocratic leaders tend to have a pattern in their congregations." He also notes they often have short tenures. On the other hand, Schmidt notes that the "Big Daddy," while hierarchical, can be successful.

Charismatic leaders represent another form of influence that may or may not be autocratic. These are the people who lead more through personal charisma than by title or position within a church or organization. Many churches have charismatic leaders who are successful. However, like autocrats, charismatic leaders - by virtue of their charisma - tend (sometimes unwittingly) to exert a disproportionate degree of influence, which often skews the level playing field required for consensus building. Edwin Friedman goes so far as to say that charismatic and consensus leadership styles are polar opposites.<sup>8</sup> He also believes that healthy, differentiated leaders can exist in either polarity.<sup>9</sup>

Friedman, moreover, is no friend of risk-avoiders that masquerade as consensus builders. When this sort of leader makes the case for consensus, he or she is doing so to the detriment of sound leadership strategies. Friedman writes:

In any type of institution whatsoever, when a self-directed, imaginative, energetic, or creative member is being consistently frustrated and sabotaged rather than encouraged and supported, what will turn out to be true 100 percent of the time, regardless of whether the disrupters are supervisors, subordinates, or peers, is that the person at the very top of that institution is a peace-monger. By that I mean a highly anxious risk-avoider, someone who is more concerned with good feelings than with progress, someone whose life revolves around the axis of consensus, a “middler,” someone who is so incapable of taking well-defined stands that the “disability” seems to be genetic, someone who functions as if they had been filleted of their backbone, someone who treats conflict or anxiety like mustard gas – one whiff, and on goes the emotional gas mask and they flit. As such leaders are often “nice,” if not charming.<sup>10</sup>

True consensus builders must live with honesty and openness that encourages and supports a variety of opinions. When consensus becomes an attempt to create peace at the

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<sup>8</sup> Edwin H. Friedman, *Generation to Generation: Family Process in Church and Synagogue*, The Guilford Family Therapy Series (New York: Guilford Press, 1985), 228-229.

<sup>9</sup> *Ibid.*, 228.

<sup>10</sup> Edwin Friedman, *A Failure of Nerve: Leadership in the Age of the Quick Fix*, ed. Margaret M. Treadwell (Harrisburg, PA: Seabury Books, 2007), 254.



expense of the church's wellbeing, it becomes just as oppressive as any other model. Moreover, Friedman's critique serves as a cautionary note for leaders. If one moves towards consensus models, one must clearly look at his or her motives. If consensus is an attempt on the leader's part to avoid risk-taking and decision making, then the church or organization can be paralyzed by vacillation and avoidance.<sup>11</sup>

Another matter to consider is the degree to which the democratic model of church governance is valid. Meetings governed by *Robert's Rules of Order* are the predominant method used by many Baptists. Such governance has, in fact, worked well for many Baptist churches in North America for over a century. However, this democratic model has also left a trail of hurt for many over the years. Majority rule, by definition, means that there are winners and losers.<sup>12</sup> Churches will have to decide for themselves if they feel led to critique the majority rule model, and I would invite those churches to at least consider the following.

Most meetings in the democratic model are governed by *Robert's Rules of Order*. Henry Martyn Robert was an accomplished military engineer who rose to the rank of general. He was asked to moderate a meeting at a church. The lack of rules for the meeting led to great embarrassment for the dutiful officer, and he was determined not to officiate a meeting again without some form of parliamentary law.<sup>13</sup> Using the rules of

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<sup>11</sup> Friedman, *Generation to Generation: Family Process in Church and Synagogue*, 257.

<sup>12</sup> Speed Leas and Paul Kittlaus, *Church Fights: Managing Conflict in the Local Church* (Philadelphia, PA: The Westminster Press, 1973), 148.

<sup>13</sup> "Short History of Robert's Rules," <http://www.robertsrules.com/history.html> (accessed May 12, 2009).

the United States House of Representatives as a guide,<sup>14</sup> he created the first form of his “rules” to ensure that societal meetings could be held in a “fair, orderly, and expeditious manner.”<sup>15</sup> General Robert felt that an orderly process that ensured majority rule while protecting minority rights would lead to harmonious decisions. However, this bias for majority rule lends itself to unhappiness for the minority.<sup>16</sup>

### **Biblical Models of Church Governance**

Over the centuries, Baptists have prided themselves on being a Bible-centered people,<sup>17</sup> and one would make a grave oversight not to engage the scriptural witness on matters of decision making and discernment. Discussion of a biblical model of governance must reflect both the diversity of viewpoint in the Bible and the cultural context of different forms of church governance.<sup>18</sup>

Of course, many volumes have been written on a vast array of leadership models claimed as “biblical.” For the purposes of this work, noting that multiple views of decision making in Scripture exist will be sufficient. To claim that a single, “scriptural” model of discernment is preferred as normative is to assume that only one such model exists. However, the biblical narrative reflects the existence of multiple models.<sup>19</sup> Over

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<sup>14</sup> Lawrence Susskind and Jeffrey L. Cruikshank, *Breaking Robert's Rules: The New Way to Run Your Meeting, Build Consensus, and Get Results* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2006), 6.

<sup>15</sup> “Short History of Robert's Rules.”

<sup>16</sup> Susskind and Cruikshank, 11.

<sup>17</sup> Walter B. Shurden, *Not A Silent People: Controversies That Have Shaped Southern Baptists*, Rev. ed. (Macon, GA: Smyth & Helwys, 1995), 69-71.

<sup>18</sup> In Chapter 3, this work will deal more precisely with the biblical usage and history of the term *diakrisis* in the New Testament.

<sup>19</sup> Raymond E. Brown, *The Churches the Apostles Left Behind* (New York: Paulist Press, 1984), 14.

the centuries, the Church has argued over issues of polity and discernment models. Church history is replete with examples of adherents to one ecclesial form arguing that their form of governance and discernment is closest to the apostolic norm.

Adherents to an episcopal form of governance might argue the biblical merits of their model.<sup>20</sup> They point to such scriptural exemplars as Abraham, Moses, Peter, and Paul as God-ordained leaders who discerned God's will for their particular community of faith. Protagonists of this model can rightly point to these biblical leaders who told the people of God, "Thus says the Lord." Moreover, the New Testament attests to the *episkopos*, the "overseer" or "bishop" (1 Tim. 3:1-7), who clearly has a role as spiritual leader of the congregation.<sup>21</sup>

At the same time, adherents to elder models of leadership can find biblical bases for their view. The *presbyteron*, or "elder," is also a New Testament term (1 Tim. 5:19).<sup>22</sup> Many might view the Council of Jerusalem in Acts 15 as the paramount example of this model. In this passage, Paul and Barnabas travel to Jerusalem to deal with the issue of circumcising Gentile converts. The text says they met with *ton apostolon kai ton presbyteron*, "the apostles and the elders" (Acts 15:4). After a great debate and words from Peter, Paul, Barnabas, and James, "the apostles and the elders, with the consent of the whole church, decided to choose men from among their members and to send them to

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<sup>20</sup> Note that the term here is used for any church whose primary decision making is vested in one person or "overseer," and we will use episcopal with a lower case e to denote that. The term is not used here exclusively in the sense of those churches within one of the Episcopal unions; instead, the term applies to all churches that utilize an overseer or bishop model.

<sup>21</sup> See also Phil. 1:1, Acts 1:20, and Titus 1:7. It should be noted that the author of 1 Peter applies this to Jesus himself. See 1 Pet. 2:25.

<sup>22</sup> See also 1 Pet. 5:1. It is interesting to note that Paul uses both *episkopos* and *presbyteros* in 1 Timothy. This seems to display that Paul did not view these as mutually exclusive offices.

Antioch with Paul and Barnabas” (Acts 15:22). Advocates of an elder system of discernment may cite this and similar passages.

Interestingly, advocates of a democratic model can point to the same passage. “The consent of the whole church” seems to denote some sort of discernment for the whole body. The same can be said of Acts 6:3, where the entire church in Jerusalem called the seven for special service, or of Matt. 18:17 where Matthews instructs readers to “tell it to the church.”<sup>23</sup>

Because Scripture does not explicitly privilege one form of decision making over another, faithful believers continue to argue from one proof text or another that their favored model is the most biblically faithful. Some insist that episcopal systems are more reflective of both Western monarchies of the Middle Ages and corporate structures of modernity than the New Testament. Conversely, others contend that congregational polity reflects more the assumptions of Western democracy and individualism than the New Testament witness. Often, a church governance model influences that church’s model of discernment, and the governance model is most often reflective of the governmental system in which a church developed, i.e., the Episcopal Church in Tudor England, the Presbyterian Kirk in the clan system of Scotland, the rise of the Free Church in the democratic New World.<sup>24</sup>

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<sup>23</sup> James Leo Garrett, “An Affirmation of Congregational Polity,” *Journal for Baptist Theology and Ministry* 3, no. 1 (Spring 2005): 41-42. Garrett here also notes Paul’s use of the *pleionon* in 2 Cor. 2:6: “The punishment inflicted on him by the majority is sufficient for him.” Garrett notes this “majority” reflects a congregational polity.

<sup>24</sup> Bruce Geunther and Doug Heidebrecht, “The Elusive Biblical Model of Leadership,” *Direction* 28, no. 2 (Fall 1999): 163; Sheldon S. Wolin, *Politics and Vision: Continuity and Innovation in Western Political Thought*, Exp. ed. (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2004), 118-119.

That no agreement on such matters exists is not to imply that one should simply sweep aside issues of ecclesiology as adiaphoric. Different ecclesial models make the claim they are “biblical” – and rightly so. Each of these models includes biblical aspects. One can find healthy congregations of every type, as well as congregations that use hybrid forms of these models. Guenther and Heidebrecht reflect this thought when they write:

During the past two thousand years, the church has used various leadership models which have reflected different emphases and needs, and which have been the pragmatic amalgamation of contemporary cultural methods and specific biblical principles. Each model has strengths and weaknesses, benefits and dangers. If we isolate only the example of the NT church’s leadership structures and declare these as normative for our day, we are prevented from considering and assessing other organizational structures and leadership models used by the church. The effectiveness of all leadership models should be continually evaluated in light of both the NT principles of leadership and an understanding of the specific cultural context.<sup>25</sup>

Readers should note this work does not contend for one ecclesiological model over all others. I respectfully submit, however, that ecclesiologies of every type thrive when they include a discernment model that reflects a commitment to unity and community, such as Paul describes in 1 Corinthians 13. Additionally, since I belong to the Free Church tradition, which embraces the priesthood of all believers, I will focus on discernment practices that lend themselves particularly well to congregational polity.

The issue, as stated above, is one of unity and community. No matter the decision making practices a congregation applies, they need to be tested against their ability to enable the Church to follow the One Leader of the Church – namely, Jesus Christ – and to enable the Church to be the community that Paul describes in 1 Corinthians 13. Although healthy congregations of every ecclesiological type exist, there are also

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<sup>25</sup> Ibid., 164.

unhealthy churches in every type. A person can find this reality in congregations in the Free Church tradition, which often use majority rule models that do not lead to unity and community. I hope to illuminate a set of discernment practices that might be used with benefit in lieu of majoritarian models. The movement to discernment, in summary, is the burden of my discourse.

### **Decision Making, Discernment, and Majority Rule**

My church, like many other Baptist churches, has utilized a democratic governance model for many decades – and the matter is settled for most of our members. Thus, the issue is not whether to change the governance, but instead to determine how to engage in our form of governance with greater spiritual sensitivity. The issue, in other words, is to transform the church’s practice of *decision making* into *discernment*.

Charles Conniry notes that these terms can be ambiguous because decision making in ecclesial contexts can mean either making the best decision between alternatives or finding God’s will and acting upon it.<sup>26</sup> Luke Timothy Johnson equates decision making and discernment, but he adds a distinction between “task” decisions, which reflect making decisions between alternatives, and “identity” decisions, which include much more than simply deciding between alternatives particularly in matters of scriptural interpretation.<sup>27</sup> Decision making as an act of spiritual discernment is about seeking and obeying the Risen Christ. “It is precisely ‘who we are as a local gathering in relationship to Jesus Christ’ (identity decisions) that guides ‘what we do’ (task decisions)

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<sup>26</sup> Charles J. Conniry, Jr., “Discernment: Corporate and Individual Considerations,” *Quaker Religious Thought* 106-107 (November 2006): 10.

<sup>27</sup> Luke Timothy Johnson, *Scripture & Discernment: Decision-Making in the Church* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1996), 35-36.

in terms of engaging in collective work and witness.”<sup>28</sup> For the sake of this discourse, my working definition of decision making is to make the best decision between alternatives while discernment is defined as a spiritual process of seeking after God’s will for an individual or the gathered church.

On the question of discerning the Spirit, Danny Morris and Charles Olsen note that discernment is a process of hearing, seeing, recognizing, and distinguishing.<sup>29</sup> Believers must first listen for God as Elijah heard God in the “still small voice” (1 Kings 19:12). They need to see as God taught Samuel in the presence of Jesse’s sons, when God told him to look past appearances and look instead at the heart (see 1 Sam. 16:7). They must recognize the presence of God as Jacob did when he wrestled with the messenger of God (see Gen. 32:22-32).<sup>30</sup> Finally, they must distinguish good from evil. Just as Solomon asked for a mind to distinguish between good and evil (1 Kings 3:1-23), believers must be vigilant to discern between God’s desires and our desires, the desires of the world, or the desires of evil.<sup>31</sup>

Thus far I have begun to illuminate an issue for churches in which majority rule often leads to a disenfranchised and angry minority. For churches this often equates to lost members and even decades of hurt.<sup>32</sup> A key issue here is when churches confuse

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<sup>28</sup> Conniry, 10.

<sup>29</sup> Morris and Olsen, 23.

<sup>30</sup> *Ibid.*, 22-23.

<sup>31</sup> *Ibid.*, 24-25.

<sup>32</sup> Leas and Kittlaus, 148; Hui-Tzu Grace Chou, “The Impact of Congregational Characteristics on Conflict-Related Exit,” *Sociology of Religion* 69, no. 1 (2008): 104-105; Richard J. Krejcir, “Why People in Church Fight?” (2008), <http://www.churchleadership.org/apps/articles/default.asp?articleid=48713&columnid=4545> (accessed January 23, 2010). Leas and Kittlaus share a concern that winner-take-all systems lead to long-term hurt and anger. Interestingly, Krejcir, a collaborator with Francis Schaeffer, noted that church fights were often

decision making with discernment. As noted earlier, our challenge may be stated as follows: *How can First Baptist Church, and others like it, move past majority rule and find a discernment process that is faithful to our tradition, faithful to the Holy Spirit, and faithful to a communal sense of God's leading?* Can First Baptist Church transform its discernment process to become more of a spiritual process that leads to harmony? Do the processes of the Society of Friends and Ignatius of Loyola offer insights that might be useful in such a process?

I have noted that democratic models do work for some and have also noted the success of charismatic models for others. I have summarized that a myriad of views in the scriptural witness can be found, and no single model works for all. Raymond Brown identifies seven different sub-apostolic understandings of church in the New Testament, and the number would be larger if he added second century sources.<sup>33</sup> I concede this reality.

Moreover, I would also add that whatever model of discernment a church chooses to employ, the congregation must take into consideration of the dynamic of the Holy Spirit's leading. Clearly, the charismatic model can have the understanding that the leader is directed by the Spirit. At the same time, the democratic model can be understood as God's working through the community in the meeting of God's people. A church needs

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connected to people's defensiveness over conflict, and they felt their ego threatened as they might be on the "wrong" side. He and Schaeffer connected this to pride issues in the church. While this can be a reality in any polity, it seems quite cogent in church polities where a vote leads to one "side" losing, and it seems this research calls the church to a more collaborative model of discernment to alleviate such defensiveness.

<sup>33</sup> Brown, 18. Brown's typologies based on the perspectives of the different New Testament writers include the Church led by authoritative teachers, the Church as mystical body of Christ, the Church as the agent of the Spirit, the Church as the people of God, the church as a discipleship of equals taught by the *Paraclete*, and the Church as a living Torah of Jesus. These models in turn lend themselves to different governance models, and, as has been noted, the governance model has historically influenced the discernment model. Geunther and Heidebrecht, 163.



to clarify the ways in which the Holy Spirit leads it. Furthermore, the Spirit is a spirit of unity, and the process should reflect a community of faith that lives joyfully in the vision that Paul describes in 1 Corinthians 13.

Therefore, the problem is that if a majority-led church does not have clearly defined spiritual aspects to its discernment process, the result may be decision making practices that lead to anger, hurt, and disunity. My proposal here is to pursue a discernment process that engenders consensus building and community. The proposed process also delineates steps to ensure the congregation intentionally seeks to discern God's will.

Looking back at the anecdote at the beginning of this chapter, I would not go so far as to say that an intentional discernment process would have instantly clarified which pew end the church should order. However, I believe the church would have benefited from a spiritual process that both listened to God's voice and valued the people involved more than the decision. In the final analysis, the design of a pew end is not a matter of life and death for the Kingdom of God. A church that regularly engages in discernment with an understanding of the importance of community might well have seen that the design of pew ends is not worth the destruction of the community. Also, a church that grounds its decision making in the life of Christ might well have been able to ask whether this issue was worth such consternation. I, therefore, propose a synthesis of certain Friends discernment practices with components of *The Spiritual Exercises of St. Ignatius* to guide churches as they seek God's will.

## Conclusion

In this chapter, I have begun to define the shape of the problem: Many churches in the Free Church tradition have adopted a majority rule model that often leads to conflict and hurt feelings, and *Robert's Rules of Order* often leads to a demoralized minority. The biblical record attests to at least seven models of church governance. Moving a given congregation from a decision making model to a spiritual discernment model that listens to Christ and builds community is expedited most effectively by redeeming that congregation's existing governance model rather than trying to replace it with another model. Finally, I suggested that discernment and consensus models may benefit Free Church congregations seeking a viable alternative to majority rule governance.

In the next chapter, I attempt to build the case for consensus-based discernment by demonstrating that the attendant liabilities of using *Robert's Rules of Order* are reflected in the secular business world as well as in the church – which reinforces the claim that the flip side of majority rule is the demoralization of the minority. Moreover, I will show that organizational experts in the field of business advocate for consensus-building models, which reinforces the potential efficacy for such an approach within congregations of the Free Church tradition.

## CHAPTER TWO

### THE BUSINESS WORLD AND CONSENSUS DECISION MODELS

If a person were to survey many contemporary American churches, especially in my Baptist tradition, that person would think the majoritarian decision making with strict use of *Robert's Rules of Order*<sup>1</sup> would be the best practice borrowed from the secular business and management theorists. Such an assumption would be incorrect. Although Robert's Rules are still widely used, many management theorists question their efficacy, and some have moved to consensus models that lead to high acceptance as a better management model.

Readers should note that other models exist, e.g. the command model or the delegate model.<sup>2</sup> Indeed, these models have their advantages and disadvantages; however, since our ultimate aim is decision making in a church like First Baptist – Mount Holly, I will focus on majoritarian models of decision making.

#### Problems with General Robert's Rules

In a majority vote utilizing Robert's Rules, there is a motion that “wins” approval. Unfortunately, this means another idea has to lose.<sup>3</sup> However, these are not the only concerns about majoritarian models ruled by General Robert's rules. Studies in the business world question whether or not majoritarian models lead to corporate unity and

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<sup>1</sup> Herein, *Robert's Rules of Order* will be referred to as Robert's Rules.

<sup>2</sup> Bruce Wilson, “When to Use Consensus for Decision Making,” [http://www.wilsonstrategies.com/notebook\\_120805.php](http://www.wilsonstrategies.com/notebook_120805.php) (accessed March 3, 2012).

<sup>3</sup> Larry Dressler, *Consensus through Conversation: How to Achieve High-Commitment Decisions* (San Francisco, CA: Berrett-Koehler Publishers, 2006), 4.

optimal decisions. These studies also show that consensus models, when constructed in such ways to ensure diverse views and options, may produce better results with greater enthusiasm amongst the participants.<sup>4</sup>

One should note that there is a place for the use of Robert's Rules; indeed, such majority rule decisions may be necessary when a situation calls for a speedy decision.<sup>5</sup> Also, such orderliness may be well-suited for use in large organizations where hundreds of people may have to decide an issue.<sup>6</sup>

As has been noted in the last chapter, General Robert was asked to moderate a church meeting. The meeting was an unorganized mess and led to great embarrassment for the dutiful officer. Afterwards, he decided to write a guide of parliamentary procedure for meetings in a variety of settings.<sup>7</sup> He used the rules of the United States House of Representatives as a guide<sup>8</sup> and created his rules to ensure that societal meetings could be held in a "fair, orderly, and expeditious manner."<sup>9</sup>

Robert's Rules have been a great success. Indeed, the bylaws of most nonprofits, churches, corporate boards, and other organizations in America call for meeting to be run

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<sup>4</sup> David M. Schweiger, William R. Sandberg, and James W. Ragan, "Group Approaches for Improving Strategic Decision Making: A Comparative Analysis of Dialectical Inquiry, Devil's Advocacy, and Consensus," *The Academy of Management Journal* 29, no. 1 (1986): 52.

<sup>5</sup> *Ibid.*, 8.

<sup>6</sup> Lawrence Susskind and Jeffrey L. Cruikshank, *Breaking Robert's Rules: The New Way to Run Your Meeting, Build Consensus, and Get Results* (Oxford; NY: Oxford University Press, 2006), 11.

<sup>7</sup> Henry Martyn Robert, *Robert's Rules of Order* (Chicago: S. C. Griggs & Company, 1876), <http://www.gutenberg.org/files/9097/9097-8.txt> (accessed March 31, 2011).

<sup>8</sup> Susskind and Cruikshank, 6.

<sup>9</sup> Robert, 17.

by these rules. Many bylaws writers simply assume they are to be the decision making model.<sup>10</sup>

Robert believes an orderly approach would be a procedure that leads the body to determine the will of the majority. The body forwards and debates motions, and minority views can be reflected through amendments. In the end, Robert seems to believe that the body should and would accept the will of the majority as reflected in the final vote. However, Robert's view does not adequately consider the problems created by an unhappy minority.<sup>11</sup>

One might wonder if such naiveté is reminiscent of a more genteel time in 19<sup>th</sup> Century American culture. However, 19<sup>th</sup> Century societies were not filled with members that quietly left meetings when outcomes of votes were opposite of their desires. Although Robert created a system for harmonious decision making for an organization based on the United States House of Representatives, he must have known of the fear, acrimony, and anger of the minority in Congress before the Civil War when they felt the majority would end slave ownership. Representatives came to Congress with loaded pistols, and hurts were created that split the nation. While the floor of Congress may have looked the model of civility at times,<sup>12</sup> the Congressional cloak rooms reflected the anger of a disenfranchised minority.<sup>13</sup>

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<sup>10</sup> Susskind and Cruikshank, 8.

<sup>11</sup> Ibid., 11.

<sup>12</sup> Eric M. Uslaner, *The Decline of Comity in Congress* (Ann Arbor, MI: University of Michigan Press, 1993), 41. Even this is historically untenable. For example, one can consider South Carolina Representative Preston Brooks' brutal beating of Senator Charles Sumner on May 22, 1856 for a slight of supporters of slavery and Brooks' uncle in a Senate speech. The beating occurred just off the Senate cloakroom with Southern senators cheering Brooks.

<sup>13</sup> Ibid., 26.

The minority may act on this sense of disenfranchisement. An angered minority might go to court or to the court of public opinion to air their grievances.<sup>14</sup> More likely, the minority will work to become the majority so that they can enforce their desire.<sup>15</sup> Another option for this disenchanted minority is simply to leave.

Robert intended to protect the body from the tyranny of the individual. He rightly had a concern for individuals who would monopolize the conversation. However, Robert's Rules can lead directly to that tyranny because so few know how to use them well. Robert's Rules are so ponderous in places that "experts" can often use the rules of procedures to ensure their wishes will be enacted. Moreover, Robert's Rules allow a group to come to the meeting with preconceived ideas about the outcome and then use the rules to push through their agenda.<sup>16</sup>

While one concern is the possible acrimonious outcomes of these rules, authors question their efficacy as a decision making process.<sup>17</sup> Meetings can be so absorbed by the processes and procedures that conversation is limited rather than facilitated. Indeed, creative options might be limited because they are outside the scope of the wording of the original motion.<sup>18</sup>

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<sup>14</sup> At the time of this writing, there are multiple such blogs. One example is <http://fbcjaxwatchdog.blogspot.com/> that details issues related to the First Baptist Church of Jacksonville, FL. Many others can be found rather readily.

<sup>15</sup> Susskind and Cruikshank, 11.

<sup>16</sup> *Ibid.*, 12.

<sup>17</sup> Michael E. Morrell, "Deliberation, Democratic Decision-Making and Internal Political Efficacy," *Political Behavior* 27, no. 1 (2005): 56.

<sup>18</sup> Lawrence Susskind, Sarah McKernan, and Jennifer Thomas-Larmer, *The Consensus Building Handbook: A Comprehensive Guide to Reaching Agreement* (Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage Publications, 1999), 17.

Robert's Rules only allow for discussion after a motion is made. Someone must take a stand on a position to even raise it as a possibility. In doing so, an individual can feel a stake in his or her position, and the conversation can quickly devolve into an ego-driven battle wherein participants defend his or her view. The Harvard Negotiating Project noted the consequences of beginning debates this way:

When negotiators bargain over positions, they tend to lock themselves into those positions. The more you clarify your position and defend it against attack, the more committed you become to it ... Your ego becomes identified with your position ... As more attention is paid to positions, less attention is devoted to meeting the underlying concerns of the parties. Agreement becomes less likely ... Positional bargaining thus strains and sometimes shatters the relationship between the parties.<sup>19</sup>

Also, the will of the body can be subverted by strategic voting rather than sincere voting. In strategic voting, options like A, B or C can be on the table. A person who favors A but is concerned that B might be the choice of the majority could vote for options that eliminate B to ensure A will be the ultimate victor.<sup>20</sup>

### **Consensus as an Alternative to Robert's Rules**

Robert's Rules and majoritarianism are so ubiquitous that many assume they are best way to run a meeting. However, consensus is becoming a more widely used option. A caveat should be noted: American culture highly values the power of the democratic model, particularly in many Baptist churches. However, democratic is not synonymous with Robert's Rules. To move towards consensus does nothing to diminish the notion of

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<sup>19</sup> Roger Fisher and William Ury, *Getting to Yes: Negotiating Agreement without Giving In* (New York: Penguin Books, 1991), 5-6.

<sup>20</sup> Susskind and Cruikshank, *Breaking Robert's Rules: The New Way to Run Your Meeting, Build Consensus, and Get Results*, 14.

democracy – the idea of “ruled by the people.” Consensus can be the way the organization chooses to live its democratic values.

### **Consensus Decision Making in the Business World**

“Consensus is a cooperative process in which all group members develop and agree to support a decision that is in the best interest of the whole.”<sup>21</sup> While this definition is excellent, it sounds a little too much like acquiescence – a silence tending towards a “going along to get along acceptance” based on a “deeply-felt acceptance of organizational circumstances, a taking-for-granted of the situation and limited awareness that alternatives exist.”<sup>22</sup> Indeed, one of the dangers of consensus, indeed of any decision making process, is acquiescence.<sup>23</sup> A simpler definition in Webster’s Collegiate Dictionary says consensus is “group solidarity in sentiment and belief.”<sup>24</sup>

The goal of consensus is to hear all the voices and have the group come to solidarity about the outcome. A key element is the idea of a shared judgment where all members are given opportunities to fine tune the proposal and, thus, are more involved in the process.<sup>25</sup> Instead of participants sharing competing ideas with each other, consensus

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<sup>21</sup> Dressler, 4.

<sup>22</sup> Craig C. Pinder and Karen P. Harlos, “Employee silence: Quiescence and acquiescence as responses to perceived injustice,” *Research in Personnel and Human Resource Management* 20 (2001): 348-349.

<sup>23</sup> Roberto, 5.

<sup>24</sup> Susskind and Cruikshank, *Breaking Robert’s Rules: The New Way to Run Your Meeting, Build Consensus, and Get Results*, 19.

<sup>25</sup> Fisher and Ury, 11.



is about looking for ways to aid the group in solutions. Instead of participants being advocates of a position, they become shareholders in a solution.<sup>26</sup>

Consensus should not be confused with unanimity. Unanimity is an almost unattainable dream. All participants totally agreeing might occur from time to time, and the group can celebrate it when it does. However, having a goal of unanimity will lead to frustration and anger. Randy Hirokawa and Marshall Poole note, “Unanimity is like pushing a greased boulder uphill: usually something goes wrong with bad consequences.”<sup>27</sup>

Indeed, a person must wonder if unanimity, particularly if it comes quickly, is simply avoidance in the guise of unanimity. Questions and concerns are not raised. The process may be short-circuited by people feeling they cannot share their views safely. Perhaps participants did not engage in the process from the beginning; thus, they acquiesced to a quick decision as an avoidance mechanism.<sup>28</sup> In either case, true consensus does not exist.

Consensus is about communication and shared solutions. Because communication exists between the parties, consensus leads to a greater comprehensive understanding throughout an organization. Because participants share the solution, they will likely have more commitment to the solution. The result can be an organization highly devoted to a solution that is understood by all the stakeholders.<sup>29</sup>

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<sup>26</sup> Dressler, 5.

<sup>27</sup> Susskind and Cruikshank, *Breaking Robert's Rules: The New Way to Run Your Meeting, Build Consensus, and Get Results*, 18.

<sup>28</sup> Roberto, 192.

<sup>29</sup> *Ibid.*, 6.

In consensus, communication is vital; yet, it may be the most difficult aspect to control. Individuals bring many varied perspectives, world views, and life experiences that can impact their understanding of a particular issue and its solution.<sup>30</sup> Good leadership can use individuals' differences to invite creative solutions. Leaders can work to make sure all are involved in the discussion, and leaders must be sure to clarify any ambiguities. This may be the key role of leadership in many decision making processes, especially as the group moves to a shared solution.<sup>31</sup>

For consensus to work, organizations can be impaired without two other components. First, without a deep understanding of this process, managers at different levels may have completely different understandings of the solutions. They may work at cross purposes to one another without realizing it.<sup>32</sup> Second, without high commitment, managers might oversee a process with which they ultimately do not agree. Execution may lag because people are not invested in the process.<sup>33</sup>

Mike Judge's movie *Office Space* illustrates this well.<sup>34</sup> In this scathing satire of the tech business world, communication is based on loads of paper work, and the organization is rudderless as managers crisscross one another carrying out similar duties. At the same time, workers in the company have no commitment to the company or its results. One worker who has awakened from his corporate slumber sums this well when

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<sup>30</sup> Randy Y. Hirokawa and Marshall Scott Poole, *Communication and Group Decision Making*, 2d ed. (Thousand Oaks, CA: SAGE Publications, 1996), 15.

<sup>31</sup> *Ibid.*, 305.

<sup>32</sup> John Bokel, "Teams and Decision Making in the Strategic Environment," *Strategic Leadership and Decision Making*, <http://www.au.af.mil/au/awc/awcgate/ndu/strat-ldr-dm/pt3ch10.html> (accessed March 30, 2011); Roberto, 6.

<sup>33</sup> Roberto, 7.

<sup>34</sup> *Office Space*, directed by Mike Judge, Los Angeles: 20<sup>th</sup> Century Fox, 1999.

he tells human resources, “My only real motivation is not to be hassled; that, and the fear of losing my job. But you know, Bob, that will only make you work just hard enough not to get fired.”<sup>35</sup>

The disgruntled worker illuminates a key issue: Without investment at all levels of the organization, a solution - no matter how brilliant or insightful - will have difficulty coming to fruition when those tasked to execute the solution may have the least commitment to it. Michael Roberto says, “Individuals often become disenchanted if they are asked to carry out a plan for which they have had little or no opportunity to provide input.”<sup>36</sup>

Consensus should not be perceived as a panacea, but it may well lead to highly committed participants with a shared understanding of the proposed solution. This can only happen when the appropriate stakeholders are at the table. For this to be a reality, care should be taken to ensure those stakeholders are part of the process.

### **Implementing Consensus**

Deciding who should be involved in a decision is a critical first step. Without the appropriate people, key information and questions may be missed. The facilitator must ensure that all interested parties are represented. Particular attention should be paid to those who clearly have a stake in the solution. This might include those that could block any proposed solution from the outset and those with relevant positions to the problem.<sup>37</sup>

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<sup>35</sup> “Memorable Quotes for Office Space,” <http://www.imdb.com/title/tt0151804/quotes> (accessed March 30, 2011).

<sup>36</sup> Roberto, 37; Wilson.

<sup>37</sup> Susskind and Cruikshank, *Breaking Robert's Rules: The New Way to Run Your Meeting, Build Consensus, and Get Results*, 49.

The facilitator should begin by having a conversation about the cooperative process with stakeholders to ensure they will engage in the process. Some will be included due to position and others should be included due to interest.<sup>38</sup>

The facilitator needs to spend time with the interested parties assuring them they will be heard. The group needs to consist of people who are committed to shared problem solving and who have a true stake in the decision. People who will be affected by the decision need to be included, as well those charged with implementation of the decision.<sup>39</sup> Also, individuals in the organization with requisite skills and relevant information to bring to the process need to be included.<sup>40</sup>

The facilitator also may need to make some decisions about personalities to exclude. If from the beginning, an individual is against a consensus model, the conversation may become ineffective. If they are open to the process, but the issue is a non-negotiable for them, they may need to be excluded.<sup>41</sup> Although most would think only topics such as abortion to be hot button issues, it regularly occurs that people build a non-negotiable around seemingly mundane issues. Although the issue may seem mundane to some, that person does not perceive it to be mundane, and he or she may strong feelings for very good reasons. However, his or her strong feelings could hamper the group's process. In such cases, this individual simply has a position that is too cemented, and he or she cannot engage in fruitful conversation around it. At the opposite

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<sup>38</sup> Susskind, McKernan, and Thomas-Larmer, *The Consensus Building Handbook: A Comprehensive Guide to Reaching Agreement*, 24.

<sup>39</sup> Dressler, 19.

<sup>40</sup> Roberto, 35.

<sup>41</sup> Susskind and Cruikshank, *Breaking Robert's Rules: The New Way to Run Your Meeting, Build Consensus, and Get Results*, 44.

end of the spectrum, some people simply have no interest in the issue or its solution. If it has no impact on them, they will not engage in the process.<sup>42</sup>

### **The Need for Differing Voices**

The group also needs to include differing voices - skeptics or questioners. Many groups will too often become too enamored with one alternative in ways that eliminate other possibilities. A key danger to be considered is Groupthink, the mode of thinking in group dynamics wherein the group does not realistically appraise alternatives out of a desire for group unity.<sup>43</sup> To alleviate this danger, the process needs individuals that will be raise pertinent questions. People are too often wedded to their own ideas, and without healthy discussion, Groupthink can quickly arise.<sup>44</sup> Indeed, group process alone does not ensure that adequate information will be shared with the decision making process. Groups may also only look for information that corresponds with the group's basic beliefs or decision.<sup>45</sup> Groups frequently will smooth over conflicts and inconsistencies in search of a quick or painless solution.<sup>46</sup>

For example, in the wake of the Bay of Pigs fiasco, President John Kennedy realized that the conversation had been dominated by a few, and skeptical voices had

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<sup>42</sup> Ibid., 45.

<sup>43</sup> Marlene E. Turner and Anthony R. Pratkanis, "Twenty-Five Years of Groupthink Theory and Research: Lessons from the Evaluation of a Theory," *Organizational Behavior and Human Decision Behavior Processes* 73, no. 2-3 (1998): 106-107.

<sup>44</sup> Roberto, 44.

<sup>45</sup> Caroline and Deo Harorimana Kamau, "Does Knowledge Sharing and Withholding of Information in Organizational Committees Affect Quality of Group Decision Making?" in *The 9th European Conference on Knowledge Management* (Southampton, UK: Southampton Solent University, 2008): 343.

<sup>46</sup> Schweiger, Sandberg, and Ragan, 52.

been marginalized or eliminated. To alleviate this, President Kennedy created a committee to advise him in future matters, and he assigned his brother Robert Kennedy and trusted adviser Ted Sorenson to play the role of Devil's Advocate in the process.<sup>47</sup> Kennedy ensured that future conversations would consider multiple options, and he eliminated decision making processes from coming to consensus too quickly. A process that comes to a decision too quickly most likely has not considered enough options, or the group is not diverse enough to have truly represented the stakeholders in the decision. Some differing opinions are necessary to protect against premature consensus.<sup>48</sup>

In addition to consensus building, Devil's Advocate and Dialectical Inquiry are approaches which integrate a variety of opinions. Devil's Advocate uses one set of recommendations and then critically evaluates that recommendation.<sup>49</sup> Dialectical Inquiry is an approach based on Hegel's dialectic wherein a thesis and antithesis are presented to a problem. The group then shares point and counterpoint based on these positions and slowly moves towards a solution. By pitting recommendations against each other, the group is forced to evaluate both, which can lead to higher quality decisions.<sup>50</sup>

Schweiger et al. studied the efficacy of Dialectical Inquiry, Devil's Advocate, and consensus models of decision making. Their hypothesis was that Dialectical Inquiry would lead to the highest quality decisions because it would account for the largest number of the group's assumptions, increase the number possible solutions, diminish

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<sup>47</sup> Roberto, 74.

<sup>48</sup> Charles R. Schwenk, "Conflict in Organizational Decision Making: An Exploratory Study of Its Effects in for-Profit and Not-for-Profit Organizations," *Management Science* 36, no. 4 (1990): 437.

<sup>49</sup> Schweiger, Sandberg, and Ragan, 53.

<sup>50</sup> Eli Berniker and David E. McNabb, "Dialectical Inquiry: A Structured Qualitative Research Method," *The Qualitative Report* 11, no. 4 (December 2006): 646-647.

Groupthink, reduce hasty decisions, and make the best recommendations. They also hypothesized that Devil's Advocate would create the second best set of decisions and that consensus would create the worst decisions.<sup>51</sup>

Their study included 120 Masters of Business Administration students at the University of Houston that were divided into three groups, with each group using one of these three methods. Participants' final reports included their recommendations and assumptions about a drug store chain case study.<sup>52</sup> Judges rated both the assumptions in number and quality as well as the final result.<sup>53</sup>

Indeed, the researchers' hypothesis proved to be correct: Dialectical Inquiry tended to lead to the best quality of critical views of assumptions. Further, Dialectical Inquiry and Devil's Advocate were judged to lead to the best recommendations.<sup>54</sup> However, the study also showed that such adversarial solutions might lead group members to reject the findings – even if they are the highest quality decisions. The study then showed that consensus led to much greater interest and investment in the implementation of the proposed solution.<sup>55</sup>

In another study, Charles Schwenk found similar results about the role of conflict. He found that for-profit managers were far more likely to see any conflict in the decision process as aversive to the decision process; non-profit managers were far more likely to see such diverse views as leading to better decisions. He also agreed that conflict led to

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<sup>51</sup> Schweiger, Sandberg, and Ragan, 54.

<sup>52</sup> *Ibid.*, 57.

<sup>53</sup> *Ibid.*, 60; Schweiger, Sandberg, and Ragan, 60.

<sup>54</sup> Schweiger, Sandberg, and Ragan, 66.

<sup>55</sup> *Ibid.*, 68.

greater clarity about recommendations and their implementation.<sup>56</sup> This is very similar to the business model of someone like Jack Welch, CEO of General Electric, who made “constructive conflict” a value of the company.<sup>57</sup> “Like Andy Grove at Intel, Welch recognized that conflict was inevitable in dealing with novel and complex decisions and that conflicting views contained information that needed to be harvested and incorporated into decisions.”<sup>58</sup>

### **The Paradox of Quality versus Acceptance**

Many managers are left with a Hobson’s choice: Use a methodology like Dialectical Inquiry that leads to higher quality decisions but low acceptance, or use consensus that leads higher acceptance but lower quality.<sup>59</sup> Indeed, some researchers believe that these are mutually exclusive.<sup>60</sup> The research is unclear whether an individual can fully eliminate this dilemma, and managers may need to make the choice: high quality versus high acceptance and implementation. Before a person attempts to deal with this dilemma, note the research showed that uses of Robert’s Rules are only suggested for

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<sup>56</sup> Schwenk, 447.

<sup>57</sup> Roberto, 108-109.

<sup>58</sup> Kenneth W. Thomas, “Making Conflict Management a Strategic Advantage,” *Psychometrics*, [http://www.psychometrics.com/docs/conflictwhitepaper\\_psychometrics.pdf](http://www.psychometrics.com/docs/conflictwhitepaper_psychometrics.pdf) (accessed December 31, 2012).

<sup>59</sup> Gerardine DeSanctis and R. Brent Gallupe, “A Foundation for the Study of Group Decision Support Systems,” *Management Science* 33, no. 5 (1987): 606.

<sup>60</sup> Murray Turoff and Starr Roxanne Hiltz, “Computer Support for Group Versus Individual Decisions,” *IEEE Transactions on Communications* 30, no. 1 (January 1982): 606.



very large systems,<sup>61</sup> and other research shows majoritarian models underperform consensus models.<sup>62</sup>

However, according to Roberto, the best results may result when using consensus for high acceptance and then including divergent voices in the process. If consensus is to be used, leaders must ensure that divergent viewpoints are constructively included in the conversation to question assumptions and proposals and to ensure the group does not hastily move to a conclusion.<sup>63</sup>

However, these voices should not be constantly negative; they should be voices who positively ensure the conversation includes lists of assumptions, multiple options, and divergent viewpoints. This is not to create a “no” atmosphere where any non-concurrence causes the process to be stopped. IBM once had a “no” culture where any senior manager could veto another project’s work if it affected her or his division. The company eventually had positions for “non-concur coordinators” who would block proposals that might be objectionable to another division. Such a culture of “no” can stifle innovation and options just as readily as a Robert’s Rules dominated meeting or a culture of acquiescent consensus.<sup>64</sup> In all these cases, multiple solutions are not considered deeply enough, and reflective solutions can be limited.

If the consensus approach is to bridge the paradox of high quality decision versus high acceptance, two key elements are limiting conflict avoidance and building trust.

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<sup>61</sup> DeSanctis and Gallupe, 595.

<sup>62</sup> Patrik Eklund, Agnieszka Rusinowska, and Harrie De Swart, “Consensus Reaching in Committees,” *European Journal of Operational Research* 178, no. 1 (2007): 192.

<sup>63</sup> Roberto, 45.

<sup>64</sup> *Ibid.*, 145.

Consensus can become acquiescence quickly if leaders do not include competing voices. However, conflict avoiders will want simply to go along with the majority. Conflict avoidance will quickly lead to compliant submission.<sup>65</sup> Therefore, groups need an attitude of trust where conflicting voices feel comfortable raising their objections and opinions. Trust in the group, trust in the facilitator, and trust that voices will be heard are important elements of the process.<sup>66</sup> All of the elements of trust building are outside the scope of this paper, but the reader should recognize several keys to trust: Belief that the leader fosters an environment of safety and security, belief the leader is more interested in shared solutions than his or her own interests, and belief that participants are being heard and valued as individuals in the process.<sup>67</sup>

### **Methodology of Consensus**

After having the right people at the table with a solid trust level built, the group turns to the elements of the process. Key elements include clarification, deliberation, confirmation, and implementation. From the outset, the facilitator needs to clarify the consensus approach. The goal should be clearly delineated in terms of “reaching” consensus, not forcing a consensus. The clear goal is to create a collective solution that is acceptable to almost everyone. However, to be honest about expectations, the facilitator might want to be careful of the language “win-win” as the final solution might mean

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<sup>65</sup> Patrick Lencioni, *The Five Dysfunctions of a Team: A Leadership Fable* (San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, 2002), 188.

<sup>66</sup> *Ibid.*, 96.

<sup>67</sup> Nicole A. Gillespie and Leon Mann, “Transformational leadership and shared values: the building blocks of trust,” *Journal of Managerial Psychology* 19, no. 6 (2004): 602-603.

participants “come out ahead” without being categorized as a win. “Win-win” might create a mental expectation of a “win,” but the goal is the best shared solution.<sup>68</sup>

The facilitator also works to make sure that everyone agrees on the ground rules. Indeed, a meeting led by Robert’s Rules might include such an orientation, but with a key difference. With Robert’s Rules, people are subordinate to the process; the goal of consensus is for the process to serve the people.<sup>69</sup> One ground rule is essential: Participants must “agree to disagree without being disagreeable.”<sup>70</sup>

The group must define the issue. Even if the issue is self-evident, the goal of this initial conversation is to make sure that all the parties understand the issue and any underlying assumptions as well as exactly what the problem really is.<sup>71</sup> The group should also clarify the importance of the issue.<sup>72</sup>

Communication is the heart of the consensus process. Participants must listen to one another and be willing to share their own thoughts and insights, and all viewpoints must be heard.<sup>73</sup> This must be done respectfully and non-judgmentally. Mutual respect, a vital component to enable the group to listen to one another, fosters constructive

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<sup>68</sup> Susskind, McKernan, and Thomas-Larmer, *The Consensus Building Handbook: A Comprehensive Guide to Reaching Agreement*, 917.

<sup>69</sup> Susskind and Cruikshank, *Breaking Robert’s Rules: The New Way to Run Your Meeting, Build Consensus, and Get Results*, 65-66.

<sup>70</sup> Susskind, McKernan, and Thomas-Larmer, *The Consensus Building Handbook: A Comprehensive Guide to Reaching Agreement*, 45.

<sup>71</sup> Dressler, 23.

<sup>72</sup> Susskind, McKernan, and Thomas-Larmer, *The Consensus Building Handbook: A Comprehensive Guide to Reaching Agreement*, 220.

<sup>73</sup> Susskind and Cruikshank, *Breaking Robert’s Rules: The New Way to Run Your Meeting, Build Consensus, and Get Results*, 214.

dialogue.<sup>74</sup> One writer describes the key ingredient of a successful consensus process thusly: “The fundamental right of consensus is for all people to be able to express themselves in their own words and of their own will. The fundamental responsibility of consensus is to assure others of their right to speak and be heard.”<sup>75</sup>

Susskind and Cruickshank differentiate between “inventing and committing.”<sup>76</sup> Inventing is the stage where the group is invited to put as many ideas on the table.<sup>77</sup> As the facilitator listens, the hope is that a consensus will begin to emerge between the different parties. Committing is the movement when the facilitator may name that consensus and determine who is committed to that solution.<sup>78</sup>

One methodology is called a single text where the facilitator meets with individual subgroups and merges their ideas into one coherent presentation or single text. The larger group brainstorms suggested improvements to the single text.<sup>79</sup> Clarifying questions and suggested improvements are added as necessary. Clarity of the shared understanding of the proposal and its constituent additions is necessary.<sup>80</sup>

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<sup>74</sup> Roberto, 122-123.

<sup>75</sup> Bill L, “Consensus Based Decision-Making Workshop,” <http://www.centralcoastna.com/uploads/Consensus.pdf> (accessed March 31, 2011).

<sup>76</sup> Susskind and Cruickshank, *Breaking Robert’s Rules: The New Way to Run Your Meeting, Build Consensus, and Get Results*, 90-91.

<sup>77</sup> Dressler, 67.

<sup>78</sup> Susskind and Cruickshank, *Breaking Robert’s Rules: The New Way to Run Your Meeting, Build Consensus, and Get Results*, 93.

<sup>79</sup> *Ibid.*, 103-104.

<sup>80</sup> Dressler, 37.

Creating value through deliberation is the focus. Being deliberate is a critical function of the process. Participants must dialogue purposefully in a mode of trust for as many options as possible to make it to the table.<sup>81</sup>

Only then does the facilitator test for consensus. Group members are asked to weigh in on the new single text proposal. Questions might include: “Is this a proposal with which you can live and ultimately support? Does it meet the shared criteria for the group? Do you believe this proposal represents the group’s best thinking at this time? Is this the best decision for our organization and its stakeholders?”<sup>82</sup>

At this point, participants have several options. They can express comfort and support for the proposal. Others might have certain concerns that can be ameliorated rather easily. On the other hand, some might have considerable concerns that cannot be bridged simply. Finally, one group may simply have little or no desire to be a further part of the process, or they may feel the proposed solution is unworkable or untenable.<sup>83</sup>

Finally, the facilitator and the group must come to some conclusion. The worst outcomes are a group that either comes to premature convergence or polarizing divergence. Premature convergence is where the group decides on an option too quickly and leads to a lack of creative options and reflective critique.<sup>84</sup> Polarizing divergence is

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<sup>81</sup> Susskind, McKernan, and Thomas-Larmer, *The Consensus Building Handbook: A Comprehensive Guide to Reaching Agreement*, 218.

<sup>82</sup> Dressler, 40.

<sup>83</sup> *Ibid.*, 38-39.

<sup>84</sup> Dorothy and Walter C. Swap Leonard-Barton, *When Sparks Fly: Igniting Creativity in Groups* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard Business School Press, 1999), 54-55.

where a group cannot come to some consensus and they are left polarized with a lack of closure.<sup>85</sup>

Indeed, there will almost always be participants that cannot agree on a proposal. Group unanimity is not the goal; group solidarity is. The entire group is to be respected, and the concerns of all are to be heard. Again, consensus is at its heart a communicative process. Even those that cannot wholeheartedly agree can feel valued enough to remain part of the process.<sup>86</sup>

### **Conclusion**

Majoritarian models based on *Robert's Rules of Order* often lead to winners and losers, and the losers can become disenchanting minorities who have little or no recourse once a vote is taken. Also, these rules can stifle creativity and opportunity because participants discuss a motion rather than actually working the problem. Researchers question the efficacy of majoritarian models. These models often lead to a lack of understanding or dedication throughout a system which can contribute to poor execution.

Consensus models of decision making can lead to commitment throughout a system with communication about possible solutions to a problem. This process must include some form of constructive critique to ensure the group does not converge on a solution too quickly without looking at possible assumptions and options.

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<sup>85</sup> C. Marlene Fiol, "Consensus, Diversity, and Learning in Organizations," *Organizational Science* 5, no. 3 (August 1994): 409.

<sup>86</sup> Susskind, McKernan, and Thomas-Larmer, *The Consensus Building Handbook: A Comprehensive Guide to Reaching Agreement*, 214.

## CHAPTER THREE

### A HISTORICAL OVERVIEW OF SPIRITUAL DISCERNMENT

If the church were a secular business, this work has shown that a consensus decision making model that includes some type of Devil's Advocate could lead to the most acceptable decisions, but the focus of this discourse is the movement from decision making to discernment. I contend the church's greater interest should be in spiritual discernment. As the Church is the Church of Jesus Christ, the Church's processes must reflect how to follow Jesus. Church history is filled with those who made the journey of discernment their focus, and I now turn to that history.<sup>1</sup>

#### Defining Discernment

The word discernment comes from the Latin *discernere*, which means to separate or distinguish.<sup>2</sup> In church history, discernment is ultimately the attempt to hear God's voice as articulated by the Holy Spirit for the edification of the Church.<sup>3</sup> God is at all times present in and speaking to the Church is a key theological principle.<sup>4</sup> Although decision making models are important, the goal of the Church should be to seek first

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<sup>1</sup> Please note the omissions of Ignatius of Loyola as well as the history of the Society of Friends on discernment. These will be discussed in future chapters.

<sup>2</sup> Morris and Olsen, 8.

<sup>3</sup> Lon Fendall, Jan Wood, and Bruce Bishop, *Practicing Discernment Together: Finding God's Way Forward in Decision Making* (Newberg, OR: Barclay Press, 2007), 1.

<sup>4</sup> Rob Taylerson, *I Come to Do Your Will: Christian Discernment through the Heritage and Tradition of the Church* (Dublin: Veritas Publications, 2000), 14; Rose Mary Dougherty, *Discernment: A Path to Spiritual Awakening* (New York: Paulist Press, 2009), 6.

God's guidance on matters of faith and practice. This seeking defines the movement towards discernment. Stephen Bryant asserts:

Spiritual discernment makes operational our faith that an ever present Guide ... is present to lead us in the way of truth and love as individuals and congregations. It opens our sails as church to the Spirit whose winds we believe are always blowing and will always move us closer to Christ, closer to one another, and closer to the world that God wills.<sup>5</sup>

Discernment is pneumatological. Bryant describes a belief that the wind of the Spirit is "always blowing," and this faith that God's Spirit will speak to the Church is the reason for a belief in discernment. This trust in the Spirit should lead the Church to question whether practices are either truly discernment or just decision making models.<sup>6</sup> More precisely, trust in the Spirit should lead the Church to seek God's guidance rather than simply to accept the latest secular model.

Bryant's definition also adds the element of "growing closer to Christ, closer to one another, and closer to the world God wills."<sup>7</sup> The goal of a decision making model is simply to make the best decision; however, the goal of discernment is to listen to the Holy Spirit, build community with God's people, and do God's will.

### ***Diakrisis in the New Testament***

The New Testament term *diakrisis*, which is most often translated as "discernment" or "distinguishing," and its cognates have the basic sense of judging or making a distinction. In theological terms, *diakrisis* came to focus on the action of

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<sup>5</sup> Stephen Bryant, "What Is Spiritual Discernment by Consensus?" *Raising Prayer to a Lifestyle* 2, no. 1 (July-September 1994): 2.

<sup>6</sup> David Lonsdale, *Listening to the Music of the Spirit: The Art of Discernment* (Notre Dame: Ave Maria Press, 1992), 31-32.

<sup>7</sup> Bryant, 2.



distinguishing between choices of alternatives of ideas, moral values, or doctrines.<sup>8</sup> The only direct usage of the term in the Septuagint is in Job 37:16 which the New Revised Standard Version translates as “balancing of the clouds.” However, its cognate *diakriso* appears 23 times in the Septuagint, and it most often denotes judging or distinguishing between two claims. For instance, to help him distinguish between right and wrong, Solomon asks God for the charism - the gift - of an understanding mind and heart (1 Kings 3:9).<sup>9</sup>

The noun *diakrasis* is used three times in the New Testament. Paul uses it in Romans 14:1 to describe weighing of thoughts. Heb. 5:14 and I Cor. 12:10 use *diakrasis* in ways that have created centuries of debate.

Heb. 5:14 states: “But solid food is for the mature who because of practice have their senses trained to discern good and evil.” The writer of Hebrews notes that discernment can be “trained” through Christian discipleship. For that author, discernment is a general charism, offered to all, but only attained by the spiritually mature.<sup>10</sup>

On the other hand, 1 Cor. 12:10<sup>11</sup> speaks directly of the “discernment of spirits” (*diakrasis pneumatou*) in a list that includes gifts of miracles, prophecy, and speaking in or interpretation of tongues.<sup>12</sup> Although the Hebrews passage clearly denoted the notion

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<sup>8</sup> Anthony D. Rich, *Discernment in the Desert Fathers: Diakrasis in the Life and Thought of Early Egyptian Monasticism*, Studies in Christian Thought and Practice (Waynesboro, GA: Paternoster, 2007), 1.

<sup>9</sup> *Ibid.*, 3.

<sup>10</sup> *Ibid.*, 7-8.

<sup>11</sup> “... to another miraculous powers, to another prophecy, to another distinguishing between spirits [*diakrasis pneumatou*], to another speaking in different kinds of tongues, and to still another the interpretation of tongues.” 1 Cor. 12:10

<sup>12</sup> Mark A. McIntosh, *Discernment and Truth: The Spirituality and Theology of Knowledge* (New York: The Crossroad Publishing Company, 2004), 23.

of training in discernment, 1 Cor. 12:10 seems to imply that *diakrisis* is a spiritual gift given only to certain individuals, one gift enumerated in a list of gifts. “All these [gifts] are activated by one and the same Spirit, who allots to each one *individually* [emphasis added] just as the Spirit chooses” (1 Cor. 12:11).

This will be an ongoing issue in interpretation of *diakrisis*, as some argue it to be a gift for all willing to exercise it, while others have believed it to be limited only to certain gifted individuals. Joseph Lienhard notes that *diakrisis pneumaton* has elicited response to three questions by most early writers: “Who is the recipient of this gift of discernment of the spirits? What or who are these *pneumaton*? Finally, by what criteria is this discernment accomplished?”<sup>13</sup>

### History of Discernment

In the first centuries of the Church, the “discernment of spirits” most often had the context of distinguishing between good and evil and was applied only to particular, called individuals.<sup>14</sup> For example, consider the exegetical work of the Antiochene tradition. The Antiochene school of thought in the 4<sup>th</sup> Century put a primacy on the close adherence to the plain meaning of the text of the Bible and to the condition of the human writer.<sup>15</sup>

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<sup>13</sup> Joseph T Lienhard, “On ‘Discernment of the Spirits’ in the Early Church,” *Theological Studies* 41, no. 3 (September 1980), <http://www.ts.mu.edu/content/41/41.3/41.3.2.pdf> (accessed June 12, 2011); McIntosh, 24.

<sup>14</sup> Olsen, 21.

<sup>15</sup> Philip Schaff, *History of the Christian Church, Volume II: Ante-Nicene Christianity. A.D. 100-325* (New York: Charles Scribner and Sons, 1867), <http://www.ccel.org/ccel/schaff/hcc2> (accessed August 10, 2012).

Indeed, the often literal-minded Antiochenes defined *diakrisis* so narrowly as to have little possibility of future applications.<sup>16</sup>

However, the Alexandrian tradition of Origen and Athanasius, which often used a more allegorical interpretation of Scripture,<sup>17</sup> began to argue that *diakrisis* was meant to be applied in a larger way to the Church. Subsequently, the monastic tradition moved further still by noting this gift as a needed virtue in the life of the Church. The Alexandrians also argued for an awareness of the cosmic forces of both good and evil. Over time, the desert traditions focused on perceiving those forces that try to afflict those attempting to live an ascetic life.<sup>18</sup> By the time of Evagrius Ponticus, discernment became an individual virtue needed by the believer for Christian discipleship.<sup>19</sup>

Origen (c. 185-251 AD)<sup>20</sup> was one of the Alexandrians that sparked this shift. He argued that humans were swayed by three forces: God, good spirits, and evil spirits. Thus, the goal of discernment was to divine these spirits so that the individual could find the path to God and righteous living.<sup>21</sup> Origen argues strongly for the free will of humanity, and he believes part of that free will is that the believer must choose which of

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<sup>16</sup> McIntosh, 24.

<sup>17</sup> Schaff.

<sup>18</sup> McIntosh, 24.

<sup>19</sup> Lienhard; McIntosh. 256. In a footnote, McIntosh notes the following summary from Lienhard deserves to be quoted in its entirety. “The term ‘discernment of spirits’ was in use as long as the spirits were understood to be personal; in this period, too, discernment of spirits was looked upon as a charism given only to some, not to all. Once attention was turned to the work of the psyche, particularly by Evagrius Ponticus, the phrase was shortened and discernment became a virtue or technique needed by every ascetic to prevent him from falling to excess or bad judgment.”

<sup>20</sup> Origen, *On First Principles*, ed. GW Butterworth (New York: Harper and Row, 1966), xxvii. Butterworth says that *On First Principles* was written c. 250.

<sup>21</sup> Olsen, 31.

the spirits they will follow.<sup>22</sup> The individual is caught in this constant struggle of turmoil between the spirits, and the believer must choose the good.<sup>23</sup> The soul has the freedom either to choose to move towards God or to move to the things of this world; thus, *diakrisis* represents the way in which the individual discerns this choice between God and evil.<sup>24</sup>

Although Origen had a strong belief in free will, he believed *diakrisis* was a gift of the Spirit; he believed that gift was given through Christ to all who would accept it. In a sermon on Exod. 4:12,<sup>25</sup> Origen said, “It is not possible to discern a mouth and words of this sort without the grace of the Holy Spirit.”<sup>26</sup> The possession of *diakrisis* showed the disciple had chosen God.<sup>27</sup>

Origen and his Alexandrian cohorts see life as a journey where humanity has fallen away from communion with God and where God works feverishly to bring humanity back to that relationship.<sup>28</sup> Ultimately, a believer completes the journey when he or she comes to understand both the mystical and the Divine. Here, in this communion with God, he or she is to be found as discerning the spirits; moreover, this reflects the Alexandrian move to see such discernment as part of the virtuous life rather than a

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<sup>22</sup> Origen, 216.

<sup>23</sup> Ibid., 227. “From this we learn to discern clearly when the soul is moved by a spirit of the better kind.”

<sup>24</sup> Rich, 33.

<sup>25</sup> “Now go; I will help you speak and will teach you what to say.” Exod. 4:12

<sup>26</sup> Lienhard, 513.

<sup>27</sup> Ibid., 514.

<sup>28</sup> McIntosh, 28; Origen, 182. “In the same way, God, who knows the secrets of the heart and foreknows the future, perhaps in his longsuffering allows the hidden evil to remain while he draws it out by means of external circumstances . . . For God deals with souls not in view of the fifty years, so to speak, of our life here, but in view of the endless world.”

charism offered to few.<sup>29</sup> To Origen, there was no greater responsibility for the Christian to train oneself in *diakrisis* and to use it.<sup>30</sup>

Finally, Origen emphasizes the interplay of both communion with God and the Christian community. Mark McIntosh notes any inference that Origen's notion of free will and communion with God equates to the hyper-individualism of modernity would be anachronistic. Instead, Origen wants his students to focus on the communal – the New Jerusalem, the city of the saints.<sup>31</sup> Also, anachronistic is the argument that Origen is discussing corporate or communal discernment. He speaks to the individual but calls them into community. Origen and other Early Church writers gave little attention to the idea of communal discernment.<sup>32</sup>

### ***Diakrisis in the Desert Fathers***

Antony the Great (251-356 AD), in his letters,<sup>33</sup> also calls the believer to discern the spirits to grow closer to God. Antony believed that *diakrisis* is ultimately a gift of the Holy Spirit and probably the most important gift of the Spirit to the monk.<sup>34</sup> John Cassian tells of a conversation between Antony and several other monks about what a monk most

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<sup>29</sup> Origen, 326-27. “Moreover, the marks of the divine image in man may be clearly discerned, not in the form of the body, which goes to corruption, but in the prudence of his mind, in his righteousness, his self-control, his courage, his wisdom, his discipline, in fact, in the whole company of his virtues.”

<sup>30</sup> Rich, 37.

<sup>31</sup> McIntosh, 29.

<sup>32</sup> Morris and Olsen, 35.

<sup>33</sup> Samuel Rubenson, *The Letters of St. Antony: Monasticism and the Making of a Saint*, Studies in Antiquity and Christianity (Minneapolis, MN: Fortress Press, 1995), 35-42. Herein, we will use the seven letters that are most often considered to be authentically Anthony. Please note that there is a scholarly debate on the subject of authenticity, but most scholars agree to the authenticity of these seven letters.

<sup>34</sup> Lienhard.

needed to withstand the Devil. Some argued for fasting, praying, withdrawing to the desert, or practicing poverty. Antony argues the key is *diakrisis* of the spirits. “What was it, then, that made them stray from the straight path? In my opinion, it was simply that they did not possess the grace of discrimination [*diakrisis*].”<sup>35</sup>

Like Origen, Antony sees the connection between communion with God and communion with one another; yet, he also adds the need to discern about oneself and, ultimately, others in the process. Antony applies the ancient Delphic wisdom of “know thyself” to spiritual discernment by noting that knowledge of self helps a believer understand more deeply God and others. Plunging the depths of one’s own journey is part of the discernment process. Antony says, “For he who knows himself, knows God”<sup>36</sup> and “For he who knows himself, knows all men.”<sup>37</sup> Antony calls his disciples to have the eyes of Christ so that they can discern good and evil.

I beseech you in the name of Jesus the Christ that God may give you the spirit of discernment ... Prepare yourselves while you have [heavenly] intercessors to pray to God for your salvation, that He may pour into your hearts that fire which Jesus came to send upon the earth (Lk 12:49),<sup>38</sup> that you may be able to exercise your hearts and senses, to know how to discern the good from the bad, the right from the left, reality from unreality.<sup>39</sup>

Another of the Desert Fathers, Evagrius Ponticus (c345-399), followed Origen’s thought that *diakrisis* was a key to the ascetic life. Part of the Council of Constantinople in 381, Evagrius was an ascetic who moved to the desert to shield him from the

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<sup>35</sup> Robin Amis, *A Different Christianity: Early Christian Esotericism and Modern Thought*, Suny Series in Western Esoteric Traditions (Albany, NY: State University of New York Press, 1995), 309-310.

<sup>36</sup> Antony, *The Letters of St. Antony the Great* (Fairacres, Oxford: SLG Press, 1975), 12.

<sup>37</sup> *Ibid.*, 23.

<sup>38</sup> “I have come to bring fire *on* the earth, and how I wish it were already kindled!” Lk 12:49

<sup>39</sup> *Ibid.*, 11.

temptations of the flesh – especially women.<sup>40</sup> He influenced John Cassian and John Climacus when he regarded *diakrisis* as essential to the monastic life and achieving its goals: “It is absolutely necessary for someone to serve as a soldier in this warfare to seek *diakrisis* from the Lord, neglecting nothing that contributes toward the reception of such a gift.”<sup>41</sup> His writing insinuates that *diakrisis* is a both a general charism needed by all monks and a necessary virtue to fight the demons.<sup>42</sup>

Evagrius agreed with Plato’s definition of the three parts of the soul: intellect, aggressiveness, and desire, and he agreed with Plato that the true self was found in the intellect. Moreover, Evagrius believed the natural state of the soul was in prayer.<sup>43</sup> This natural state was often impeded by the lower parts of the soul that served to distract or block the soul from its natural state. In his work on monastic life, *The Praktikos*, Evagrius argues the need to train the soul through *diakrisis* so as to withstand these lower parts:

One who has reached knowledge and culled the pleasure it brings will no longer be persuaded by the demon of vainglory offering him all the pleasures of the world. What could it promise him that would be better than spiritual contemplation? But to the extent that we lack the taste of knowledge, we should eagerly engage in the ascetical life [*praktike*], showing our aim to God, namely that we are doing everything for the sake of knowledge of him.<sup>44</sup>

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<sup>40</sup> Rich, 40. Evagrius left Jerusalem to avoid an adulterous relationship just after the Council of Constantinople.

<sup>41</sup> *Ibid.*, 43.

<sup>42</sup> Lienhard.

<sup>43</sup> Ryan Clevenger, “Was Evagrius a Platonist?” <http://patristicsandphilosophy.wordpress.com/2011/10/29/was-evagrius-a-platonist/> (accessed March 10, 2012).

<sup>44</sup> Evagrius Ponticus, *Praktikos and on Prayer*, Faculty of Theology, [http://www.ldysinger.com/evagrius/01\\_Prak/00a\\_start.htm](http://www.ldysinger.com/evagrius/01_Prak/00a_start.htm) (accessed April 29, 2011).

While the *praktike* is the ascetic life, discernment is the process in that life by which the monk seeks to move away from the world and in to knowledge of God.<sup>45</sup>

*Diakrisis* is both a spiritual and noetic process; the monk must be immersed in God to understand God and deeper spiritual realities.<sup>46</sup>

Key elements in this process are both conquering vice and conquering *pathos*, or emotion, that can hinder the spiritual life. Evagrius calls this conquering of the emotions the *apatheia*. *Apatheia* is a Stoic term that is often translated as “passionless,” and Evagrius more specifically means the Stoic sense of stability in emotion and intellect, characterizing the mature balance of the ascetic.<sup>47</sup> Thus, by conquering the body and the emotions, a monk is open to deeper understanding of God. Writing on Evagrius, Anthony Rich states, “The monk reaches his ultimate goal of *gnosis* of God, via his proximate goal of *apatheia*, by exercising *diakrisis* in the *nous*.”<sup>48</sup>

Evagrius believed through attention to the commandments of Scripture and to daily prayers, the monk moves closer and closer to God. This movement towards God consists of three renunciations by the monk. First, the monk must renounce worldly things for the sake of knowledge of God. Second, the monk must conquer his vices through his own efforts and the grace of God: Gluttony, fornication, avarice, grief, anger,

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<sup>45</sup> Evagrius Ponticus and David Brakke, *Talking Back: A Monastic Handbook for Combating Demons* (Collegeville, MN: Cistercian Publications, 2009), 39, <http://www.litpress.org/excerpts/9780879073299.pdf> (accessed July 1, 2011).

<sup>46</sup> Rich, 50-51.

<sup>47</sup> Columba Stewart, “The Monastic Journey According to John Cassian,” *Word and Spirit: A Monastic Review* 15 (1993): 34.

<sup>48</sup> Rich, 44.



listlessness, vainglory, and pride must be overcome.<sup>49</sup> Finally, he must gain knowledge of evil so that he will not be led by ignorance of the evil spirits.<sup>50</sup>

Evagrius believed that it was critical to be constantly vigilant against vice and evil, and he believed the scriptures were the greatest instrument available to fight vices. He applied Ecc. 8:11 to the spiritual life: “When the sentence for a crime is not quickly carried out, the hearts of the people are filled with schemes to do wrong.”<sup>51</sup> He noted that, if a temptation were dealt with quickly, a monk could often conquer it. The monk needed to conquer it before it “is firmly set in one’s thinking.” However, if the monk allowed a temptation to linger, he will often succumb to it.<sup>52</sup>

Evagrius’ noted the use of the scriptures to *antirrhektikos* or “talk back” to the demons. *Antirrhektikos* is about more than just applying biblical texts to refute the demons and the thoughts they create; it also includes the efforts of the individual to fight all sinful tendencies in the self.<sup>53</sup> These texts work as prayers that, like Christ in His temptations, aid the individual in spiritual struggles against both personal desires and the demonic.

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<sup>49</sup> Ibid., 55. Rich notes that some argue that Evagrius was the first to teach about or write on the eight principal vices. Cassian later introduced them to the Latin West. Gregory the Great then reduced this to the Seven Deadly Sins.

<sup>50</sup> Evagrius Ponticus, *Ad Monachos*, trans. Jeremy Driscoll (Mahwah, NJ: Paulist Press, 2003), 107.

<sup>51</sup> Ponticus and Brakke, *Talking Back: A Monastic Handbook for Combating Demons*, 54.

<sup>52</sup> Ibid., 23-24.

<sup>53</sup> Luke Dysinger, *Psalmody and Prayer in the Writings of Evagrius Ponticus*, Oxford Theological Monographs (Oxford: Oxford University Press 2005), quoted in Ponticus and Brakke, *Talking Back: A Monastic Handbook for Combating Demons*, 20.

Evagrius had a strong belief in spiritual warfare, and he crafted what was probably the most sophisticated demonology in early Christian monasticism.<sup>54</sup> He felt the world was filled with demons, and he warned monks to be wary of demonic influence. Half of his *Antirrhektikos* deals with demons directly or the temptations they bring.<sup>55</sup> He notes the demons will attack any weakness, and the greatest tool for demons is often our own good intentions. For example, almsgiving can be turned by the demons to avarice and vainglory in the life of the monk.<sup>56</sup>

To fight demonic influence or selfish desires, a monk needs *diakrisis*. The monk must use prayer, Scripture, mind, *antirrhektikos*, and heart to understand God more deeply; all of these elements need *diakrisis* from the monk. Similarly, as the monk grows in understanding of God, *diakrisis* will be more prevalent in his life. This transforming of the mind of the believer, echoed in Rom. 12:2,<sup>57</sup> is the heart of *diakrisis* for Evagrius. Evagrius believed that the contemplative life itself is a process of *diakrisis*; simultaneously, this process binds the individual ever closer to God and leads to even deeper discernment.<sup>58</sup> Thus, both the journey and the destination are *diakrisis*.

Another important voice from the deserts was Amma Syncletica of Alexandria. The 4<sup>th</sup> Century desert mother gave all her possessions to the poor and adopted the ascetic life. When she and her sister attempted to discern whether they should abandon their

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<sup>54</sup> Lienhard; Ponticus and Brakke, *Talking Back: A Monastic Handbook for Combating Demons*, 10.

<sup>55</sup> Ponticus and Brakke, *Talking Back: A Monastic Handbook for Combating Demons*, 20.

<sup>56</sup> Ponticus, *Ad Monachos*, 123.

<sup>57</sup> Do not conform to the pattern of this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind. Then you will be able to test and approve what God's will is — his good, pleasing and perfect will. Rom. 12:2.

<sup>58</sup> Rich, 74.

lives, they carefully weighed the options before them. They considered their options, prayed fervently over each one, and discerned which option was the most faithful to their calling.<sup>59</sup> Her example reminds us of the importance of *diakrisis* as a part of a daily journey with God. Instead of always looking to discernment of some issue in the future, Syncretica calls the ascetic to pay attention to God's presence daily to discern God's will.<sup>60</sup>

### ***Diakrisis* in Ascetical Practice**

As the ancient church moved into the 5th<sup>th</sup> Century and following Evagrius' work on *diakrisis* and the psyche, the phrase *diakrisis pneumatōn* became less frequent in patristic sources, and writers seemed to prefer *diakrisis* alone or *diakrisis logismōn* (discernment of evil thoughts). This reflected a widening of perspective of *diakrisis* that included the fight against evil and the virtue of right thinking.<sup>61</sup> Moreover, as the Church becomes Western in outlook, the Latin *discretion* replaces the Greek *diakrisis*.<sup>62</sup>

John Cassian (360-436 AD) also calls for a discerning eye from believers. His classic work, *The Conferences*, is cast as a set of dialogues between the desert elders about ways to live the monastic life. Cassian means to offer his readers a methodology to live the Gospel in a practical way so as to move to purity of heart. "The end of our

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<sup>59</sup> Laura Swan, *The Forgotten Desert Mothers: Sayings, Lives, and Stories of Early Christian Women* (New York: Paulist Press, 2001), 57.

<sup>60</sup> Mary C. Earle, *The Desert Mothers: Spiritual Practices from the Women of the Wilderness* (Harrisburg, PA: Morehouse Pub, 2007), 30-31.

<sup>61</sup> Lienhard.

<sup>62</sup> *Ibid.*

profession indeed, as I said, is the kingdom of God or the kingdom of heaven: But the immediate aim or goal, is purity of heart.”<sup>63</sup>

In Chapter One of the second book of *The Conferences*, Cassian begins to focus on discernment, or “discretion,” as he calls it. In a conversation from Abbot Moses, the Abbot turns to the “grace of discretion.” Then the Abbot quotes 1 Cor. 10:12<sup>64</sup> and clearly follows Paul’s thought that *diakrisis* is indeed a gift of God. “The gift of discretion is no earthly thing and no slight matter, but the greatest prize of Divine grace.”<sup>65</sup> Then the Abbot makes the turn to the individual and the call for that individual to strive for this gift. “And unless a monk has pursued it with all zeal, and secured a power of discerning with unerring judgment the spirits that rise up in him, he is sure to go wrong.”<sup>66</sup> Once again, the desert elders noted that *diakrisis* may well be a charism, but they hold it forth as a charism meant for all who hope to lead an ascetic life.<sup>67</sup>

McIntosh notes the connection here between Origen and Cassian on this point: Humans are created for communion with God, and that communion is a Divine gift; however, the desert elders believe a response from the individual is vital. “Discernment as distinguishing between spirits is thus an element in the wider restoration of humanity’s capacity to discern the cosmic order and significance of all things – a discerning vision that flows from the renewal of human companionship with God.”<sup>68</sup> Discernment must

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<sup>63</sup> John Cassian, *Conferences* (Buffalo, NY: Christian Literature Publishing Co., 1894), <http://www.newadvent.org/fathers/3508.htm> (accessed March 12, 2012), iv.

<sup>64</sup> “So, if you think you are standing firm, be careful that you don’t fall!” 1 Cor. 10:12

<sup>65</sup> *Ibid.*, ch 2.

<sup>66</sup> *Ibid.*, ch 1.

<sup>67</sup> McIntosh, 35.

<sup>68</sup> *Ibid.*, 35.

become a “practical skill” for all ascetics so that they can keep from being fooled by Satan.<sup>69</sup>

Just before he turns to speak of discretion, Cassian clearly defines the origins of human thoughts between God who displays the illumination of the Holy Spirit, the Devil who attempts to make sin alluring, and the faithful. “Our thoughts, i.e., from God, from the Devil, and from ourselves come from God when He vouchsafes to visit us with the illumination of the Holy Ghost, lifting us up to a higher state of progress.”<sup>70</sup> For Cassian, discernment is about vision - the way to see the world through the illumination of the Holy Spirit. This “illumination of the Holy Spirit” will allow the monk to stay on the straight path that neither veers into temptation nor turns into excessive fervor.<sup>71</sup>

For Cassian, *diakrisis* is both an intellectual and spiritual pursuit, but a pursuit based on the dependence on God of the monk. *Diakrisis* calls for constant vigilance to ward off vanity. Even when the monk has the gift of *diakrisis*, he can easily fool himself into believing his actions are led by God. Cassian tells of Abbot John, who was deceived in a moment of fatigue and hunger to allegiance to the image of the king on the coin rather than the true King:

But the last duty of this “good money-changer,” which, as we mentioned before, concerns the examination of the weight, will be fulfilled, if whenever our thoughts suggest that anything is to be done, we scrupulously think it over, and, laying it in the scales of our breast, weigh it with the most exact balance, whether it be full of good for all, or heavy with the fear of God: or entire and sound in meaning; or whether it be light with human display or some conceit of novelty, or whether the pride of foolish vain glory has not diminished or lessened the weight of its merit. And so straightway weighing them in the public balance, i.e., testing them by the

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<sup>69</sup> Maribel Dietz, *Wandering Monks, Virgins, and Pilgrims: Ascetic Travel in the Mediterranean World A.D. 300-800* (University Park, PA: The Pennsylvania State University Press, 2005), 88.

<sup>70</sup> Cassian, xix.

<sup>71</sup> Morris, *Discerning God's Will Together: A Spiritual Practice for the Church*, 27.

acts and proofs of the Apostles and Prophets let us hold them as it were entire and perfect and of full weight, or else with all care and diligence reject them as imperfect and counterfeit, and of insufficient weight.<sup>72</sup>

Here Cassian notes the importance of *diakrisis* and vigilance necessary for it. A believer must not only pray for *diakrisis* but also must always be on guard asking whether it be good for all, include respect for God, and diminish prideful vain glory.<sup>73</sup>

For the ascetic life, both the extremes of falling to temptation of the flesh and to the temptation of vanity smack of a triumph of self over God's will. The former represents a triumph of physical temptation over the spiritual, and the latter reflects hubris by individuals as they believe they have conquered by their own power. In either case, eyes have not stayed on Christ and individuals stray from the straight path. Only one solution exists – turn eyes back to Christ. “And when our gaze has wandered ever so little from Him, let us turn the eyes of the soul back to Him, and recall our mental gaze as in a perfectly straight direction.”<sup>74</sup>

John Climacus (c. 579-649)<sup>75</sup> was an abbot of the monastery on Mount Sinai. He wrote *The Ladder of Divine Ascent* towards the end of his life, which proclaimed a great deal of the teaching in the East about the ascetical life.<sup>76</sup> *The Ladder of Divine Ascent* applies the image of Jacob's ladder to the spiritual life, and *The Ladder* consists of 30 steps for monks to traverse to heaven and contemplation of God – one step for every year

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<sup>72</sup> Ibid. 1, xxii.

<sup>73</sup> Morris, *Discerning God's Will Together: A Spiritual Practice for the Church*, 27.

<sup>74</sup> Cassian, 1, xiii.

<sup>75</sup> John Climacus, *The Ladder of Divine Ascent*, trans. Colm Luibheid and Norman Russell, (Mahwah, NJ: Paulist Press, 1982), 3. Some debate exists on the birth and death dates of Climacus, but these debates are inconsequential to our discussion herein.

<sup>76</sup> McIntosh, 41.

in the life of Jesus before His baptism.<sup>77</sup> Many Eastern paintings, icons, and frescoes reflect the image as the monks traverse up the steps of the Ladder with angels lending them a hand and demons trying to trip them.<sup>78</sup> Climacus places discernment as step 26 on the Ladder. Only after the monk has traversed 25 steps, including breaking from the world, virtues needed, and vices shed, can he or she truly discern the Holy Spirit.<sup>79</sup> Climacus also juxtaposes step 26 with step 4, “Obedience.”<sup>80</sup>

The ultimate goal for Climacus is *diakrisis* of the will of God. “... Discernment is - and is recognized to be – a solid understanding of the will of God in all times, in all places, in all things; and it is found only among those who are pure in heart, in body, and in speech.”<sup>81</sup> Thus, the 25 steps before discernment are about preparing the body, the heart, and the tongue with a God-directed conscience as the aim.<sup>82</sup>

Climacus then turns to the notion of discernment as a part of the spiritual journey at three distinctly different levels: self-knowledge, distinguishing between good and evil, and, ultimately, knowledge resulting from Divine illumination. Each of these steps leads upward to the goal of illumination.<sup>83</sup> One should note that these are progressive levels for Climacus; the Christian begins at self-knowledge and progresses through the other two.

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<sup>77</sup> Ibid., 40.

<sup>78</sup> Climacus, 11.

<sup>79</sup> McIntosh, 40.

<sup>80</sup> Liviu Barbu, “The ‘Poor on Spirit’ and Our Life in Christ: An Eastern Orthodox Perspective on Christian Discipleship,” *Studies in Christian Ethics* 22, no. 3 (2009): 271-272; Morris, *Discerning God’s Will Together: A Spiritual Practice for the Church*, 27.

<sup>81</sup> Climacus, 229.

<sup>82</sup> Ibid., 230.

<sup>83</sup> Climacus, 229.

This final level includes the God-given light to discern the world around the self as well as to illuminate darkness in others and the world.<sup>84</sup>

The ascetic must be vigilant, as demons will try to destroy the discerning soul. “Every demonic upheaval within us arises from the following three related causes, namely, carelessness, pride, and the envy of demons. The first is pitiable, the second deplorable, the third is blessed.”<sup>85</sup> The monk is constantly assailed by the power of passions, but these can be overcome by the power of the Trinity and the remedy of humility.<sup>86</sup> Climacus notes this can lead to what he calls the active life – the life of illumination with the Holy Spirit – where fasting and obedience serve as the virtues that bind the monk to God. “Fasting destroys sensuality and obedience completes the destruction by bringing in humility.”<sup>87</sup>

One fallacy in modern readings of Climacus is to define narrowly illumination as a noetic reality. Some may constrict his understanding of illumination into oversimplified answers of questions of God’s will for this or that. Climacus calls the ascetic to a more pneumatological meaning. His understanding of *diakrisis* is connected to a journey with God through life in which the ascetic is moved daily by the winds of God’s Spirit.<sup>88</sup> Rather than applying discernment like a Magic 8 ball or Ouija board to the questions of the individual, Climacus notes that *diakrisis* is always in the journey as the ascetic grows accustomed to the winds of the Spirit. This notion of Divine illumination as the final step

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<sup>84</sup> Ibid., 229; Morris, *Discerning God’s Will Together: A Spiritual Practice for the Church*, 28.

<sup>85</sup> Ibid., 229-230.

<sup>86</sup> Ibid., 236.

<sup>87</sup> Ibid., 239.

<sup>88</sup> McIntosh, 41.



of *diakrisis* is only accomplished by the “pure in heart.”<sup>89</sup> For Climacus, the heart is the key component as the monk lovingly shares the Divine insights while guarding against pride and envy.<sup>90</sup>

Interestingly, Climacus never states whether he believes *diakrisis* to be a limited or general charism. A close reading of *The Divine Ladder* could lead to either conclusion. Climacus believes *diakrisis* to be part of the spiritual journey, the ascent of the Divine Ladder, but such an advanced step in the journey is rare to attain. Moreover, if a monk attains it, he still has several steps to climb on the journey that leads to stillness of heart, holy prayer, and perfection.<sup>91</sup>

### **Discernment in the Middle Ages**

In the 12<sup>th</sup> Century, both Bernard of Clairvaux and Richard of St. Victor discuss the need for *discretio* in the spiritual life. Both also reflect the influence of Climacus and other desert monastics in the West, as they place *discretio* as one of the steps of the Christian journey of the monk and a step which stands as the “moderator of excessive zeal and deficient devotion.”<sup>92</sup> This safeguard against extremes becomes a highlighted aspect of *discretio* for Bernard.<sup>93</sup>

Richard goes further by explicating the contours of *discretio*. He notes a great paradox: A great need for all Christians is to have *discretio* for the fullness of the

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<sup>89</sup> Barbu, 273.

<sup>90</sup> John Chryssavgis, *John Climacus: From the Egyptian Desert to the Sinaite Mountain* (Burlington, VT: Ashgate Publishing, 2004), 96.

<sup>91</sup> *Ibid.*, 194-195.

<sup>92</sup> McIntosh, 47.

<sup>93</sup> *Ibid.*, 48.

Christian life is a reality, but true *discretio* comes only from “long use” and, thus, is limited in most believers.<sup>94</sup> Richard also notes that *discretio* is about a certain self-knowledge as the Divine light permeates the soul and aids the soul in focusing on things of the Spirit rather than of this world.<sup>95</sup>

Catherine of Siena (1347-1380) adds a fuller dimension of the soul’s love for God as she focuses on the immensity of the soul’s ability to respond to the immensity of God’s love. Catherine views discernment as a profound transformation of the soul in which the humility of truth and self-knowledge lead the soul to deeper experience of and longing for an ecstatic connection to God’s love.<sup>96</sup> “Rather, discernment is a concomitant fruit of the person’s capacity for love and truth, capacities for which the person is created.”<sup>97</sup>

Catherine also believes that as this self-knowledge will lead to deeper understanding of God, and deeper understanding of God’s will lead to a deeper understanding of love. Knowledge of God and knowledge of self are two sides of a coin. Left on its own, knowledge of self can lead to pridefulness and selfishness, but when connected to knowledge of God, knowledge to be constructive and to bear fruit for charity is the result.<sup>98</sup>

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<sup>94</sup> Ibid., 49.

<sup>95</sup> Ibid., 53.

<sup>96</sup> Diana Villegas, “Discernment in Catherine of Siena,” *Theological Studies* 58, no. 1 (March 1997): 24; McIntosh, 55.

<sup>97</sup> Villegas, 24.

<sup>98</sup> Catherine, *The Dialogue of the Seraphic Virgin Catherine of Siena* (London: Kegan Paul, Trench, Trubner & Co, Ltd, 1907), 51.

Like many before her, Catherine warns her readers that even spiritual disciplines without humility will lead to destruction. Thus, discernment becomes about illuminating the path towards God and away from the self.<sup>99</sup> In her discussion of penance, Catherine describes some who fall in love with the discipline rather than the One to whom the discipline is meant to draw.<sup>100</sup> Discernment means distinguishing which fork in a path leads to the love of God and which leads to love of self.

Catherine's teaching clarifies the importance of grounding a discernment process in an ongoing relationship with God and self, where disciplined prayer and interiority foster knowing oneself honestly at the same time that one seeks the felt knowledge of God's unconditional mercy and love. . . . This encounter with God's transforming love results in growing connaturality with God so that one becomes increasingly attuned to what is true, good, and ordered.<sup>101</sup>

Jean Gerson (1363 – 1429) was one of the most well-read scholars of his day of the classics on *diakrisis pneumaton*, and he often quoted masters like Cassian and Climacus.<sup>102</sup> Gerson makes an important shift from the earlier masters: He focuses more on the experience of discernment rather than on any specific truth that discernment seeks.<sup>103</sup>

In Gerson's era, the growth of Franciscan spirituality led to a greater number of lay people experiencing visions and other supernatural phenomena, and Gerson wrote extensively on discerning the spirits to deal with these phenomena.<sup>104</sup> Gerson believed

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<sup>99</sup> McIntosh, 59.

<sup>100</sup> Catherine, 99.

<sup>101</sup> Villegas, 37.

<sup>102</sup> Jean Gerson and Brian Patrick McGuire, *Jean Gerson: Early Works*, Classics of Western Spirituality #92 (New York: Paulist Press, 1998), 332.

<sup>103</sup> McIntosh, 61-62.

<sup>104</sup> Moshe Sluhovsky, "Discernment of Difference, the Introspective Subject, and the Birth of Modernity," *Journal of Medieval and Early Modern Studies* 36, no. 1 (2006):180.

that discernment was a charism that was offered to certain people in certain offices, but he also saw possibilities in which that charism was wider than ecclesial offices - even in women.<sup>105</sup>

In *On Distinguishing True for False Revelations*, Gerson uses this metaphor: As gold has characteristics like weight, malleability, and durability, discernment has characteristics of humility, patience, truth, discretion, and charity.<sup>106</sup> Humility and discretion receive the most attention. Gerson sees humility as the “weight” to guard against ambition, and discretion is the quality of being able to listen to others and accept direction as to fight pridefulness.<sup>107</sup>

Probably Gerson’s greatest influence was in codifying a method to test questions of discernment. In *On the Proving of Spirits*, Gerson posits the following rhetorical device: *Tu, quis, quid, quare, cui, qualiter, under, requiere*. You should seek who, what, why, to whom, what kind, whence to discern the spirits. Sadly, the Inquisition later used Gerson’s tract as a guide to prove many of the peasants did not have valid visions, and the Inquisitors often tortured these peasants.<sup>108</sup>

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<sup>105</sup> Dyan Elliott, “Seeing Double: John Gerson, the Discernment of Spirits, and Joan of Arc,” *The American Historical Review* (February 2002), <http://www.historycooperative.org/journals/ahr/107.1/ah0102000026.html> (accessed 14 July 2011); Gerson and McGuire, 36; Moshe Sluhovskiy, *Believe Not Every Spirit: Possession, Mysticism, & Discernment in Early Modern Catholicism* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2007), 177-178. Elliott shows how Gerson continues to harden his viewpoints on charisms in women. While he advocated for women at one time, he becomes more conservative on the issue in his later writings. Undoubtedly, Gerson’s writings are sexist, and he writes things like “[women are] extravagant, changeable, uninhibited, and therefore not to be considered trustworthy.” At the same time, he leaves open the possibility, even if rare in his opinion, of some women having these charisms. Even so, he never ruled on the beatification of Bergitta of Sweden.

<sup>106</sup> Gerson and McGuire, 54.

<sup>107</sup> Andrew W. Keitt, *Inventing the Sacred: Imposture, Inquisition, and the Boundaries of the Supernatural in Golden Age Spain*, *The Medieval and Early Modern Iberian World* (Boston: Brill, 2005), 58.

<sup>108</sup> *Ibid.*, 62-63.

### Discernment from the Reformation and Beyond

Interestingly, although the Desert Fathers wrote extensively about discernment, the Reformers spoke little of it.<sup>109</sup> Martin Luther, keenly aware of self-deception, had concerns that any “enthusiasm” not grounded in Scripture was suspect.<sup>110</sup> “In these matters, which concern the spoken, external Word, it must be firmly maintained that God gives no one His Spirit or grace apart from the external Word which goes before. We say this to protect ourselves from the *enthusiasts* [italics added].”<sup>111</sup> For the most part, Reformation churches - with the notable exceptions of the Radical reformation, the Methodists, and the Charismatics - have followed Luther on this point.<sup>112</sup>

Similarly, John Calvin argues that humanity is blind to the ways of the Spirit that are not mediated by the Word. He notes three different aspects to discernment: knowledge of God, knowledge of God’s favor as to salvation, and knowledge of the regulation of our conduct. “With regard to the former two, but more properly the second, men otherwise the most ingenious are blinder than moles.”<sup>113</sup> Calvin further believed that communal observances of discernment would corrupt worship.<sup>114</sup> This belief has led to a

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<sup>109</sup> Morris, *Discerning God’s Will Together: A Spiritual Practice for the Church*, 32.

<sup>110</sup> Simeon Zahl, “Rethinking ‘Enthusiasm:’ Christoph Blumhardt on the Discernment of the Spirit,” *International Journal of Systematic Theology* (Oxford: Wiley-Blackwell, 2010): 342.

<sup>111</sup> Martin Luther and Christopher Boyd Brown, *Luther’s Works*, vol. 40 (St. Louis, MO: Concordia Pub. House, 2006), 142.

<sup>112</sup> Zahl, 342.

<sup>113</sup> John Calvin, *Institutes of the Christian Religion*, <http://www.reformed.org/master/index.html?mainframe=/books/institutes/> (accessed August 20, 2011).

<sup>114</sup> Morris, *Discerning God’s Will Together: A Spiritual Practice for the Church*, 32.

separation of governance from spirituality that continues to plague many churches today.<sup>115</sup>

Jonathan Edwards (1703-1758), writing in the wake of the Great Awakening, struggled to explicate ways for people to process their experiences with the Holy Spirit. Edwards ultimately comes to the conclusion that “true religion, in great part, consists only in religious affections,”<sup>116</sup> and Edwards wrote *A Treatise Concerning Religious Affections* to discern the spirits to judge the validity of those experiences.<sup>117</sup> Edwards’ work is considered by some to be the most complete work on spiritual discernment ever written.<sup>118</sup>

For Edwards, the first step is to discern unreliable signs.<sup>119</sup> Physical manifestations in the individual, excitement in the individual, Scripture references coming to mind, events seeming to happen at the “right” time, and even mouths that openly praise God are not proof of discernment for Edwards.<sup>120</sup> Edwards then delineated twelve signs of true religious affection:

1. The Holy Spirit is the only source of true affections toward God.
2. The basis of true religious affections is the divine excellency and glory of God in Jesus Christ, and not our own need of Him.
3. Therefore, true religious affections are developed only through delighting in God’s holiness or “beauty and moral excellence.”

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<sup>115</sup> Ibid., 32.

<sup>116</sup> Jonathan Edwards, *A Treatise Concerning Religious Affections*, <http://www.ccel.org/ccel/edwards/affections.toc.html> (accessed August 11, 2011).

<sup>117</sup> Morris, *Discerning God’s Will Together: A Spiritual Practice for the Church*, 34.

<sup>118</sup> Gerald R. McDermott, *Understanding Jonathan Edwards: An Introduction to America’s Theologian* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2009), 6.

<sup>119</sup> Gerald R. McDermott, *Seeing God: Jonathan Edwards and Spiritual Discernment* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1995), 45.

<sup>120</sup> Edwards.

4. True religious affections are formed only through spiritual understanding or enlightening of the mind by the illumination of the Holy Spirit.
5. True religious affections are grounded in the conviction of the historical truth of the gospel, not subjective reasonings or imaginings.
6. A deep awareness of personal insufficiency as a result of sin, often called “evangelical humiliation,” stimulates and sustains true religious affections.
7. True religious affections produce conversions that change one’s character.
8. A Christlike gentleness signifies true religious affections.
9. True religious affections are marked by tenderness instead of hardheartedness.
10. True religious affections produce a balance in the life of the convert, balance in consistency and constancy, in temperament and development of Christian virtues.
11. As true religious affections increase, so will a longing for spiritual matters.
12. True religious affections are intensely practical in everyday life; they change lives practically, and they produce practical results: “Christian practice is much more to be preferred as evidence of salvation than sudden conversion, mystical enlightenment, or the mere experience of emotional comfort that begins and ends with contemplation.”<sup>121</sup>

The second criterion is critical: The basis for discernment of the spirits is ultimately for the sake of the glory of God with an orientation towards God and away from the individual. Like Catherine of Siena and Ignatius of Loyola, Edwards believes true religion is about becoming connected to God’s intentions for the individual. God is to be loved for God’s own glory.<sup>122</sup> False religion is allowing pride to focus the story of redemption on the individual and subjugating God to a supporting role in the individual’s own drama.<sup>123</sup>

Edwards proposes discernment as being grounded ultimately in another, namely Christ. “For Edwards, the fundamental question of discernment will be (as Bernard had

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<sup>121</sup> David Reed, “Edwards on Religious Affections,” <http://individual.utoronto.ca/hayes/edwards/Affections.htm> (accessed August 20, 2011).

<sup>122</sup> McDermott, *Seeing God: Jonathan Edwards and Spiritual Discernment*, 94.

<sup>123</sup> McIntosh, 80; Edwards. “. . . pride itself will prejudice them in favour of that which they call Christ: selfish, proud man naturally calls that lovely that greatly contributes to his interest, and gratifies his ambition.”

also said) whether one loves God for God's sake or one's own."<sup>124</sup> The work of discernment is to continue to focus first on God and withstand the perpetual temptation to focus on the self. As was also found in the writings of John Wesley,<sup>125</sup> Edwards felt such discernment of the spirits would lead to a transformed character. At the heart of Edwards' belief is this reality: True religion leads to a heart attuned to the love of God, which reveals itself in love for God and for others, not love for the self.<sup>126</sup>

### Conclusion

Although other writers could undoubtedly be included in this historical survey, I have attempted here to trace the broad contours of the history of discernment. This survey outlines over the centuries a gradual movement of defining *diakrisis* as a specific charism to a general charism. However, the history reveals the consensus that this charism is not attained by all. The gift only occurs through a combination of God's grace and individual assiduousness and when the individual purposefully immerses oneself in God to fight the temptations of pride, self-aggrandizement, personal agendas, and self-delusion. As this chapter has defined these contours, readers can now move in the next chapter to see them in practice in *The Spiritual Exercises* of Ignatius of Loyola.

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<sup>124</sup> Ibid., 81.

<sup>125</sup> John Wesley, *The Journal of John Wesley*, ed. Percy Parker (Chicago: Moody Press, 1951), <http://www.ccel.org/ccel/wesley/journal.i.html> (accessed August 20, 2011). While they agree on this point, I believe Edwards would be concerned at the notion of reliance on "feelings" in Wesley's writings. From Wesley's journals, "How do you know whether you love me? Why, as you know, whether you are hot or cold. You feel this moment that you do or do not love me."

<sup>126</sup> Gordon T. Smith, *The Voice of Jesus: Discernment, Prayer, and the Witness of the Spirit* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2003), 52-53.



## CHAPTER FOUR

### IGNATIAN DISCERNMENT MODELS

*The Spiritual Exercises of St. Ignatius* provides individuals a framework for the discernment of the spirits – both good and evil. Ignatius carefully delineated a process by which an individual would spend a month in discernment of the spirits.

For just as taking a walk, journeying on foot, and running are bodily exercises so we call the Spiritual Exercises every way of preparing and disposing the soul to rid itself of all inordinate attachments, and, after their removal, of seeking and finding the will of God in the disposition of our life for the salvation of our soul.<sup>1</sup>

This process includes a time of purgative contemplation that leads ultimately to contemplation of the life of Christ. *The Spiritual Exercises* is divided into four “weeks” with four major themes: sin, the life of Jesus, the Passion of Jesus, and the Resurrection of Jesus. By focusing away from the self and onto Christ, discernment becomes about imitating Christ. Finally, in imitating Christ, illumination comes.

Sadly, few contemporary Christians feel they have either the time or the inclination to spend 5 to 6 hours of reflection each day for a month; indeed for this reason, *The Spiritual Exercises* have often been relegated to monastic life. However, Ignatius’ model may be adapted to provide a model for both individual and corporate reflection. The progression of purgation to illumination to imitation is a process that can be powerful in the life of any Christian, and Ignatius offers a template through which a Christian can undertake such a journey. Herein, this work analyzes the elements of *The*

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<sup>1</sup> Ignatius, *The Spiritual Exercises of St. Ignatius*, trans. Elder Mullan, S.J. (New York: P.J. Kennedy & Sons, 1914), [http://www.nwjesuits.org/JesuitSpirituality/Exercises/SpEx001\\_020.html](http://www.nwjesuits.org/JesuitSpirituality/Exercises/SpEx001_020.html) (accessed August 11, 2012).

*Spiritual Exercises* and makes some suggestions for use in the contemporary discernment.

### **A Short History of Ignatius of Loyola**

Ignatius of Loyola (1496-1551) is known as the founder of the Society of Jesus (Jesuits), a missionary, a pilgrim, a mystic, the defender of the Catholic faith, and the author of *The Spiritual Exercises*. Ignacio Lopez of Loyola was born into a noble family in the Basque region of Spain and, as a boy, served as a page in the royal court of King Ferdinand.<sup>2</sup>

After a rather wild adolescence, Ignatius decided on a career as a soldier for his country, and he fought the French in the Battle of Pamplona in 1521. During the battle, Ignatius was hit by cannon fire, and he suffered severe injuries to his legs.<sup>3</sup> This battle experience stayed with Ignatius, and *The Spiritual Exercises* are filled with battle imagery – particularly against evil.<sup>4</sup>

While recuperating at home, Ignatius immersed himself in stories of St. Francis, and he read Jacobus de Varaine's *The Golden Legend*, Thomas à Kempis' *Imitation of Christ*, and Ludolph of Saxony's *The Life of Christ*. Ignatius saw the influence of Francis, and he believed vows of poverty were the antidote for the greed in some clerics. Jacobus'

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<sup>2</sup> Margaret Silf, *Inner Compass: An Invitation to Ignatian Spirituality*, 10th anniversary ed. (Chicago: Loyola Press, 2007), 8-9.

<sup>3</sup> David Lonsdale, *Eyes to See, Ears to Hear: An Introduction to Ignatian Spirituality*, Rev. ed, Traditions of Christian Spirituality Series (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 2009), 40.

<sup>4</sup> Taylerson, 69.

work appealed to his romantic desire to emulate the spiritual heroism of the saints.<sup>5</sup> Ludolph and à Kempis' work gave him an even deeper hunger for connecting to the life of Jesus. In *The Spiritual Exercises*, Ignatius used the idea of “memory points” in salvation history as points of reflection.<sup>6</sup> Ludolph also presented meditations on the life of Christ including the Incarnation, the Nativity, the acts of Jesus, the Passion, the Resurrection and the Ascension. Later, when writing *The Spiritual Exercises*, Ignatius made over 300 pages of notes on *The Life of Christ*.<sup>7</sup>

After a vision of the Virgin Mary, Ignatius decided to take a vow of poverty and make a spiritual pilgrimage to Montserrat and, ultimately, Jerusalem. He was acutely aware of the riches represented by his clothing, and after arriving at Montserrat, he arranged to trade his clothes with those of a beggar.<sup>8</sup> He kept a vigil of arms with his sword all night before the famous dark brown statue of the Madonna, Our Lady of the Rocks, carved by Moors some centuries earlier. There he made a vow to the Holy Mother and surrendered his sword and his dreams for earthly glory as a knight, and he became a

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<sup>5</sup> James Brodrick, *Saint Ignatius Loyola: The Pilgrim Years, 1491-1538* (San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 1998), 63-64.

<sup>6</sup> Antonio T. De Nicolás and Ignatius, *Ignatius De Loyola, Powers of Imagining: A Philosophical Hermeneutic of Imagining through the Collected Works of Ignatius De Loyola, with a Translation of These Works* (Albany, NY: State University of New York Press, 1986), 13. Memory points are Ignatius' use of memorable elements in the life of Jesus as moments for reflection to aid the individual immerse himself or herself in Christ.

<sup>7</sup> George A. Aschenbrenner, *Stretched for Greater Glory: What to Expect from the Spiritual Exercises* (Chicago: Loyola Press, 2004), 3.

<sup>8</sup> José Ignacio Tellechea Idígoras, *Ignatius of Loyola: The Pilgrim Saint*, trans Cornelius Michael Buckley (Chicago: Loyola University Press, 1994), 154. Unfortunately, the beggar would be arrested for having these rich clothes, and this almost foiled Ignatius' attempt to escape his home.

soldier for Christ.<sup>9</sup> Driven by his love for Jacobus' work, he saw this moment as the first step in a heroic journey for Christ.<sup>10</sup>

Over the next eleven months, Ignatius lived the life of a pilgrim. He begged for alms daily, spent hours each day in prayer and confession, abandoned drinking wine on any day but Sunday, visited hospitals to bathe the sick, and attended mass daily.<sup>11</sup> During this time for reasons that are unclear, Ignatius decided that, instead of making a pilgrimage to Jerusalem, he would focus on living faithfully in Spain.<sup>12</sup>

He then felt the need for further theological education which led him to Barcelona, Alcala, and Salamanca. He gained a particular disdain for the writings of Erasmus, and this deepened his desire to defend the faith. He rejected Erasmus because he felt his Latin works were far too hermeneutically rigid and bordered on arrogance. His greater rejection occurred after reading Erasmus' *Enchiridion* which he found to be a cold, academic work, and he was deeply hurt that Erasmus only referred to the Holy Mother once. Because of Ignatius' devotion to the Holy Mother, he was outraged.<sup>13</sup>

He wrote his first versions of *The Spiritual Exercises* in a notebook he would keep for many years, and he gained several acolytes who stayed with him through his

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<sup>9</sup> Silf, 12.

<sup>10</sup> Brodrick, 79.

<sup>11</sup> Idígoras, 184.

<sup>12</sup> Brodrick, 85-86.

<sup>13</sup> Brodrick, 147-149; Mark Rotsaert, "When Are Spiritual Exercises Ignatian Spiritual Exercises?" *Review of Ignatian Spirituality* 32, no. 3 (2001): 38; Christiaan Theodoor Lievestro, "Erasmus, Education, and Folly," in *Through A Glass Darkly: Essays in the Religious Imagination*, ed. John Hawley (New York: Fordham University Press, 1996), 72-75. Ignatius had particular dislike for Erasmus' version of the discernment of spirits found in *Enchiridion Militis Christiani*. Lievestro notes that the Jesuit disdain for Erasmus continues to the present.

numerous journeys.<sup>14</sup> After several years living as a mendicant in Salamanca, Ignatius and his group moved to Paris where Ignatius enrolled at the University of Paris. Ignatius was exposed to more humanists, and he became acquainted with Erasmus' friend, Luis Rives. He and Rives went to dinner on a day of abstinence in Lent. Rives ordered a gourmet fish dish, and they discussed theological works of the day. Rives left the conversation impressed and remarked to a friend that Ignatius could one day lead a religious order. Ignatius left rather disgusted that men like Rives and Erasmus could lead lives of luxury ordering fish while the poor subsisted on little.<sup>15</sup> Ignatius left Paris with a Masters' degree and a burning desire to live for Christ; he also left with his small group of acolytes committed to live *The Spiritual Exercises*.<sup>16</sup>

In 1539, Ignatius and his acolytes petitioned to be recognized as a missionary order, the Society of Jesus, and Pope Paul III gave official approval the next year.<sup>17</sup> The Society of Jesus then named Ignatius as its leader.<sup>18</sup> Over the next sixteen years before Ignatius' death from a fever, Ignatius constantly updated *The Spiritual Exercises* in his notebook, the order grew to over 1000 Jesuits, and the Society of Jesus brought many Protestants back to the Catholic Church.<sup>19</sup> The order sent missionaries far and wide, and

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<sup>14</sup> Francis Thompson, *Saint Ignatius Loyola* (Baltimore: Carroll Press, 1951), 80-81. These followers were originally Peter Favre, Francis Xavier, who would later gain fame as a missionary to Indonesia and Japan, Diego Lainez, Alfonso Salmeron, Nicolas Bobadilla, and Simon Rodriguez.

<sup>15</sup> Idígoras, 288-289. Idígoras notes that Ignatius' judgment was rather harsh. Rives had been banished from England for not supporting the divorce of Henry VIII and was similar to Ignatius in his willingness to take a stand for the faith.

<sup>16</sup> Brodrick, 278.

<sup>17</sup> John C. Olin, *Catholic Reform: From Cardinal Ximenes to the Council of Trent, 1495-1563: an Essay with Illustrative Documents and a Brief Study of St. Ignatius Loyola* (New York: Fordham University Press, 1996), 24-27.

<sup>18</sup> Thompson, 267.

<sup>19</sup> Idígoras, 331.

*The Spiritual Exercises* gained an even greater audience. Following his death in 1556, Ignatius was canonized in 1622, and Pope Pius XI named him the patron saint of spiritual exercises in 1922.<sup>20</sup>

### **The Content of *The Spiritual Exercises***

*The Spiritual Exercises* is divided into four “weeks.” The process starts with a week of confession. This is a purgative process to enable the individual to open space for God. In the second week, the individual enters into the narrative of the life of Christ so that he or she might learn the imitation of Christ. The third week is to take the steps of the Passion from the triumphant entry to Jerusalem to the ignominy of the Cross. Finally, the fourth week places the individual at the Resurrection. As Ignatius explains, “First, the consideration and contemplation on the sins; Second, the life of Christ our Lord up to Palm Sunday inclusively; Third, the Passion of Christ our Lord; Fourth, the Resurrection and Ascension, with the three Methods of Prayer.”<sup>21</sup> Thereby, the process of discernment is ultimately framed around confession and the life of the Savior.<sup>22</sup>

A caveat should be noted about time. Although Ignatius uses the paradigm of “weeks,” to think only chronologically is a mistake. The spiritual life cannot be limited by the vagaries of time.<sup>23</sup> For Ignatius, the process is far more important than elapsed

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<sup>20</sup> Thompson, 318.

<sup>21</sup> Ignatius and Louis J. Puhl, *The Spiritual Exercises of St. Ignatius: Based on Studies in the Language of the Autograph* (Mansfield Centre, CT: Martino Publishing, 2010), 2.

<sup>22</sup> Rotsaert, 33.

<sup>23</sup> Silf, 27.

time,<sup>24</sup> and he encourages the individual to focus more on the process than any chronometer. “For, as it happens that in the First Week some are slower to find what they seek - namely, contrition, sorrow and tears for their sins - and in the same way some are more diligent than others, and more acted on or tried by different spirits; it is necessary sometimes to shorten the Week, and at other times to lengthen it.”<sup>25</sup>

Another interesting caveat in the introduction to *The Spiritual Exercises* is the sense of propriety about vows or decisions that a disciple might make under duress. The goal is not to force a decision; indeed, forcing would be counter to the contemplative life the process hopes to engender.<sup>26</sup> Ignatius shows great concern for authenticity in both the individual and those giving guidance to that individual.<sup>27</sup> The process calls for genuine response from the individual, and such cannot be forced, hurried, or coerced. Indeed, the individual should remember the ultimate goal: He or she is created to praise, revere, and serve the Lord God, and by this means to save his or her soul.<sup>28</sup>

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<sup>24</sup> Ignatius and Joseph N. Tylenda, *A Pilgrim's Journey: The Autobiography of Ignatius of Loyola*, Rev. ed. (San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 2001), 27.

<sup>25</sup> Ignatius and Puhl, *The Spiritual Exercises of St. Ignatius: Based on Studies in the Language of the Autograph*, 2.

<sup>26</sup> Ignatius and Puhl, *The Spiritual Exercises of St. Ignatius: Based on Studies in the Language of the Autograph*, 5-6. “If he who is giving the Exercises sees that he who is receiving them is going on in consolation and with much fervor, he ought to warn him not to make any inconsiderate and hasty promise or vow: and the more light of character he knows him to be, the more he ought to warn and admonish him. For, though one may justly influence another to embrace the religious life, in which he is understood to make vows of obedience, poverty and chastity, and, although a good work done under vow is more meritorious than one done without it, one should carefully consider the circumstances and personal qualities of the individual and how much help or hindrance he is likely to find in fulfilling the thing he would want to promise.”

<sup>27</sup> Michael Ivens, *Understanding the Spiritual Exercises* (Leominster, MA: Gracewing Publishing 1998), 12.

<sup>28</sup> Ignatius and Puhl, *The Spiritual Exercises of St. Ignatius: Based on Studies in the Language of the Autograph*, 7-8.

The goal of the first week is for the individual to turn away from sin and turn to God. This begins with choosing a specific sin that the individual would like to purge. The purgative process begins with the Examination of Conscience, commonly known as the Examen. Jim Manney summarizes the Examen thusly:

1. Pray for light: Begin by asking God for the grace to pray, to see and to understand.
2. Give thanks: Look at your day in a spirit of gratitude. Everything is a gift from God.
3. Review the day: Guided by the Holy Spirit, look back on your day. Pay attention to your experience. Look for God in it.
4. Look at what's wrong: Face up to failures and shortcomings. Ask forgiveness for your faults. Ask God to show you ways to improve.
5. Resolution for the day to come: Where do you need God today? What can you do today?<sup>29</sup>

Although an outcome of the Examen may well be an individual living more fully the Gospel, the real intent of the Examen is for the individual to see how God is to be found in all things.<sup>30</sup>

The Examen consists of the individual raising the issue to conscience through morning prayers so that the individual prepares herself or himself spiritually to deal with the issue that day. The prayer should be one for diligence to resist this particular evil. The midday prayer asks God for the grace to see how often he or she has fallen into a certain

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<sup>29</sup> Jim Manney, *A Simple, Life-Changing Prayer: Discovering the Power of St. Ignatius Loyola's Examen* (Chicago: Loyola Press, 2011), 15; George Aschenbrenner SJ and John English SJ, "Examen," (2007), <http://www.diocese.cc/upload/images/originals/Examens070510A.pdf> (accessed August 11, 2012); Alexander Michael Peck, "The Consciousness Examen," (Brisbane: Broken Bay Institute of the Sydney College of Divinity, 2008), 4. Peck, a graduate student in Australia, has used Aschenbrenner's work to create a nice pneumonic device to remember the Examen: TEACH - Thanksgiving to God, Enlightenment prayer, Accounting of one's actions, Contrition and sorrow, and Hopeful resolution for the future.

<sup>30</sup> Rotsaert, 34.



sin or defect.<sup>31</sup> The dinner prayer entails an accounting to God for the actions of the day so that the individual can ensure that he or she has not succumbed.<sup>32</sup>

Under a rubric of making a Christian's confession more efficacious, Ignatius also gives advice to the individual on minute ways to call to mind a particular sin. He suggests that if a believer backslides into that sin, the believer should "let him put his hand on his breast, grieving for having fallen: which can be done even in the presence of many, without their perceiving what he is doing."<sup>33</sup> Another interesting element is a call for the individual to keep a record of how many times he or she falls into this particular sin by charting the sin daily. Simple dots remind him or her about falling.<sup>34</sup> These simple elements are well before their time pedagogically as they teach the individual through different modes of learning and different sensations.<sup>35</sup>

Of course, the key issue for Ignatius is the discernment of the spirits. He ensures that his reader understands three sources for thought: the individual, the good spirit, and the bad spirit. Thus, the individual must examine his or her thoughts to decipher their

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<sup>31</sup> Ignatius and Puhl, *The Spiritual Exercises of St. Ignatius: Based on Studies in the Language of the Autograph*, 15.

<sup>32</sup> Aschenbrenner, 30; Ignatius and Puhl, *The Spiritual Exercises of St. Ignatius: Based on Studies in the Language of the Autograph*, 15-16.

<sup>33</sup> Ignatius and Puhl, *The Spiritual Exercises of St. Ignatius: Based on Studies in the Language of the Autograph*, 16.

<sup>34</sup> Aschenbrenner, 36; Ignatius and Puhl, *The Spiritual Exercises of St. Ignatius: Based on Studies in the Language of the Autograph*, 15.

<sup>35</sup> Joseph A. Tetlow, *Making Choices in Christ: The Foundations of Ignatian Spirituality* (Chicago, IL: Loyola Press, 2008), 19.

source.<sup>36</sup> The individual may often need to repeat the process to ensure he or she fully understands.<sup>37</sup>

At the end of the process, Ignatius' greatest concern is the resistance of sin by the individual. However a Christian brings sin to light, the process is meant to give room for the individual to conquer that particular sin. Ignatius notes that sin will return "again and again," but the goal is to resist the temptation until it is conquered. Herein, the individual finds a "meritorious" conquering of sin.<sup>38</sup>

The powerful dénouement of the first week is to be found in Ignatius' Annotation 53 as the individual comes to grip with three questions: "What have I done for Christ? What am I doing for Christ? What ought I do for Christ?"<sup>39</sup> These questions strip away all pretenses of selfishness and pride and force the individual to contemplate who Jesus truly is in his or her life.

The first week also consists of selected exercises that aid the individual to see his or her sin and the cost of that sin. Herein, this work will illuminate two specific exercises: the general confession for Communion and the meditation on hell.

The Lord's Supper has long been an opportunity for Christians to take seriously confession. To follow Paul's words in connection to the Supper in 1 Cor. 11:28, "Examine yourselves, and only then eat of the bread and drink of the cup." However,

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<sup>36</sup> Ignatius and Puhl, *The Spiritual Exercises of St. Ignatius: Based on Studies in the Language of the Autograph*, 18.

<sup>37</sup> Anthony Mottola and Ignatius, *The Spiritual Exercises of St. Ignatius* (Garden City, NY: Image Books 1964), 43.

<sup>38</sup> Ignatius and Puhl, *The Spiritual Exercises of St. Ignatius: Based on Studies in the Language of the Autograph*, 18.

<sup>39</sup> Taylerson, 73; Ignatius and Puhl, *The Spiritual Exercises of St. Ignatius: Based on Studies in the Language of the Autograph*, 28.

Ignatius adds a sense of both memory and imagination to this confession. He suggests that the individual should examine his or her entire life. By taking an inventory year by year and day by day,<sup>40</sup> a believer should look at the places he or she inhabited and remember his or her places of work. Only after a full inventory of sins in this imaginary walk back through life should a Christian come to the Lord's Table.<sup>41</sup> With this process at the end of the week, Ignatius hopes the individual will come to the Table with a deeper appreciation of the power of what is offered in the Sacrament.<sup>42</sup>

Ignatius, a person with a strong belief in demons and the reality of hell, felt it was important to take time to reflect on the reality of hell from which Christ saves us. In the exercise of Confession, the individual is to imagine the great expanses of hell indeed "the length, breadth and depth of hell."<sup>43</sup> This imaginary process is to be one of all the senses. The individual is to visualize the great fires and the wretched souls therein; to hear the wailings and the cries of the damned as they proclaim blasphemies against God; to smell sulphur, smoke, and "putrid" things; to taste "the bitter things, like tears, sadness, and the worm of conscience;" and, finally, to touch the fire that burns the souls.<sup>44</sup>

Ignatius intends this process to remind the individual not only of those that did not believe or know but also of those that were disobedient. More importantly, Ignatius desires for this reflection to aid the individual to come to a deeper sense of the need for

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<sup>40</sup> Aschenbrenner, 29-30.

<sup>41</sup> Ivens, 41.

<sup>42</sup> Ignatius and Puhl, *The Spiritual Exercises of St. Ignatius: Based on Studies in the Language of the Autograph*, 44.

<sup>43</sup> *Ibid.*, 32-33.

<sup>44</sup> Ivens, 62.

Christ.<sup>45</sup> Ignatius has the concern that the individual will move directly to the joy of the Resurrection without pondering the implications of his or her sin and the price paid for it by Jesus.<sup>46</sup> Ignatius senses that part of the penance is to penetrate the darkness and pain at the root of sin; if a disciple jumps to the Resurrection, he or she limits the capacity to see into his or her own interior darkness.<sup>47</sup>

Reflecting on hell should not be perceived, however, as some attempt to scare people out of their sins. Ignatius placed this step after a long period of rumination on the love and mercy of Christ. Through the experience of God's love alone, Ignatius calls the individual to consider from what God has saved him or her.<sup>48</sup>

For those raised with constant teachings about hell, this step may seem heavy-handed; but, in the end, Ignatius might tell those people that the struggle with this step may reflect their need for it.<sup>49</sup> Perhaps, by entering into such contemplation, they might find answers; their discomfort may be issue to explore on journey with the Spirit.<sup>50</sup>

After the first week, the focus moves to the life of Christ. The second week teaches the individual to follow Christ as His disciples. The individual delves fully into the life of the Savior: the Incarnation, the birth in Bethlehem, the flight to Egypt, the

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<sup>45</sup> David Michael Stanley, *A Modern Scriptural Approach to the Spiritual Exercises* (Chicago: Institute of Jesuit Sources, 1967), 87-89. Stanley also notes both the difficulty in translating the Biblical world to our present situation as well as the medieval world of Ignatius to our reality.

<sup>46</sup> Ignatius and Puhl, *The Spiritual Exercises of St. Ignatius: Based on Studies in the Language of the Autograph*, 36.

<sup>47</sup> Tetlow, 93.

<sup>48</sup> Aschenbrenner, 60.

<sup>49</sup> Fidelis Udahemuka, "Meditations on the First Week of the Spiritual Exercises," in *Dynamics of the Spiritual Exercises: African Perspectives*, ed. Paul Christian Kiti (Nairobi: Paulines Publications of Africa, 2005), 58.

<sup>50</sup> Tetlow, 48.

baptism in the Jordan River, the calling of the disciples, the Sermon on the Mount, the calming of the storm, the raising of Lazarus, the cleansing of the Temple, and the triumphal entry into Jerusalem.<sup>51</sup> The third week focuses on the Last Supper, the Passion Narrative, and the ignominy of the Cross. The fourth and final week focuses on the triumph of the Empty Tomb, Jesus' appearance to His disciples, and, ultimately, the call to all Jesus' disciples to love and serve Him.<sup>52</sup>

For Ignatius, discernment is firmly rooted in entering the life of Christ.<sup>53</sup> The influence of Ludolph of Saxony and Thomas à Kempis is reflected in this involvement in the life of Christ. Indeed, this seems to be the genius of *The Spiritual Exercises*: the individual is retreating with the Spirit away from selfish desires and entering herself or himself into the larger story of God's grace as seen in the life, death, and Resurrection of Jesus.<sup>54</sup>

### **The Rules of Discernment**

After his description of the four weeks, *The Spiritual Exercises* has several additional chapters on various matters. One of them describes Ignatius' fourteen rules on discernment. This work provides a brief view of a few of these rules.

The first rule deals with those that have moved away from God. This person moved from one mortal sin to another. Ignatius notes this person is easy to entice by the

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<sup>51</sup> Ignatius and Puhl, *The Spiritual Exercises of St. Ignatius: Based on Studies in the Language of the Autograph*, 43.

<sup>52</sup> *Ibid.*, 55-67.

<sup>53</sup> Aschenbrenner, 2-3.

<sup>54</sup> *Ibid.*, 36.

enemy as “sensual delights and gratifications” will move them further into sin.<sup>55</sup> This movement away from God and towards sin is a question of fundamental direction in life. The individual must choose to follow the enemy in the direction of sensual pleasure or follow the “good spirit” that pricks the conscience and reason.<sup>56</sup> Ignatius sees the good spirits and the enemy as opposites, so he notes their methods are polar opposites of one another.<sup>57</sup>

Readers should note Ignatius’ use of the general term the “enemy.” This leads to several possibilities. The most evident is Satan and other demonic powers that will use the sensual delights against the individual. Seemingly, Ignatius also means our human frailties, the flesh as Paul says, that will lead us astray. Human egos and disordered sensuality can be just as much of an enemy as any embodiment of evil.<sup>58</sup> The human condition and human failing – our hurts, doubts, and burdens – can create an enemy within that leaves many susceptible to sensual pleasure.<sup>59</sup>

The second rule is a movement towards God for those that are “cleansing their sins and rising from good to better in the service of God our Lord.”<sup>60</sup> Here, the enemy works to trouble the heart of the individual while the good spirit works an encourager.

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<sup>55</sup> Ignatius and Puhl, *The Spiritual Exercises of St. Ignatius: Based on Studies in the Language of the Autograph*, 141.

<sup>56</sup> Timothy M. Gallagher, *The Discernment of Spirits: An Ignatian Guide for Everyday Living* (New York: Crossroad Pub. Co, 2005), 32-33.

<sup>57</sup> *Ibid.*, 39.

<sup>58</sup> Jules J. Toner, “Discernment in the Spiritual Exercises,” in *A New Introduction to the Spiritual Exercises of St. Ignatius*, ed. John E. Dister (Collegeville, MN: Liturgical Press, 1993), 64.

<sup>59</sup> Gallagher, 34.

<sup>60</sup> Ignatius, *The Spiritual Exercises of St. Ignatius*.

The weapons of the enemy are sadness, obstacles, and false reason.<sup>61</sup> The good is known to “give courage and strength, consolations, tears, inspirations and quiet, easing, and putting away all obstacles.”<sup>62</sup> Once again, the good spirit pulls opposite of the enemy. If the individual moves away from God, the enemy encourages and the good spirit troubles. When the person moves toward God, the enemy troubles while the good spirit encourages.<sup>63</sup>

The rest of the “rules” apply to the disciple that has followed the good spirit, and they highlight the encouraging action of the good spirit versus the troubling action of the enemy.<sup>64</sup> The third and fourth rules are what Ignatius describes as “spiritual consolation” and “spiritual desolation.” He speaks of the comfort that comes when the soul becomes “inflamed with love of its Creator and Lord.”<sup>65</sup> The key word is the modifier “spiritual;” Ignatius notes that those uplifting and comforting experiences connected directly to our relationship with God are longer lasting than those of a non-spiritual origin.<sup>66</sup> He also believes they will have their culmination in service and love for others.<sup>67</sup> On the other hand, spiritual desolation is filled with anxiety, self-involvement, and depression.

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<sup>61</sup> Gallagher, 42-43.

<sup>62</sup> Ignatius, *The Spiritual Exercises of St. Ignatius*.

<sup>63</sup> Silf, 72.

<sup>64</sup> Gallagher, 46.

<sup>65</sup> Ignatius, *The Spiritual Exercises of St. Ignatius*.

<sup>66</sup> Gallagher, 53.

<sup>67</sup> David Lonsdale, “Discernment of Spirits” in *An Ignatian Spirituality Reader*, ed. George W. Traub (Chicago: Loyola Press, 2008), 179.

Ignatius warns that in such times the individual must first make no decisions, as she or he will not be led by a loving Spirit and could lead to destructive choices.<sup>68</sup>

Once again, a theme of movement towards God or away from God appears. Desolation causes the individual to withdraw and can lead to a self-centeredness with little concern for others. Movement towards God and the inner life of the Savior should lead to an inner peace which culminates in love for God's family.<sup>69</sup> That inner peace may lead us to reach to others with God's spirit of reconciliation and peace.<sup>70</sup> Disciples should note that the spiritual life is not completely times of consolation; a disciple should expect an ebb and flow of movement between consolation and desolation.<sup>71</sup>

Ignatius notes desolation can be a time of great growth. This is not to say that desolation causes growth; instead, desolation leads to growth when a disciple resists.<sup>72</sup> Therefore, rules five through eight are advice for the individual enduring this time of desolation. He notes that a believer should avoid making great changes, as the believer is susceptible in such times to the leading of "evil guides and counsels." He encourages the individual to intensify his or her discipline of prayer, meditation, examination, and penance. The individual should work to remember the abundance of God's grace and work to be patient for the end of the time of trial.<sup>73</sup>

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<sup>68</sup> Michael Buckley, "Rules for the Discernment of Spirits," *The Way* 20 (1973), <http://www.theway.org.uk/Back/s020Buckley.pdf> (accessed October 19, 2011); Gallagher, 72-73.

<sup>69</sup> Silf, 88-89.

<sup>70</sup> Lonsdale, *Eyes to See, Ears to Hear: An Introduction to Ignatian Spirituality*, 98.

<sup>71</sup> James L. Wakefield and Ignatius, *Sacred Listening: Discovering the Spiritual Exercises of Ignatius Loyola*, 179.

<sup>72</sup> Gallagher, 115.

<sup>73</sup> Ignatius and Puhl, *The Spiritual Exercises of St. Ignatius: Based on Studies in the Language of the Autograph*, 142-143.



Rule nine tells three principal reasons desolation happens to the believer. First is lacking a faithful response.<sup>74</sup> Some people that genuinely search after God become negligent in some area of their spiritual life, and in these inattentive times, the believer is susceptible. Indeed, this can create a vicious cycle for the believer. Desolation can be caused by a lack of attention to spiritual disciplines. Furthermore, while in desolation, a believer often does not have the energy or passion to grow warmer to God, and the distance grows even deeper.<sup>75</sup> The second reason is God giving the desolation as a gift to test the individual to aid their growth into the person God desires them to be.<sup>76</sup> The third reason is needing to learn true wisdom about the gifts of God and to remind the individual of his or her deep need for God's grace. Much like the story of Gideon's army,<sup>77</sup> God knows the human tendency to think a person did everything on his or her own, and times of desolation can grant wisdom about the Lord who is always with humanity.<sup>78</sup>

Ultimately, times of desolation are connected to gratitude. In the case of the person lacking a faithful response, the person responds with the ingratitude of tepidity and slothfulness. In times of testing, God wants believers to grow in gratitude for the

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<sup>74</sup> Jesus Corella, "Spiritual Desolation in Today's World," *The Way* 43, no. 3 (July 2004), <http://www.theway.org.uk/Back/433Corella.pdf> (accessed October 19, 2011); Ignatius and Puhl, *The Spiritual Exercises of St. Ignatius: Based on Studies in the Language of the Autograph*, 144.

<sup>75</sup> Corella.

<sup>76</sup> Gallagher, 121.

<sup>77</sup> Judg. 7:1-7

<sup>78</sup> Corella.

great love offered in Christ. Finally, when learning the true wisdom of Christ, believers are reminded that all is ultimately a gift of God's grace.<sup>79</sup>

Contrarily, rules ten and fourteen teach that consolation can be a time to prepare for coming times of desolation and that a believer cannot become complacent as the enemy continues to work against the faithful.<sup>80</sup> The modern reader struggles here with sexist language that depicts the enemy as a woman that "is a weakling before a show of strength and a tyrant if he has a will." Ignatius also compares the enemy to a "false lover who seeks to remain hidden."<sup>81</sup> Although modern sensibilities reject such stereotyping, Ignatius' larger point is interesting: The enemy is voracious on one hand yet weak on the other hand.<sup>82</sup> Believers can take solace in the reality that the enemy is ultimately weak, and if a person resists firmly, he or she will see the enemy weaken.<sup>83</sup>

### Reflections on Ignatian Discernment

The goal is for the individual to enmesh herself or himself into Christ's story, a concept drastically different from the linear models of discerning God's will using fill-in-the-blank worksheets that purport to give an answer at the end.<sup>84</sup> Instead, the individual is

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<sup>79</sup> Ibid.

<sup>80</sup> Ignatius and Puhl, *The Spiritual Exercises of St. Ignatius: Based on Studies in the Language of the Autograph*, 144.

<sup>81</sup> Ignatius and Puhl, *The Spiritual Exercises of St. Ignatius: Based on Studies in the Language of the Autograph*, 102; David Lonsdale, "Discernment of Spirits," 184.

<sup>82</sup> Gallagher, 151.

<sup>83</sup> Kevin F. O'Brien, *The Ignatian Adventure: The Spiritual Exercises of Saint Ignatius in Daily Life* (Chicago: Loyola Press, 2011), 195; Gallagher, 153.

<sup>84</sup> J. Brent Bill, *Sacred Compass: The Way of Spiritual Discernment* (Brewster, MS: Paraclete Press, 2008), 84; Silf, 102. Interestingly, both Bill and Silf use the metaphor of the compass to illuminate discernment as a journey rather than simply a destination.

to focus on confession and the life of Jesus. Through aligning the soul of the individual with the story of Jesus, the Spirit illuminates the journey of finding God's will. The goal of *The Spiritual Exercises* is to lead to an imitation of Christ. Indeed, the *Imitation of Christ* was one of Ignatius' favorite books, and he is said to have read a chapter of it devotionally every day.<sup>85</sup>

Thus, knowledge of God's will starts with a personal identification with God's story of grace and love. Narrative theologians remind Christians that enmeshment with the narrative - reflection on the story of God's unfailing love - is the beginning of moral reflection.<sup>86</sup> Ignatius shows the life of Jesus as reflected in the Gospels needs to be normative for our discernment of the Holy Spirit as well.<sup>87</sup>

Indeed, without this mooring, believers are adrift and can be moved in directions away from the Triune God. Here, Ignatius focuses first on confession and then the life of Christ in correlation to the "discernment of the spirits." His rules therein are filled with powerful rejoinders of those whose pride and avarice keep them from discerning the spirits.<sup>88</sup> The ninth rule displays both the laziness which encumbers many on this journey and the pride which leads others to see illumination as a creation of their own.<sup>89</sup>

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<sup>85</sup> Willard M. Swartley, "The *Imitatio Christi* in the Ignatian Letters," *Vigiliae Christianae* 27, no. 2 (1973): 82; Buckley.

<sup>86</sup> James William McClendon, *Systematic Theology*, 2d ed. (Nashville, TN: Abingdon Press, 2002), 39-40. While such a list could be quite exhaustive, along with McClendon, one might read John Howard Yoder, *The Politics of Jesus* and Stanley Hauerwas and William Willimon, *Resident Aliens*.

<sup>87</sup> Stanley, 8.

<sup>88</sup> Ivens, 127.

<sup>89</sup> Ignatius and Puhl, *The Spiritual Exercises of St. Ignatius: Based on Studies in the Language of the Autograph*, 143-144. "The ninth: There are three principal reasons why we find ourselves desolate. The first is, because of our being tepid, lazy or negligent in our spiritual exercises; and so through our faults, spiritual consolation withdraws from us. The second, to try us and see how much we are and how much we let ourselves out in His service and praise without such great pay of consolation and great graces. The third, to give us true acquaintance and knowledge, that we may interiorly feel that it is not ours to get or keep

The theme of journey, to which Ignatius referred in his prologue, is the key to understand *The Spiritual Exercises*. Ignatius does not want discernment to be a quick jaunt.<sup>90</sup> When a person takes shortcuts on a journey, she or he does not have the opportunity to smell the roses and look at the wonder of the scenery. Much the same can be said about the believer's journey with God: If a disciple rushes through the process just to say that the steps have been trodden, the disciple will not take the time necessary either to look inside in the aforementioned purgative process or to have the time to appreciate fully his or her place in God's unfolding story.<sup>91</sup>

Therein lies one of the greatest struggles for ministers applying *The Spiritual Exercises*: the issue of time. The quantity of time necessary to pursue the Ignatian journey as envisioned by its creator is available in the sort of monastic life to which Ignatius wrote, but what about in local churches today? To confess that believers often "just don't have time" for spiritual discernment is rather sad, but the reader should not overlook this metaphorical elephant in the room. Thus, if a minister desires to utilize the process with parishioners, she or he is often left with a Hobson's choice: shorten the process or abandon the process.<sup>92</sup> Indeed, busyness may be the greatest impediment to discernment.<sup>93</sup>

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great devotion, intense love, tears, or any other spiritual consolation, but that all is the gift and grace of God our Lord, and that we may not build a nest in a thing not ours, raising our intellect into some pride or vainglory, attributing to us devotion or the other things of the spiritual consolation."

<sup>90</sup> Tetlow, 2.

<sup>91</sup> Silf, 30.

<sup>92</sup> Michael E. Gaitley, *Consoling the Heart of Jesus: A Do-It-Yourself Retreat, Inspired by the Spiritual Exercises of St. Ignatius* (Stockbridge, MA: Marian Press, 2010), 12.

<sup>93</sup> Margaret Benefiel, *Soul at Work: Spiritual Leadership in Organizations* (New York: Seabury, 2005), 54.

Although options exist to abbreviate the process,<sup>94</sup> making the process shorter entails significant costs. The Ignatian process of discernment, even in a more streamlined form than he envisioned, requires a substantial investment in time. Participants not willing to commit time to the process reflect self-interest and self-absorption that are clearly impediments to spiritual discernment.<sup>95</sup> Anyone seeking spiritual discernment must also come to a deeper reality: God moves in God's own time. Ignatius takes for granted that discernment is bound by God's time rather than humanity's time.<sup>96</sup> Thus, true discernment calls for participants to submit to taking as much time as God dictates.<sup>97</sup> Believers who say they do not have time for spiritual discernment represent the very type of selfishness that Ignatius hoped to eliminate by *The Spiritual Exercises*.<sup>98</sup>

The focus of *The Spiritual Exercises* is connected to the diminishment of such self-interest and self-absorption and to the reorientation of the soul to God. The goal is to move the soul of the individual to be "indifferent to all but God's will."<sup>99</sup> Ignatius is clear on this point: The purpose of *The Spiritual Exercises* is "to conquer oneself and to regulate one's life in such a way that no decision is made under the influence of any inordinate attachment."<sup>100</sup>

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<sup>94</sup> Gaitley, 17. Gaitley distills *The Spiritual Exercises* into a do-it-yourself retreat for those that do not have the time or financial resources to go away to an Ignatian retreat.

<sup>95</sup> Benefiel, 54.

<sup>96</sup> Ignatius and Puhl, *The Spiritual Exercises of St. Ignatius: Based on Studies in the Language of the Autograph*, 2.

<sup>97</sup> Jules J. Toner, "A Method for Communal Discernment of God's Will," in *Studies in the Spirituality of Jesuits*, ed. Charles E. O'Neill, SJ, vol. 3 (St. Louis, MO: American Assistancy Seminar on Jesuit Spirituality, 1971), 128.

<sup>98</sup> David L. Fleming, *What Is Ignatian Spirituality?* (Chicago, IL: Loyola Press, 2008), 39.

<sup>99</sup> Toner, "A Method for Communal Discernment of God's Will," 126.

<sup>100</sup> Ignatius, *The Spiritual Exercises of St. Ignatius*.

For example, a Christian must give up, or at least moderate, attachment to his or her own opinions and agendas. A wholehearted defense of an individual's own opinions or agendas is often an impediment to discernment.<sup>101</sup> Participants must determine whether they seek God's will or their own. They must eliminate any prejudgments or convictions about the outcome of the discernment process, an essential part of the process.<sup>102</sup> Ignatius believes that a disciple must curtail his or her own desires and judgments to be open to God's will, and *The Spiritual Exercises* were created as a methodology through which the individual systematically focuses on Christ instead of self.<sup>103</sup>

A caveat that Ignatius would add is to note the arrogance of believing that following these steps will always lead to God's will. A person's own sinfulness and failings are too great and the ways of God too unfathomable to say with certainty that a believer is always correct in discerning God's will.<sup>104</sup> At the same time, Ignatius would argue that the process most often leads to a deeper understanding of God's will. More importantly, Ignatius notes that if a Christian truly humbly seeks after God, God will make good from the choices that person makes even if those choices are not God's "perfect" will.<sup>105</sup>

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<sup>101</sup> Silf, 143.

<sup>102</sup> Toner, "A Method for Communal Discernment of God's Will," 128-129.

<sup>103</sup> Serge Lorougnon, "Presenting the Call of the King in *The Spiritual Exercises* in Africa Today," in *Dynamics of the Spiritual Exercises: African Perspectives*, ed. Paul Christian Kiti (Nairobi: Paulines Publications of Africa, 2005), 100.

<sup>104</sup> Ignatius and George E. Ganss, *Ignatius of Loyola: The Spiritual Exercises and Selected Works*, The Classics of Western Spirituality (New York: Paulist Press, 1991), 427.

<sup>105</sup> Mark E. Thibodeaux, *God's Voice Within: The Ignatian Way to Discover God's Will* (Chicago: Loyola Press, 2010), 98.

### **Conclusion**

The process that Ignatius defined is one worthy of usage in the contemporary church. Ignatius said all who want to discern both the spirits and God's will must enter into a deliberative process: Deliberative is a key word here. Ignatius defined the movement as from self to God. He wanted the participant to start with examining himself or herself and looking at sins and faults that must be removed before a Christian can enter discernment. He invited participants to enter a process of purgation and contemplation on the life, death, and Resurrection of Jesus. For him, only when believers reflect both on their own sinfulness and the life of the Savior could they empty themselves in ways that would lead to illumination of the greater ways of God.

## CHAPTER FIVE

### DISCERNMENT MODELS OF THE SOCIETY OF FRIENDS

Although Ignatius and *The Spiritual Exercises* offer an excellent method for individual discernment, his work was not written as a method for communal discernment. A person can find ways to adapt them for communal usage, but the original focus is on the individual. On the other hand, the Quakers, the Religious Society of Friends of Truth,<sup>1</sup> have been practicing forms of communal discernment for centuries. From the beginning, the Friends have focused on moving away from divisiveness and rancor to a more peaceful model based on the “Inner Light” from God and the “sense of the meeting.”

The central idea was the complete elimination of majorities and minorities; it became the Quaker custom to reach all decisions in unity. The clerk of the meeting merely performed the function of reporting the corporate sense, i.e., the judgment of the assembled group, and of recording it. If there were differences of view, as they are likely to be in such a body, the consideration of the question at issue would proceed, with long periods of hush and meditation, until slowly the lines of thought drew together towards a point of unity. Then the clerk would frame a minute of conclusion, expressing the “sense of the meeting.”<sup>2</sup>

How does a communal body reach “all decisions in unity?” This seems to be an impossible dream, and even history of the seemingly irenic Friends would support its impossibility.<sup>3</sup> Therefore, note from the outset of this chapter that such a lofty goal is just that: a goal. At the same time, no discernment model is perfectly peaceful, as all models

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<sup>1</sup> Herein, we will use the term “Friends” to refer to the Religious Society of Friends.

<sup>2</sup> Rufus Matthew Jones, *Mysticism and Democracy in the English Commonwealth* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1932), 56, quoted in Michael J. Sheeran, *Beyond Majority Rule: Voteless Decisions in the Religious Society of Friends* (Philadelphia: Philadelphia Yearly Meeting of the Religious Society of Friends, 1983), 3.

<sup>3</sup> Thomas D. Hamm, *The Quakers in America*, Columbia Contemporary American Religion Series (New York: Columbia University Press, 2003), 46.



are burdened with human frailties and limitations.<sup>4</sup> Although perfection is clearly unattainable, the Friends do offer a set of practices that have stood the test of time, and they focus the community on listening to the Holy Spirit.

### **A Short History of the Friends**

George Fox (1624-1691) lived during a time of great change and tumult in England. He was born under the reign of King James I, who believed completely in the divine right of kings. He lived through the trial and execution of Charles I, the English Civil War, the Commonwealth Era, the “Glorious Revolution” and the deposing of James II, and the ascendancy of William and Mary to the throne. By the time of his death, the divine right of kings was supplanted by a powerful Parliament that could enthrone and dethrone monarchs.<sup>5</sup>

Fox was a natural dissenter. He traveled throughout the countryside as a spiritual seeker, but he could not find answers to his struggles over the differentiations between clergy, nobility, and peasants from the priests he met.<sup>6</sup> He noticed the priests seemed to have little desire to help him or the commoners, but he also found many of the ministers

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<sup>4</sup> Andrew Purves, *Pastoral Theology in the Classical Tradition* (Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox Press, 2001), 91-92.

<sup>5</sup> H. Larry Ingle, *First among Friends: George Fox and the Creation of Quakerism* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1994), 3.

<sup>6</sup> George Fox and Norman Penney, *The Journal of George Fox* (Cambridge: The University Press, 1911), 34; Ingle, 5-6. Ingle notes Fox struggled with questions 117 and 118 of his boyhood catechism. 117 asked, “What is thy duty to thy neighbor?” The answer, “My duty towards my neighbors is to love him as I love myself . . . to honor and obey the king and his masters . . . to submit to all governors, teachers, spiritual pastors, . . . to order myself reverently to all my betters.” Question 118 went to explain what it meant “to order myself reverently to all my betters.” Fox could not reconcile the idea of “betters” with Galatians 3:28 and other passages.

among the dissenters just as wanting.<sup>7</sup> He realized only direct connection to Christ could soothe his soul, and he was thrilled at this insight. “I heard a voice which said, ‘There is one, even Christ Jesus, that can speak to my condition,’ and when I heard it, my heart did leap for joy.”<sup>8</sup>

Fox was connected from an early age to groups of dissenters from the two dominant churches of the time: the established Church of England and the growing Presbyterian Church.<sup>9</sup> Both churches appeared similar from Fox’s point of view; they each included strong ecclesiastical authorities known for rigidity in theology and practice.<sup>10</sup> With the historical backdrop of the Commonwealth period and the rising authoritarianism of both established churches, a desire for freedom rose among many in rural England. By Fox’s death in 1691, ten percent of the English population had joined the Friends.<sup>11</sup>

While the Episcopalians rested authority in the Church and the Presbyterians in Scripture, Fox felt both of these lacked the direction of the Holy Spirit. “Thus when God doth work, who shall hinder it? And this I knew *experimentally* [emphasis added]. My desire after the Lord grew stronger, and zeal in the pure knowledge of God, and of Christ alone, without the help of any man, book or writing.”<sup>12</sup> His use of the term “experimentally” is illuminating. Fox has here elevated personal spiritual experience over

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<sup>7</sup> Ingle, 38.

<sup>8</sup> Fox and Penney, 36.

<sup>9</sup> George Fox and Rufus Matthew Jones, *George Fox, an Autobiography* (Philadelphia: Ferris & Leach, 1903), [http://www.ccel.org/ccel/fox\\_g/autobio.iii.html](http://www.ccel.org/ccel/fox_g/autobio.iii.html) (accessed May 12, 2012).

<sup>10</sup> Sheeran, 16.

<sup>11</sup> *Ibid.*, 3.

<sup>12</sup> Fox and Jones, *George Fox, an Autobiography*.

the mediation of any other – whether human or written. In other words, no human or biblical authority could hold primacy over the personal experience with Christ.<sup>13</sup> Fox believed that people were capable of inner holiness, even perfection, without the hierarchies or education of the Church.<sup>14</sup>

Fox was not a systematic theologian; instead, his autobiography and preaching reflected his deep sense that union with God leads to freedom from sin.<sup>15</sup> From Fox and other early Friends, Carole Spencer notes the following eight key elements as the hallmarks of early Friends' spirituality: Scripture reading, imminent return of Christ, born again conversion, Spirit leading, evangelism, mysticism, suffering, and holy living.<sup>16</sup> On the same topic, Pink Dandelion has a similar list, but he adds a key aspect: "an impulse to gather with others who had had this experience."<sup>17</sup>

Fox's preaching quickly created a movement. The form of worship was simple and needed no educated clergy or fancy meeting places. The worship focused on the mystical as both men and women proclaimed as led by the "Inner Light of Truth." The

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<sup>13</sup> Pink Dandelion, *An Introduction to Quakerism* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007), 19; Ingle, 49-50.

<sup>14</sup> Sheeran, 8; Kieran Doherty, *Puritans, Pilgrims, and Merchants: Founders of the Northeastern Colonies*, Shaping America (Minneapolis: Oliver Press, 1999), 140; Douglas V. Steere, *Quaker Spirituality: Selected Writings*, The Classics of Western Spirituality (New York: Paulist Press, 1984), 134. For this and other beliefs, Fox would be imprisoned 8 other times and pulled before magistrates about 60 times for his faith. In one of these trials, Fox challenged Judge Hotham to tremble before the Lord, and the judge retorted that he was a Christian, not a Quaker. The name stuck.

<sup>15</sup> Carole D. Spencer, "Holiness: The Quaker Way of Perfection," *Quaker History* 93, no. 1 (2003): 138.

<sup>16</sup> *Ibid.*, 128.

<sup>17</sup> Pink Dandelion, *The Quakers: A Very Short Introduction*, Very Short Introductions (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008), 21. Note the differences in Pink Dandelion's list of Friends' characteristics: 1) an in-breaking of God's power; 2) a realization of how sinful the believer's life had been, how far it had fallen short; 3) the chance to repent and accept the new life; 4) the experience of regeneration; 5) an impulse to gather with others who had had this experience; 6) mission to those who had not yet had this experience. In both cases, there is a highlight of the personal experience.

group gathered, inwardly focusing on God while outwardly waiting for the Holy Spirit to work in the community.<sup>18</sup> The meeting was both an expression of seeking after God's presence and the corporate seeking for God's will.<sup>19</sup>

Note the democracy here. Fox and his followers were passionate egalitarians, and they strongly believed that both men and women could be vessels of the Holy Spirit.<sup>20</sup> God's message was not limited to Oxford and Cambridge men; it was for all – regardless of gender or socioeconomic status.<sup>21</sup> Quakers shunned the use of personal titles, and they refused the “hat honor” – the practice of removing one's hat in the presence of one's superior.<sup>22</sup> Friends committed to plainness of dress and speech and refused to swear oaths, pay tithes, or participate in military conflict.<sup>23</sup> In worship, they refused elements that made them anathema to the two larger ecclesial powers: They refused to remove their hats as the Presbyterians did, and they refused to kneel as the Episcopalians did.<sup>24</sup> This directly impacted their evolving understanding of discernment. Their egalitarianism

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<sup>18</sup> Steere, 13-14.

<sup>19</sup> Sheeran, 5-6.

<sup>20</sup> H. Larry Ingle, “A Quaker Woman on Women's Roles: Mary Penington to Friends, 1678,” *Signs* 16, no. 3 (Spring, 1991): 578. Ingle notes multiple occasions where Fox publicly challenged those that questioned women's calling to proclaim.

<sup>21</sup> Steere, 14.

<sup>22</sup> Ingle, *First among Friends: George Fox and the Creation of Quakerism*, 61-62; Fox and Jones, *George Fox, an Autobiography*; Dandelion, *An Introduction to Quakerism*, 45. Fox wrote, “When the Lord sent me forth into the world, He forbade me to put off my hat to any, high or low; and I was required to ‘thee’ and ‘thou’ all men and women, without any respect to rich or poor, great or small.” Many Friends were imprisoned for refusing to remove their hats – especially when in court.

<sup>23</sup> Ingle, *First among Friends: George Fox and the Creation of Quakerism*, 128; Dandelion, *The Quakers: A Very Short Introduction*, 149. The commitment to plain dress, what became known as “Quaker grey,” became normative for Friends until the 20<sup>th</sup> Century.

<sup>24</sup> John Henry Ferguson, *Politics Quaker Style: A History of the Quakers from 1624 to 1718*, Stokvis Studies in Historical Chronology and Thought (San Bernardino, CA: Borgo Press, 1995), 62-63.

reflected itself in a strong priesthood of every believer in which all believers could receive a leading from the Inner Light.<sup>25</sup>

The preceding narrative could paint an idyllic picture of a growing movement that is forever irenic. However, the Friends, at times, have struggled with internal struggle and strife. Even the Friends' focus on communal discernment and peace in Christ has not insulated them from splits and struggles. Indeed, the very opening to God's revelation to the individual has created strife when others disagree on that revelation.<sup>26</sup>

The case of early Friends leader James Nayler illustrates this. Nayler felt led to enter the town of Bristol on horseback with his followers spreading cloaks in imitation of Christ's entry to Jerusalem. He was tried by the legal authorities, branded as a blasphemer, and had his tongue pierced.<sup>27</sup> Many Friends believed that Nayler's actions were inappropriate, but the community had no process by which to judge whether his actions were truly a leading of the Spirit. Many Friends were embarrassed by Nayler, and some leaders began to see the need to set some boundaries around leadings that were "out of the Light."<sup>28</sup> Because of Nayler and other controversies, Richard Farnsworth, in collaboration with Fox and other Friends leaders, published "A testimony from the

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<sup>25</sup> Sarah Crabtree, "'a Beautiful and Practical Lesson of Jurisprudence': The Transatlantic Quaker Ministry in an Age of Revolution," *Radical History Review* 99, no. 3 (Fall 2007): 62.

<sup>26</sup> Dandelion, *The Quakers: A Very Short Introduction*, 44.

<sup>27</sup> William G. Bittle, "The Trial of James Nayler and Religious Toleration in England," *Quaker History* 73, no. 1 (1984): 30-31; Maryann Feola-Castelucci, "'Warring with Ye Worlde': Fox's Relationship with Nayler," *Quaker History* (1992): 70-71.

<sup>28</sup> Dandelion, *An Introduction to Quakerism*, 42; Sheeran, 18-20. John Perrot, another early Friends leader, had a leading that the group should be no regular meetings and only meet when so led. Fox and others strongly disagreed, and Farnsworth's pamphlet was meant to answer such excesses.

brethren” which argued that primacy for revelation was to be found in the gathered meeting rather than in the individual.<sup>29</sup>

Robert Barclay wrote his systematic theology, *Apology for the True Christian Divinity*, both to make the Friends more understandable to the larger Christian community and to mark the boundaries between personal and communal revelation. Barclay noted the infallibility of the Spirit in the gathered community, but infallibility was not fixed in any individual. Barclay noted any individual could be deceived or misled, and the community needed to be the check against excess.<sup>30</sup>

The Nayler, Farnsworth, and other controversies strengthened early Friends in a theological commitment both to be in communion with the Inner Light and with one another. This movement dealt with a practical dilemma: What does the community do when one of its members claims a leading that is not verified by others? An important test was the self-consistency of the Spirit. If the leading was of the Spirit, then it would be confirmed by the Spirit’s leading in others. For Friends, the natural place for this was in the Meeting for Worship.<sup>31</sup>

### **Friends and Spiritual Discernment**

The hallmark of Friends’ existence has been the seeking after the illumination of God’s Spirit through Christ. This is a theological commitment to seeking after God. As Eden Grace notes in a statement to the World Council of Churches:

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<sup>29</sup> Sheeran, 29-30; Dandelion, *An Introduction to Quakerism*, 45.

<sup>30</sup> H. Larry Ingle, “From Mysticism to Radicalism: Recent Historiography of Quaker Beginnings,” *Quaker History* 76, no. 2 (1987): 90-91; Sheeran, 33-34.

<sup>31</sup> Hugh Barbour, *The Quakers in Puritan England* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1964), <http://www.tractassociation.org/tracts/tests-discerning-true-leading/> (accessed May 6, 2012).

The primary theological doctrine and spiritual experience of Friends is that the living Christ is present to teach us Himself. No priestly intermediary is necessary for Divine access, for “there is One, Christ Jesus, who can speak to thy condition.” Rooted in such texts as John’s prologue, Quakers believe that the Light of Christ is given in some measure to all people. This experience of the immediate presence of Christ, both personally and corporately, implies that we may be led by the Inward Teacher. Since Christ is not divided, the nearer we come to Him, the nearer we will be to one another. Thus the sense of being led into Unity with one another becomes a fundamental mark of the Divine work in the world.<sup>32</sup>

Thus, discernment for Friends is rooted not only in a seeking after God’s will, both individually and corporately, but also it is in a commitment to worship wherein worship entails “*attending, discerning, and minding the Divine Will*” [emphasis in original].<sup>33</sup> Discernment is not a linear process; instead, discernment is a communal commitment to seeking to discern God’s call.<sup>34</sup> Friends commit to seek after the Light of Christ in each of us.<sup>35</sup>

Friends and those who would adopt their methods must make a pneumatological move, not to a method, but to a process of constant attention to the Spirit as mediated in the community. Discernment is the result of such praxis, but the commitment is to following the Light wherever it leads, not to discernment of one specific issue. The following is the beginning of the introduction to Friends’ practice: “As Friends, we commit ourselves to a way of worship which allows God to teach and transform us. We

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<sup>32</sup> Eden Grace, “An Introduction to Quaker Business Practice,” in *Special Commission on Orthodox Participation in the World Council of Churches* (Damascus, Syria World Council of Churches, 2000), <http://www.edengrace.org/quakerbusiness.html> (accessed May 12, 2012).

<sup>33</sup> Paul Anderson, “The Meeting for Worship in Which Business Is Conducted,” *Quaker Religious Thought* 106-107 (November 2006): 27.

<sup>34</sup> Patricia Loring, *Spiritual Discernment: The Context and Goal of Clearness Committees*, Pendle Hill Pamphlet 305 (Wallingford, PA: Pendle Hill Publications, March 2001), 5.

<sup>35</sup> Felicity Kelcourse, “Discernment: The Soul’s Eye View,” in *Out of the Silence: Quaker Perspectives on Pastoral Care and Counseling*, ed. J. Bill Ratliff (Wallingford, PA: Pendle Hill Publications, 2001), 32.

have found corporately that the Spirit, if rightly followed, will lead us into truth, unity and love: all our testimonies grow from this leading.”<sup>36</sup> Or, put more succinctly in the same work in a quote often found on Friends’ meeting house walls:<sup>37</sup> “Take heed, dear Friends, to the promptings of love and truth in your hearts.”<sup>38</sup>

Therefore, the very purpose of worship is discernment of the promptings of the Inner Light – promptings of any kind. Thus, unlike traditions that see church “business” as antithetical to worship,<sup>39</sup> the Friends view the division between “business” and “worship” as a false dichotomy. When business is split from worship, the focus can narrowly be decision making. However, if “business” is first and foremost about listening for Christ’s leading, that business becomes a profoundly worshipful endeavor. For Friends, the goal is not simply to make a decision; instead, the goal is to come to “unity around a common sense of Christ’s leading.”<sup>40</sup>

In worshipping thusly, a key biblical passage to Friends is Matt. 18:18-20.<sup>41</sup> For many interpreters, this key element of this passage is about creating a process for forgiveness that enhances community through church discipline. “The concern of one

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<sup>36</sup> *Quaker Faith & Practice: The Book of Christian Discipline of the Yearly Meeting of the Religious Society of Friends (Quakers) in Britain* (London: The Yearly Meeting of the Religious Society of Friends (Quakers) in Britain, 2010), <http://qfp.quakerweb.org.uk/qfpmain.html> (accessed April 6, 2012).

<sup>37</sup> Loring, 4.

<sup>38</sup> *Quaker Faith & Practice: The Book of Christian Discipline of the Yearly Meeting of the Religious Society of Friends (Quakers) in Britain*.

<sup>39</sup> Jay Edward Adams, *Shepherding God’s Flock: A Handbook on Pastoral Ministry, Counseling, and Leadership*, The Jay Adams Library (Grand Rapids, MI: Ministry Resources Library, 1986); Olsen, 26.

<sup>40</sup> Anderson, “The Meeting for Worship in Which Business Is Conducted,” 28.

<sup>41</sup> “Truly I tell you, whatever you bind on earth will be bound in heaven, and whatever you loose on earth will be loosed in heaven. Again, truly I tell you that if two of you on earth agree about anything you ask for, it will be done for you by my Father in heaven. For where two or three come together in my name, there am I with them.” Matt. 18:18-20



disciple for another is to be a specific concern for forgiveness and restoration of fellowship.”<sup>42</sup> Another central focus is the presence of Christ in the gathered community. By proclaiming His presence in the gathered community, Jesus affirms that the mission of the Church is found in His presence in and through the Church. “Christ is among us as the God who saves, and the Church – the community of Christ’s disciples - works with Him to offer forgiveness of sin.”<sup>43</sup> Some would like to limit interpretation of this passage to one of these foci, but Friends’ practice reflects a mutual inclusiveness of these foci.<sup>44</sup> For them, Matt. 18:18-20 reflects both Christ’s presence in the gathered community and His calling for the Church to be a community.<sup>45</sup>

From a discernment perspective, more diverse voices can enhance the discussion, but Friends believe this to be more than a quantitative issue of input. Friends believe this to be a Christological reality as Christ is incarnated sacramentally in the gathered community.<sup>46</sup> For this reason, Friends eschew the outward practice of the Eucharist;

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<sup>42</sup> David McClister, “‘Where Two or Three Are Gathered Together’: Literary Structure as a Key to Meaning in Matt 17:22-20:19,” *Journal of Evangelical Theological Society* 39, no. 4 (December 1996): 554-555.

<sup>43</sup> Tomas Joseph Surlis, *The Presence of the Risen Christ in the Community of Disciples: An Ecclesiological Significance of Matthew 18:20* (Rome: Gregorian and Biblical Press, 2011), 10-11.

<sup>44</sup> Anderson, “The Meeting for Worship in Which Business Is Conducted,” 28.

<sup>45</sup> Donald A. Hagner, “Holiness and Ecclesiology: The Church in the Gospel of Matthew,” in *Built Upon the Rock: Studies in the Gospel of Matthew* (Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans Pub., 2008), 179-180. I have a personal experience with this either/or mentality. I was in a post-graduate seminar at Princeton Theological Seminary some years ago. The presenter, a member of the Church of the Brethren, talked about the church discipline aspects on Matthew 18. Dr. James Kay, a Presbyterian theologian and preaching professor, strongly asserted the passage was about Christ’s presence. To note these interpretations are not mutually exclusive is most faithful to me.

<sup>46</sup> Anderson, “The Meeting for Worship in Which Business Is Conducted,” 28.

instead, the focus is on the incarnational, living witness of the death and Resurrection of Christ found through listening for Christ and unity with one another.<sup>47</sup>

The goal of the meeting is nothing less than the transformation of the soul by the light of Christ, and absorption of that light is communion for Friends.<sup>48</sup> Interestingly, the question before the meeting is secondary to this transformation; finding the “answer” to the presented issue is theoretically not the real issue. Worship of Christ may lead to even more questions than answers as the body listens together.<sup>49</sup>

Indeed, Scripture reading is at the heart of discernment for Friends and is a key test to determine the Inner Light’s leading.<sup>50</sup> Friends trust the same Spirit that inspired the biblical authors will inspire the contemporary reader. As John writes in the Farewell Discourse in John 14-17, the Spirit will remain with the disciples to lead them: “If Christ is alive he seeks to lead us, and if he seeks to lead us, his will can be discerned and obeyed.”<sup>51</sup> Moreover, Friends understand the Spirit of Christ can use the Scriptures as well as our reason, our history with God, and our interaction with one another to open our eyes.<sup>52</sup> As Friend Robert Barclay wrote, “Because the Spirit of God is the fountain of all truth and sound reason, therefore, we have well said, that it cannot contradict neither the testimony of the Scripture, nor right reason.”<sup>53</sup>

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<sup>47</sup> Grace.

<sup>48</sup> Morley, 25.

<sup>49</sup> Kelcourse, 45.

<sup>50</sup> Sheeran, 26.

<sup>51</sup> Paul Anderson, “The Present Leadership of the Resurrected Lord,” [http://www.georgefox.edu/discernment/present\\_leadership.pdf](http://www.georgefox.edu/discernment/present_leadership.pdf).

<sup>52</sup> Anderson, “The Meeting for Worship in Which Business Is Conducted,” 29.

<sup>53</sup> Robert Barclay, *An Apology for the True Christian Divinity, as the Same Is Held Forth and Preached by the People Called in Scorn Quakers; Being a Full Explanation and Vindication of Their*

Another key biblical passage to Friends is Gal. 5:22-23.<sup>54</sup> To balance excesses, any leading must be tested by the fruits of the Spirit. The love, joy, peace and patience of the Spirit should be hallmarks of both individual and corporate leadings. Absence of such calls the community to ask if the Spirit is absent as well.<sup>55</sup>

A helpful distinction here is attentiveness to the broader themes of Scripture. Friends have been wary of using the Bible as a rule book that would substitute for the individual's experience of the Light.<sup>56</sup> To focus too narrowly can cause the individual to fall into the trap of creating a proof text that reinforces preconceived biases. An individual can argue something horrendous like slavery is "biblical," but attentiveness to the larger witness of God's love in Scripture denies the trafficking of human beings as compatible with God's love and the fruits of the Spirit.<sup>57</sup> Scripture reading led by the Spirit of Christ should always lead to the fruits of the Spirit.<sup>58</sup>

### **The Process of Friends' Spiritual Discernment in Worship**

As worshippers gather to consider the presenting issue, the body moves together into a time of silence and reflective prayer for the guidance of the Inner Light. Silence itself is not the goal; the goal is discerning and minding the Divine Will. Within the

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*Principles and Doctrines* (Glenside, PA: Quaker Heritage Press, 2002), <http://www.qhpress.org/texts/barclay/apology/> (accessed August 7, 2012).

<sup>54</sup> "But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness and self-control. Against such things there is no law." Gal. 5:22-23

<sup>55</sup> Bruce Bishop, "Discernment: Corporate and Individual Considerations," *Quaker Religious Thought* (2006): 20-21; Loring, 5-6.

<sup>56</sup> *Ibid.*, 7; Barbour.

<sup>57</sup> Bishop, 20-21.

<sup>58</sup> Jo Farrow, "Discernment in Quaker Tradition," *The Way* 64 Spring (1989): 58; Loring, 7.

Friends' community, a person finds "programmed" and "unprogrammed" worshiping styles, but in both, Friends recognize the need to create space for the promptings of the Spirit.<sup>59</sup> This silence is more than a "moment of silence" or a time to gather a person's thoughts; instead, the silence is an earnest attempt to take the time, whatever time necessary, to wait for God to speak to the community. This time is sometimes called "recollection" as the community attempts to return to the Creator, to give over an individual's preconceived thoughts on the matter, to place the matter in God's hands, and to acquire a mind and heart in tune to the Divine Will.<sup>60</sup> Paul Lacey describes this as a dynamic time as the community is gathered to seek the Inner Light. "The silence was not the absence of sound but something full of energy, like the quiet we might experience in an artist's studio or a library when a number of people are present, each concentrating on his or her own work."<sup>61</sup>

Silence begins and ends the meeting as a reminder to worshippers that the goal is the Inner Light and God's will.<sup>62</sup> Douglas Steere explains this well:

The Quaker meeting for business opens with an unhurried period of waiting silence, and if the meeting is properly carried through, there emerges something of this mood of openness not to my wishes and my designs and my surface preferences but openness to the deeper levels where the Guide's bidding may have its way and where the problem may be resolved in quite a different way than ever occurred to me.<sup>63</sup>

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<sup>59</sup> Anderson, "The Meeting for Worship in Which Business Is Conducted," 27. Anderson notes that the number of strictly unprogrammed Friends would be about fifteen percent of Friends worldwide.

<sup>60</sup> Loring, 24.

<sup>61</sup> Paul A. Lacey, *Leading and Being Led*, Pendle Hill Pamphlet 264 (Wallingford, PA: Pendle Hill Publications, 1985), 13.

<sup>62</sup> Sheeran, 49.

<sup>63</sup> Steere, 37-38.

This time of silence is critical in giving space for inner silence to listen for the still, small voice of God. By entering into the silence, the community moves to push aside personal agendas for the sake of the Spirit's prompting.<sup>64</sup>

A first movement is to prepare oneself for worship; each individual needs to prepare himself or herself to listen to God. A worshipper must recognize that he or she is a fallen individual subject to both sins of commission and omission. She or he is also an imperfect person prone to error and is often blinded by her or his own selfish desires or preset biases and opinions.<sup>65</sup> However, attentiveness to God's Spirit and a willing heart can ameliorate these concerns. "Given a healthy dose of modesty, we can minimize the dangers of subjectivism and the tendency to project our interests onto the process."<sup>66</sup>

Modesty and humility are key elements in discernment; discernment is a gift of grace rather than human sufficiency. As such, only with focus on God's revelation can discernment take place. "A humbled disposition before the Divine Presence is not a contrived posture; it is the only authentic way to be when the eyes of our hearts are opened."<sup>67</sup>

Some mistakenly speak of the Friends model as being a model of consensus, but "consensus" is imprecise.<sup>68</sup> Instead, Friends seek the "sense of the meeting" as the

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<sup>64</sup> Tom Rothschild, "Listening for the Voice of God: Silence in Quaker Worship," *Parabola* 33, no. 1 (2008): 2.

<sup>65</sup> Lacey, 9.

<sup>66</sup> Anderson, "The Meeting for Worship in Which Business Is Conducted," 29.

<sup>67</sup> *Ibid.*, 29.

<sup>68</sup> Morley, 3-4. Morley notes even many Friends make this same mistake, and he has seen consensus used in meeting houses and documents.

product of the Inner Light.<sup>69</sup> Consensus is a rational process in which reasonable people work together to come to a shared solution to an issue. The goal of Friends' meeting is not to reason together and come to some solution where one side gives a little here and another gives there until there is "consensus."<sup>70</sup> Neither is the goal of Friends to create a *quid pro quo* where individuals come towards each other to gain more of what they want.<sup>71</sup>

These understandings of consensus are far too focused on personal desires, and they do not reflect a desire to hear from the Divine Will. "Through consensus we decide it; through sense of the meeting we turn it over, allowing it to be decided."<sup>72</sup>

Rather, the goal in a meeting for worship in which business is conducted is to come to unity around a common sense of Christ's leadership, which while achieved together in community, is the result of a product greater than the sum of its constituent parts.<sup>73</sup>

This spiritual process of discernment is the goal, not decision making. Indeed, the sense of the meeting may well be that the body cannot find a unified sense around a decision, and this signifies that the Spirit has not led the body to a unity of purpose. The sense may well be to place a moratorium on the decision for a future meeting.<sup>74</sup>

Friends' discernment exhibits an interesting paradox. Friends believe that the best decisions can only be made when the decision is the byproduct rather than the focus of the meeting. By purposefully not focusing on the decision, they feel they will make the

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<sup>69</sup> Steere, 269.

<sup>70</sup> Morley, 5.

<sup>71</sup> Anderson, "The Meeting for Worship in Which Business Is Conducted," 30.

<sup>72</sup> Morley, 3-4.

<sup>73</sup> Anderson, "The Meeting for Worship in Which Business Is Conducted," 30.

<sup>74</sup> Sheeran, 51.

best decision! Rather than the model “Let’s pray so we can get onto the real work,” the real work of the meeting is worship itself. Indeed, Douglas Van Steere describes the meeting as a “laboratory of the Holy Spirit” where the community sees Christ’s promise to be in the midst of His gathered disciples.<sup>75</sup> “Rather than focusing on ‘what we’re going to do,’ focusing on ‘what God is wanting to do’ is the best way to discern our role in partnering with the Divine Will.”<sup>76</sup>

The Clerk of the meeting plays a pivotal role in the discernment process. In Robert’s Rules, a moderator focuses on the right procedure of motions and votes. In a Friends’ meeting, the clerk focuses on listening to God. The clerk must be a person who can listen well both to individuals and to God, must be a person of wisdom who can distill the “sense of the meeting,” and must be patient – even patient enough to delay a decision until future meetings if clearness is not achieved.<sup>77</sup> The clerk must have some artistry as to the right timing of a given group, and she or he must be spiritually gifted and mature.<sup>78</sup> This spiritual maturity must include the ability to speak not just on his or her behalf; instead, the clerk must speak for the entire body.<sup>79</sup>

When the body begins to deliberate, care is taken to hear from many voices. Since no majority vote occurs, participants can focus on the presenting issue and one another rather than on a particular solution.<sup>80</sup> Because of the focus on Christ’s leading, the basic

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<sup>75</sup> Steere, 15.

<sup>76</sup> Anderson, “The Meeting for Worship in Which Business Is Conducted,” 30.

<sup>77</sup> Steere, 38; Anderson, “The Meeting for Worship in Which Business Is Conducted,” 29-30.

<sup>78</sup> Sheeran, 101-102.

<sup>79</sup> Anderson, “The Meeting for Worship in Which Business Is Conducted,” 32.

<sup>80</sup> Steere, 39.

presumption of the body is that everyone is working together towards a Spirit-led solution.<sup>81</sup> A guiding principle is that a deeply-held thought which a person does not raise may be exactly the word the community needs to hear.<sup>82</sup> In many meetings, the discussion is divided into two stages. The preliminary discussion often presents the issue, allows for clarifying questions, and offers some possible solutions. The second stage is the serious discussion that follows as participants will begin to focus their thoughts.<sup>83</sup> They might share an assent with a position with words like, “I can unite with that,” or they might share more insights to the issue.<sup>84</sup> The clerk is to listen for the leading of the Spirit and for the sense of the meeting, and if it does not arise, the clerk can obey the old Friends adage, “When in doubt, wait.”<sup>85</sup> At any time in this discussion, the clerk may call the body to silence before Christ to give opportunities to listen for the Inner Light.<sup>86</sup>

Michael Sheeran noted an important element of social sanctioning in the meetings he attended that was called the “Philadelphia Treatment.” Friends do not see the meeting as a debating society. When one member tries to dominate the conversation or impress with flowery rhetoric, members may pointedly ignore the person’s comments, and direct comments are usually not made towards the speaker. Instead, subtle comments make clear to the individual that overwrought or overdramatic exaltations are not leading to sense of the meeting. The Philadelphia Treatment also included members purposefully

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<sup>81</sup> Sheeran, 53.

<sup>82</sup> Ibid., 55.

<sup>83</sup> Ibid., 64-65.

<sup>84</sup> Farrow, 58.

<sup>85</sup> Steere, 46.

<sup>86</sup> Lacey, 13; Morley, 18.



reasserting the views of shy or quiet members to ensure those voices are heard. Friends hope this will lead the shy member to be more assertive in the future.<sup>87</sup>

During this discussion, dissent is healthy, and as the discussion continues, dissenters have multiple options. An option for those with slight disagreements is to say, “I disagree but do not wish to stand in the way.” In this case, the individual endorses the action by noting his or her objection does not rise to the level to prevent action.<sup>88</sup> Deeper concerns might lead the person to say, “I cannot unite with this decision.” This objection usually leads the clerk to wait for the next meeting. In the period before the next meeting, the clerk and others might meet with the objector, or in Friends’ parlance “to labor with Brother X or Sister Y,” to understand more fully the objection. All of those in the meeting are asked to reconsider their positions in light of this dissent and in light of continued exploration of the Divine Will.<sup>89</sup> Interestingly, at the next meeting, very often agreement is possible. By taking time, different parties may have breathing room to analyze their options more deeply, and often a new sense of the meeting emerges.<sup>90</sup>

Unanimity is not always reachable. Sometimes the sense of the meeting includes dissent, but often a unifying sense arises. If the dissenting group is less than ten to fifteen percent of the body, the individual or group may be asked if their concerns are weighty enough to stop the clerk from calling the sense of the meeting. If not, they may be asked to stand aside, but Friends do not desire this outcome. Standing aside should only occur when the following questions are met:

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<sup>87</sup> Sheeran, 56-57.

<sup>88</sup> *Ibid.*, 66.

<sup>89</sup> *Ibid.*, 69-70.

<sup>90</sup> Morley, 16.

- Do you feel you have been listened to, and that your concern has been heard by the larger group?
- Are you satisfied with your articulation of your concerns, including why they are compelling, or is there anything you'd like to add or clarify?
- Is your desire first and foremost the discerning and following of Christ's will and leading on this and other matters?
- Do you believe that others also desire to follow Christ supremely, and is it conceivable that the larger group may have grasped the Lord's leading on this matter despite your continuing concerns?
- Are you willing to release your concerns to the meeting and to lovingly support the action taken, trusting that Christ is leading and will continue to lead individuals and groups committed to living under His Lordship?<sup>91</sup>

Friends believe this to be a last resort; the goal is always unity of the community.<sup>92</sup>

As the body moves towards a sense of the meeting, the deeper question looms: Is what the body has discerned from the Spirit of Christ? Often believers can misconstrue their own desires for God's will, although Friends hope this deliberate process will reduce this possibility. Barry Morley reminds Friends that Christ and unity of the community are the long lens through which all presenting issues need to be viewed. Moreover, Friends must ask if the solution to the issue leads to a transition to the Inner Light for the individual and the community.<sup>93</sup> Paul Anderson notes the following questions the body should ask to clarify if the sense is a true leading of the Spirit in either personal or communal discernment:

1. Is this leading in keeping with the teachings of the Scriptures?
2. Are there examples from the past that may provide direction for the present?
3. Is a leading self-serving, or is it motivated by love for God and others?
4. Does it matter who gets the credit?
5. Is the ministry of Jesus being continued in what we do?<sup>94</sup>

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<sup>91</sup> Anderson, "The Meeting for Worship in Which Business Is Conducted," 44-45.

<sup>92</sup> Barbour.

<sup>93</sup> Morley, 17-18.

<sup>94</sup> Anderson, "The Meeting for Worship in Which Business Is Conducted," 34.

Friends place a high premium on the sense of unity as a sign of the Spirit's presence.<sup>95</sup> George Fox's journal has at least 20 references to the unity of the Spirit.<sup>96</sup> Friends do not see this as an incidental issue. If indeed they are seeking after the Spirit of Christ, the Spirit should not give divided counsel. Thus, unity is a key sign of leading.<sup>97</sup> As Fox wrote, "Since there is but one Light and one Truth, if the Light of Truth be faithfully followed, unity will result."<sup>98</sup>

### **Critiques of Friends' Discernment**

Lest this writing devolve into hagiography, the focus now turns to critiques of this process. The beginning of this chapter asserted that no human process can be perfect. However, cogent analysis that a person should consider includes concerns about acquiescence, entrenched minorities, Groupthink, impatience, and reliance on experiential revelation.

Some Friends have concerns that the unity of sense of the meeting sometimes simply acquiesces to the lowest common denominator. What happens when an individual or a group stubbornly assert that they cannot unite with a decision? Strong personalities can dominate the conversation and discourage others from speaking. People in communities like the Friends may even have a bent towards agreement, and strong personalities may be able to manipulate that bent.<sup>99</sup> In Sheeran's study, strong

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<sup>95</sup> Farrow, 60.

<sup>96</sup> Fox and Jones, *George Fox, an Autobiography*.

<sup>97</sup> Steere, 198.

<sup>98</sup> Fox and Jones, *George Fox, an Autobiography*.

<sup>99</sup> John Gastil, *Democracy in Small Groups: Participation, Decision Making, and Communication* (Philadelphia, PA: New Society Publishers, 1993), 53.

personalities abounded in the Philadelphia Yearly Meeting of Friends, and some members felt they had experienced the group being hindered by an obstinate minority.<sup>100</sup>

The community can feel a group's objections are not weighty enough to stop the body from moving forward, but the minority may surely not agree. Even this process can fracture community, and such forcing of a decision is tantamount to the very majoritarian models critiqued earlier.<sup>101</sup> If someone cannot unite with the leading, the community usually will delay the decision. How long? If the body works to help that member either consent or step aside and they refuse, what is the body to do?

Acquiescence can come in two forms: Groupthink or caving to a strong personality. Groupthink, discussed earlier in this writing, and acquiescence to strong personalities can be a real concern for any consensus process.<sup>102</sup> According to Sheeran, Friends' meetings are usually filled with the kind of thoughtful conversation that would alleviate Groupthink.<sup>103</sup> With that said, acquiescence to strong personalities can be a greater issue for Friends. The "Philadelphia Treatment" may alleviate this issue but cannot entirely prevent it.<sup>104</sup>

Time is an important consideration. If a church decides to enter discernment like the Friends, such a process can be quite time consuming. In a majoritarian model, two-thirds of the body may be ready to move forward and make a decision, but Friends with

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<sup>100</sup> Sheeran, 105.

<sup>101</sup> Anderson, "The Meeting for Worship in Which Business Is Conducted," 44.

<sup>102</sup> Jim Platts, "The Fruitful Use of Silence," <http://che.pi.ac.ae/piisee/docs/Mr.%20Platts%20Paper%202%20THE%20FRUITFUL%20USE%20OF%20SILENCE.pdf> (accessed August 19, 2012).

<sup>103</sup> Sheeran, 55.

<sup>104</sup> *Ibid.*, 57.

only two-thirds in support of a decision would continue the process. This can lead to frustration and missed opportunities.<sup>105</sup>

A consistent critique for Friends, even within the Friends' community, is the balance of experiential versus scriptural revelation. This has been an issue both of internal struggles for Friends and of major criticism from others. The internal struggle that comes from those who want to elevate scriptural revelation over personal revelation has caused two major conflicts within the Friends.<sup>106</sup>

A greater critique outside the Friends comes from Cessationists, who believe direct revelation ceased in the Early Church in either the times of the apostles or the completion of the biblical canon. Cessationists question the validity of the direct revelation claimed by Fox and subsequent generations of Friends.<sup>107</sup> The scope of this work cannot address the myriad of issues in the Cessationist versus Non-Cessationist

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<sup>105</sup> Gastil, 55.

<sup>106</sup> H. Larry Ingle, *Quakers in Conflict: The Hicksite Reformation* (Knoxville: University of Tennessee Press, 1986), 60-63; Hamm, 40-42; Thomas D. Hamm, "New Light on Old Ways: Gurneyites, Wilburites, and the Early Friends," *Quaker History* 93, no. 1 (2004): 54-55. A deep schism in the 19<sup>th</sup> Century is what Friends call the "Great Separation." The key factor was Friends itinerant preacher Elias Hicks who felt some Evangelical Friends were abandoning the tenets of Fox and the early Friends for the sake of approval with the larger Evangelical community. These Friends, now called the Orthodox, felt the need for a strong biblical authority and traditional Christian orthodoxy. Hicks and the "Hicksites" felt the revelation of the Holy Spirit should have primacy over Scripture or church doctrine. As he asked, "Is it possible for men to be more idolatrous than to esteem and hold the Scriptures as the only rule of faith and practice, by which they place them in the very seat of God and worship them as God?" Ultimately, many Friends Yearly Meetings were split between the Orthodox and the Hicksites. Another great schism among the Friends occurred in the 1840s between the followers of British Friend John Gurney and Rhode Island Friend Wilbur. The issues of scriptural authority versus the inner light echoed the Hicks controversy.

<sup>107</sup> R. Fowler White, "Richard Gaffin and Wayne Grudem on 1 Cor. 13:10: A Comparison of Cessationists and Non-Cessationist Argumentation," *Journal of Evangelical Theological Society* 35, no. 2 (June 1992), [http://www.etsjets.org/files/JETS-PDFs/35/35-2/JETS\\_35-2\\_173-181\\_White.pdf](http://www.etsjets.org/files/JETS-PDFs/35/35-2/JETS_35-2_173-181_White.pdf) (accessed August 19, 2012); Drake Shelton, "Cessationism: The Majority View of the Puritans, Defended," <http://olivianus.thekingsparlor.com/the-regulative-principle/cessationism-the-majority-view-of-the-puritans-defended-by-drake-shelton> (accessed August 19, 2012).

debate. However, the reader should note the debate and its impact on Friends' claims for the revelation of the Inner Light.<sup>108</sup>

Paul Anderson notes this critique from others is rather interesting in that to make the argument that direct revelation is limited to the apostolic church is to conflict with Scripture itself.<sup>109</sup> The Farewell Discourse, particularly John 14-17, focuses on the ongoing leadership of Christ through the Holy Spirit, telling of the *paraclete* that will teach all things to the disciples and remain with them.<sup>110</sup> Friends hold tightly to John 14:26: "But the Counselor, the Holy Spirit, whom the Father will send in my name, will teach you all things and will remind you of everything I have said to you."<sup>111</sup> Cessationists may well question application of this to direct revelation of the Inner Light, but Anderson believes this conflicts with the clear intent of the passage. "The question, therefore, is how to prepare ourselves to be in a position to be led by Christ—effectively and dynamically—when we are also fallen beings, subject to error, sin, and selfishness."<sup>112</sup>

Finally, a person might question the efficacy of Friends' discernment. More pointedly, that person might ask: If this is such a great process, why has it not been copied by more Christian churches? While a cogent question, it lacks understanding that many churches around the world already use consensus models of discernment. The

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<sup>108</sup> F. David Farnell, "The Current Debate About New Testament Prophecy," *Bibliotheca Sacra* (July-September 1992), <https://www.tms.edu/FacultyDocuments/BIBSAC-1.pdf> (accessed August 12, 2012), 296.

<sup>109</sup> Anderson, "The Meeting for Worship in Which Business Is Conducted," 28.

<sup>110</sup> James M. Hamilton, *God's Indwelling Presence: The Holy Spirit in the Old & New Testaments*, ed. E. Ray Clendene, *Nac Studies in Bible & Theology* (Nashville, TN: B&H Publishing Group, 2006), 79-80.

<sup>111</sup> Rosemary Anne Moore, *The Light in Their Consciences: Early Quakers in Britain, 1646-1666* (University Park, PA: Pennsylvania State University Press, 2000), 55.

<sup>112</sup> Anderson, "The Meeting for Worship in Which Business Is Conducted," 29.

Orthodox Church that represents 225 million Christians around the world already uses a consensus discernment model.<sup>113</sup> Indeed, the Orthodox Church joined the Friends to move the World Council of Churches to a consensus model in 2005.<sup>114</sup> The United Church of Australia has used consensus models since the early 1990s.<sup>115</sup> Even the election of the Pope follows a consensus model.<sup>116</sup> Bill Hybels of Willow Creek Community Church has also adopted consensus models in his leadership team.<sup>117</sup> Over the last two decades, the number of churches and denominational bodies using consensus models has grown greatly.<sup>118</sup>

Many churches have never attempted to use communal discernment practices like the Friends because they simply acquired a model by tradition and culture. As noted in Chapter One, democratic models were reflective assumptions of Western individualism and the democratic societies in which they grew. Similarly, the Anglican-Episcopal approach and the Scottish-Presbyterian approach reflected the larger political structures around them.<sup>119</sup> Many in Western culture will see a voting process as normative because

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<sup>113</sup> Paul Anderson, e-mail message to author, August 16, 2012.

<sup>114</sup> Eden Grace, "Voting Not to Vote: Toward Consensus in the WCC," <http://www.georgefox.edu/discernment/VRTGrace.pdf> (accessed August 14, 2012); "Final Report of the Special Commission on Orthodox Participation in the WCC," <http://www.oikoumene.org/fileadmin/files/wccassembly/documents/english/pb-03-specialcommission.pdf> (accessed May 12, 2012).

<sup>115</sup> Grace, "Voting Not to Vote: Toward Consensus in the WCC."

<sup>116</sup> J.T. Toman, "The Papal Conclave: How Do Cardinals Divine the Will of God?" (2004). <http://dev.wcfia.harvard.edu/sites/default/files/Toman2004.pdf> (accessed August 14, 2012).

<sup>117</sup> Bill Hybels, *Courageous Leadership* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2009), [http://books.google.com/books/about/Courageous\\_Leadership.html?id=YxQMTfoAzZcC](http://books.google.com/books/about/Courageous_Leadership.html?id=YxQMTfoAzZcC) (accessed August 14, 2012).

<sup>118</sup> Paul Anderson, e-mail message to author, August 16, 2012.

<sup>119</sup> Geunther and Heidebrecht, 163-164.

it is normative in the larger culture; however, this does not have to be normative for the Church.

### **Conclusion**

Some key elements of Friends' discernment include patience; attentiveness to the Inner Light through Scripture, one another, reason, and tradition; silent waiting for the Inner Light; and then careful attention to what Friends call the sense of the meeting. Careful listening to one another is critical, as well as a willingness to speak even when one's words may be a dissent from the group's direction. There must be great care to check an individual's agendas and biases. The body must always scrutinize a decision to ensure they are following the Inner Light, and they must work assiduously to ensure unity of the body. Most importantly, readers must enter the paradox of Friends' discernment: The presenting issue is never the issue - doing Christ's will is. Next, the final chapter of this work begins to synthesize certain elements of both Ignatian and Friends' discernment. The application of both calls a disciple who wants to discern God's will to struggle with this paradox of focusing on doing God's will rather than simply answering a presenting issue.



## CHAPTER SIX

### SYNTHESIS AND CONCLUSIONS

At the outset of this work, I asked a question: *How can First Baptist Church, and others like it, move past majority rule and decision making and find a discernment process that is faithful to our tradition, faithful to the Holy Spirit, and faithful to a communal sense of God's leading?* My proposal here is to pursue a discernment process that engenders consensus building; more significantly, the proposed process also delineates steps to ensure the congregation intentionally moves from decision making to discernment of the Holy Spirit by synthesizing practices from Ignatius and the Friends.

A key issue has been to move from decision making to discernment. Morris and Olsen note that discernment is a process of hearing, seeing, recognizing, and distinguishing the guidance of the Holy Spirit for the community of faith.<sup>1</sup> Stephen Bryant asserts:

Spiritual discernment makes operational our faith that an ever-present Guide ... is present to lead us in the way of truth and love as individuals and congregations. It opens our sails as church to the Spirit whose winds we believe are always blowing and will always move us closer to Christ, closer to one another, and closer to the world that God wills.<sup>2</sup>

#### Summary

Chapter One outlines some issues with majoritarian models of church governance. Church votes often leads to divisiveness as the losing minority can harbor ill feelings that

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<sup>1</sup> Morris and Olsen, 23.

<sup>2</sup> Bryant, 2.

fester into church conflict. The embarrassment and loss of face for the “losing” side can cause hurt that last for years.<sup>3</sup>

A key movement is from decision making to discernment. Since I serve in the Free Church tradition, my focus herein has been discernment models for churches that live a communal understanding of Acts 15:22 where “... the apostles and elders, *with the whole church*, decided to choose” [emphasis added].<sup>4</sup> The model also should reflect the ongoing presence and leadership of the Holy Spirit as reflected in John 14-17.<sup>5</sup>

Chapter Two begins to look at some alternative methods for decision making used in the business world with a focus on consensus models. A more in-depth focus was given to some issues related to the use of majoritarian models using Robert’s Rules. Although Robert’s Rules may well reflect the view of the majority, they can easily create a disenfranchised minority.<sup>6</sup>

To alleviate these issues, some in the business world are moving to consensus models of decision making. Consensus is “group solidarity in sentiment and belief.”<sup>7</sup> Instead of participants sharing competing ideas with one another, consensus is about looking for ways to aid the group in solutions. Instead of participants being advocates of

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<sup>3</sup> Krejcir.

<sup>4</sup> Garrett, 41-42.

<sup>5</sup> Paul Anderson, “The Meeting for Worship in Which Business Is Conducted,” 28-29.

<sup>6</sup> Susskind and Cruikshank, *Breaking Robert’s Rules: The New Way to Run Your Meeting, Build Consensus, and Get Results*, 11.

<sup>7</sup> *Ibid.*, 19.

a position, they become shareholders in a solution.<sup>8</sup> Because the solution is shared, participants will likely have more commitment to the solution.<sup>9</sup>

A concern in consensus models is that competing voices will not be heard in the process, and Groupthink will lead to acquiescence. Schweiger et al. showed methods like Dialectical Inquiry or Devil’s Advocate may lead to higher quality decisions. However, the study also showed that such adversarial solutions might lead group members to reject the findings – even if they are the highest quality decisions. The study then showed that consensus led to much greater interest and investment in the implementation of the proposed solution.<sup>10</sup> A great decision making paradox is the result: Choosing between higher quality versus higher levels of acceptance. One possible solution is to use consensus models that include a Devil’s Advocate to sharpen the group’s thinking.<sup>11</sup> Also, because consensus has the potential to lead to acquiescence, the consensus process needs to be carefully constructed in ways that lead to healthy dialogue.

Chapter Three discussed the New Testament term *diakrisis* which is most often translated discernment and then the evolution of discernment through church history. Key biblical usages of *diakrisis* are found in Heb. 5:14 and 1 Cor. 12:10. Heb. 5:14 says, “But solid food is for the mature, who because of practice have their senses trained to discern [*diakrisis*] good and evil.” This passage seems to say that discernment is a general gift offered to all but only attained by the spiritually mature that have trained in

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<sup>8</sup> Larry Dressler, *Consensus through Conversation: How to Achieve High-Commitment Decisions*, 5.

<sup>9</sup> Roberto, 6.

<sup>10</sup> Schweiger, Sandberg, and Ragan, 68; Schwenk, 447.

<sup>11</sup> Roberto, 45.

discernment.<sup>12</sup> 1 Cor. 12:10 speaks directly of the “discernment of spirits” (*diakrisis pneumaton*) in a list of spiritual gifts that includes prophecies, working of miracles, and interpreting the speaking of tongues. This passage suggests that discernment is a particular spiritual gift that is only given to selected individuals.<sup>13</sup> In the era of the Desert Fathers, *diakrisis* was viewed as a gift only to a selected group, but, by the time of Evagrius Ponticus at the end of the 5<sup>th</sup> Century, most writers saw it as a general charism essential to monastic life.<sup>14</sup> Elizabeth Liebert reflects this when she notes discernment is both a “gift” and “... simultaneously a habit of faith.”<sup>15</sup>

Chapter Three also provides a brief history of discernment in Christian practice. Key themes include discernment as a journey through times of reflection, prayer, and devotion, through attention to the Holy Spirit’s leading, and through spiritual maturity and humility. John Climacus, in *The Ladder of Divine Ascent*, exemplifies this journey motif as he places step 26, discernment, after the monk has traversed the steps needed to break from the world.<sup>16</sup> Jean Gerson notes that for discernment to exist, certain characteristics must be present: humility, patience, truth, discretion, and charity.<sup>17</sup> This again is the result of spiritual maturity. This maturity is best seen in a humble spirit that can listen to others and take direction.<sup>18</sup>

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<sup>12</sup> Rich, 7-8.

<sup>13</sup> McIntosh, 23.

<sup>14</sup> Lienhard.

<sup>15</sup> Elizabeth Liebert, *The Way of Discernment: Spiritual Practices for Decision Making* (Louisville, KY: John Knox Press, 2008), 9.

<sup>16</sup> Climacus, 9-11.

<sup>17</sup> Gerson and McGuire, 54.

<sup>18</sup> Keitt, 58.

Discernment cannot occur when the individual is focused on himself or herself; discernment only occurs when a Christian seeks after God's will. Jonathan Edwards adds that humility is ultimately for the sake of the glory of God, with an orientation towards God and away from the individual. Like Bernard, Catherine of Siena, and Ignatius of Loyola, Edwards believes true religion is about becoming connected to God's intentions for the individual.<sup>19</sup> False religion is both allowing pride to focus the story of redemption on oneself and subjugating God to a supporting role in a person's own drama.<sup>20</sup>

Chapter Four focuses on Ignatius, *The Spiritual Exercises*, and their use as a discernment process. This process includes a time of purgative contemplation that leads ultimately to contemplation of the life of Christ. *The Spiritual Exercises* is divided into four sections, called "weeks," of varying lengths with four major themes: sin, the life of Jesus, the Passion of Jesus, and the Resurrection of Jesus. By focusing away from the self and onto Christ, discernment becomes about imitating Christ. Finally, in imitating Christ, illumination can come.<sup>21</sup>

The themes of journey and patience are important elements of *The Spiritual Exercises*. If a believer rushes through the process just to say that the steps have been trodden, the believer neither will take the time necessary to look inside in the aforementioned purgative process nor will have the time to appreciate fully his or her

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<sup>19</sup> McDermott, *Seeing God: Jonathan Edwards and Spiritual*, 94.

<sup>20</sup> McIntosh, 59, 80; Edwards. "... pride itself will prejudice them in favour of that which they call Christ: selfish, proud man naturally calls that lovely that greatly contributes to his interest, and gratifies his ambition." McIntosh notes that Catherine of Siena describes how discernment without humility can lead to destruction.

<sup>21</sup> Buckley; Swartley, 82. Swartley notes that Ignatius read a chapter of *The Imitation of Christ* devotionally every day.

place in God's unfolding story.<sup>22</sup> A Christian must have patience for illumination to occur. Indeed, the weeks are meant to ensure the individual does not rush the process.<sup>23</sup>

A key element for Ignatius is confession. Ignatius then asks the believer to apply what he calls the Examen to move the individual to realization of God's presence, to connect to the Light of Christ, and to confess his or her sins.<sup>24</sup> Once again, the Examen includes themes of journey, patience, seeking, humility, and selflessness. One sees both a commitment to follow Christ daily and a commitment to examine a person's life through the assistance of the Holy Spirit. At the heart of *The Spiritual Exercises* is a desire to put away personal desires and attitudes for the sake of Christ. Imitation of Christ and living with Him daily is the key to discernment.

Chapter Five begins to look at the discernment practices of the Society of Friends of the Truth, also known as the Quakers or Friends. The Friends have been practicing communal discernment in worship for several centuries, and the heart of the Friends' witness is faith that Christ will speak to the gathered community when two or three are gathered in His name.<sup>25</sup> A key element of worship is attentiveness to the Inner Light of Christ; highlighted in a phrase that is often posted in Friends' meeting houses: "Take heed, dear Friends, to the promptings of love and truth in your hearts."<sup>26</sup> As worshippers gather to consider the presenting issue, the body moves together into a time of silence and reflective prayer for the guidance of the Inner Light. Silence itself is not the goal; the goal

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<sup>22</sup> Silf, 30.

<sup>23</sup> Gaitley, 12.

<sup>24</sup> Manney, 15.

<sup>25</sup> Anderson, "The Meeting for Worship in Which Business Is Conducted," 28.

<sup>26</sup> *Quaker Faith & Practice: The Book of Christian Discipline of the Yearly Meeting of the Religious Society of Friends (Quakers) in Britain.*

is discerning and minding the Divine will. Friends do not mean for this to be a “moment of silence” or a time to gather a participant’s thoughts; instead, Friends view the silence as an earnest attempt to take the time, whatever time necessary, to wait for God to speak to the community.<sup>27</sup>

Modesty, humility, and patience are key elements in discernment for the Friends. The early Friends were famous for wearing the drab colors called Quaker grey as an outward sign of humility before God. The focus must be on the Spirit of Christ and His leading; a participant’s own agendas and beliefs must be placed aside for the sake of the Inner Light. Finally, the believer must trust Christ will speak to His people, and the believer must understand that God will do so on God’s time. A Christian must be willing even to lay aside the presenting issue for the sake of listening for God. The believer can remember the old Friends’ proverb: “When in doubt, wait.”<sup>28</sup> A Christological foundation for Friends is the belief that the Inner Light of Christ found incarnationally in the community should lead to unity.<sup>29</sup>

Friends work to find the “sense of the meeting,” where that sense is an expression of Christ’s leading for the community. Friends have an honest desire to see what Christ is saying to the community.<sup>30</sup> This leads to the great paradox of the Friends’ understanding of discernment: Friends believe that the best decisions can only be made when the

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<sup>27</sup> Sheeran, 49.

<sup>28</sup> Steere, 46.

<sup>29</sup> Loring, *Spiritual Discernment: The Context and Goal of Clearness Committees*, 5-6; Anderson, “The Meeting for Worship in Which Business Is Conducted,” 28.

<sup>30</sup> Morley, 3-4.

decision is the byproduct, rather than the focus, of the meeting. By purposefully not focusing on the decision, they feel they will make the best decision.<sup>31</sup>

### **Gleaning Elements of Discernment**

Looking back over this research work, one can glean key elements common to the history of discernment. The following is my distillation of that gleaning. Now, return to the definition earlier in this chapter: “Spiritual discernment makes operational our faith that an ever present Guide ... is present to lead us in the way of truth and love as individuals and congregations.”<sup>32</sup> This definition includes two elements noted in Chapter One. First, Christ, present in the Church and speaking to the Church, is a first-order theological foundation. Second, if the Church truly followed the Spirit of Christ, unity will be the result.<sup>33</sup>

A caveat should be noted here about human frailty, sin, and selfishness. As noted personal agendas, beliefs, and issues can interfere with following the Spirit’s leading. Writers including Evagrius Ponticus, John Cassian, John Climacus, Jean Gerson, Catherine of Siena, Ignatius, Robert Barclay, and Jonathan Edwards write about the human tendency for pride and selfishness to interfere with discernment. As discernment is a human process in response to the Divine will, it can be derailed through our human limitations.<sup>34</sup>

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<sup>31</sup> Anderson, “The Meeting for Worship in Which Business Is Conducted,” 30.

<sup>32</sup> Bryant, 3.

<sup>33</sup> Carole Spencer, phone interview with author, May 9, 2012.

<sup>34</sup> Ruth Haley Barton, *Pursuing God’s Will Together: A Discernment Practice for Leadership Groups* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2012), 138.



Also, another caveat is a pneumatological principle: Discernment is about listening for the Holy Spirit. Techniques, principles, and practices may be helpful, but the ultimate issue is one of the Holy Spirit speaking to God's people. No technique can ensure the Spirit's intervention; God's Spirit is not dependent on human action. Discernment is a profoundly spiritual experience that requires individuals and faith communities to be listening and looking for the Spirit's guidance.<sup>35</sup>

At the same time, research in the history of discernment presented herein illuminates certain practices that can ameliorate these caveats and make discernment a possibility. These practices include confession, patience, humility, a listening heart, selflessness, silence and reflection, and - most of all - a focus on Christ's leading.<sup>36</sup> A close corollary to these practices is the connection to discernment as a journey. Through careful listening to God and one another, discernment occurs as a part of the journey.<sup>37</sup>

Corporate discernment starts with spiritual formation of the individual. Without this focus, the group will not have the spiritual resources and maturity that will enable individuals to stay open to God and one another, and the group may devolve into blaming, manipulation, power struggles, or worse.<sup>38</sup> As Ruth Barton notes, "There is no individual discernment outside a communal setting and no communal discernment without individual discernment."<sup>39</sup>

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<sup>35</sup> Morris, 43-44.

<sup>36</sup> Carole Spencer, phone interview with author, May 9, 2012.

<sup>37</sup> Suzanne G. Farnham, Stephanie A. Hull, and R. Taylor McLean, *Grounded in God: Listening Hearts Discernment for Group Deliberations*, Rev. ed. (Harrisburg, PA: Morehouse Pub., 1999), 6-7.

<sup>38</sup> Barton, 37-38.

<sup>39</sup> *Ibid.*, 52.

A first step to this end is confession. This is the heart of Ignatius' Examen as the individual asks the questions:

- Did I bring Christ to my community? Did they bring Christ to me?
- Have I been a sign of God's presence and love to the people I met today?
- Did I go out to: the lonely, the sorrowful, the discouraged, and the needy?
- Have I had a keener sense of being loved, of sinfulness, of desire to give back what I have received, of dependence?
- Is there some part of my life still untouched by Jesus Christ and where He is calling me to a change of heart?<sup>40</sup>

Penance can be the beginning of a key movement in discernment where a person tries to move the focus from self to God. Confession runs counter to human nature in a culture where people constantly work to hide the worst part of themselves – even to the point of self-delusion. Confession is the culmination of self-examination and self-awareness, and confession enables a group of believers to come together with forgiving hearts because they are forgiven people.<sup>41</sup>

Another important element of discernment is patience. Ignatius' process of connecting to the life of Christ is one element of taking the time to listen for God. Indeed, a concern for Ignatius is that individuals might focus on moving through *The Spiritual Exercises* without taking the appropriate time to learn from God in each step. The very process is designed to remind the individual to be on God's time and not his or her own.<sup>42</sup> The Friends demonstrate patience in discernment through their willingness to wait for a leading from the Inner Light. For Friends, a decision should not be made until a leading is present, and the community must be patient waiting for that leading.<sup>43</sup>

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<sup>40</sup> Aschenbrenner SJ and English SJ.

<sup>41</sup> Barton, 143-144.

<sup>42</sup> Ignatius and Puhl, 2.

<sup>43</sup> Loring, *Spiritual Discernment: The Context and Goal of Clearness Committees*, 6.

Times of devotional reflection are critical to the discernment process, and this includes the use of the spiritual disciplines of prayer, fasting, and Scripture reading for spiritual formation.<sup>44</sup> For Ignatius, *The Spiritual Exercises* were written for exactly that reason.<sup>45</sup> For Friends, they understand that each day must include “a time of retirement” for spiritual refreshment to aid the Christian to attend to the leadings of the Inner Light.<sup>46</sup>

Yet another element of discernment is silence. Ignatius includes silent meditation and prayer as a part of each day; Friends start meetings with silence before the Lord to give time to hear from the Spirit of Christ. This time of silence is critical in giving space for inner silence to listen for the still, small voice of God.<sup>47</sup> By entering into the silence, the community moves to push aside personal agendas for the sake of the Spirit’s prompting.<sup>48</sup> This silence also gives time for clearness and clarity. As Paul Anderson says, “Progress toward unity is often more efficiently made in five to seven minutes of quiet than it is in an hour of debate.”<sup>49</sup>

A desired outcome of these steps is humility before the Lord. For Ignatius, contemplation of all that God has done for the individual should lead to a humble, contrite heart. Everything from ruminations on hell to the promise of God’s love leads to

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<sup>44</sup> Dougherty, 22-23.

<sup>45</sup> Ignatius and Puhl, 143-144.

<sup>46</sup> Loring, *Listening Spirituality*, 14-15.

<sup>47</sup> Fendall, Wood, and Bishop, 17; Wakefield and Ignatius, 61-62.

<sup>48</sup> Rothschild, 3; Barton, 13; Anderson, “The Meeting for Worship in Which Business Is Conducted,” 27-28.

<sup>49</sup> Amy Johnson Frykholm, “Out of Silence: The Practice of Congregational Discernment.” *Christian Century* 124, no. 7 (2007): 36.

humility.<sup>50</sup> For Friends, humility is a natural outcome of the commitment that discernment is a gift of grace and not human self sufficiency.<sup>51</sup> Humility is the counter to self-centeredness and pride that hinder discernment.<sup>52</sup>

The most important element in discernment is the basic commitment to do the will of God and God alone. Ignatius calls this letting go of inordinate attachments so individuals can be “indifferent to all but God’s will.”<sup>53</sup> The discerning Friends’ community is a people committed to God’s purpose for the community<sup>54</sup> and is driven by one great value - “God’s will: nothing more, nothing less, and nothing else.”<sup>55</sup>

Ruth Barton notes that the “prayer of quiet trust” and the “prayer for indifference” can be used both individually and communally to move to be able to say as Jesus said in the Garden of Gethsemane, “Not my will but Thine.” The “prayer of quiet trust” calls for the individual to reflect on Psalm 131. The Psalmist calls for the individual to acknowledge his or her utter dependence on God for all things that are “too great and marvelous for me.” The Psalmist then calls the individual to become still and quiet before God (Ps. 131:1-2).<sup>56</sup> In the “prayer for indifference,” the individual asks God to make her or his heart indifferent to anything but the will of God. The individual lifts up in prayer

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<sup>50</sup> Ignatius and Puhl, 23; Phyllis Zagano, “Spiritual Wisdom, Narcissism, and ‘Healthy Humility,’” *The Journal of Pastoral Counseling* 39 (2004), 26.

<sup>51</sup> Barton, 52.

<sup>52</sup> Ben Campbell Johnson and Andrew Dreitzer, *Beyond the Ordinary: Spirituality for Church Leaders* (Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans Pub., 2001), 111-112.

<sup>53</sup> Toner, “A Method for Communal Discernment of God’s Will,” 126.

<sup>54</sup> Farnham, Hull, and McLean, 51.

<sup>55</sup> Morris and Olsen, 90.

<sup>56</sup> “My heart is not proud, LORD, my eyes are not haughty; I do not concern myself with great matters or things too wonderful for me.” Ps. 131:1-2

the words of Mary when she learned she would give birth to the Messiah, “‘I am the Lord’s servant,’ Mary answered, ‘May it be to me as you have said’” (Lk. 1:38).<sup>57</sup>

### **A Proposal for Discernment in the Local Church**

With all of these elements in mind, I now come to the place where I can propose a discernment process. Since Ignatius focused on individual discernment and the Friends’ process focuses on communal discernment, my proposal is to synthesize them by having both individual and communal components. In the context of First Baptist Church of Mount Holly, this process may be used by one of our teams, our administrative board, our deacons, or the gathered church.

#### **Step 1: Invitation to Personal Spiritual Formation**

We will invite the group to a time of individual spiritual formation and discernment in which team members will spend a week in a time of devotional use of *The Spiritual Exercises*. I would like to use all of *The Spiritual Exercises*, but I know realistically that most church members are probably not ready to invest that much time in the process.

Attached in the Appendix starting on page 131 is a devotional guide that can be used by each individual. In the guide, the introduction states: “Let me tell you a key to the journey for this week. It’s not about you or me; it’s about Jesus. Our goal this week is to think and pray about Jesus so we can listen to Him and have His Spirit teach us. His

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<sup>57</sup> Barton, 42.

life for us will be our focus this week.” My hope is to help the group from the outset to focus on that key issue: Discernment is not about them; it is about Jesus.

Since Baptists pride themselves on being a “people of the Book,”<sup>58</sup> each day starts with a Scripture Reading on the life of Jesus and is followed by the three points on that passage directly from Ignatius. A great difficulty here was deciding which seven elements of *The Spiritual Exercises* to use. I chose the temptation, the Sermon on the Mount, the calming of the sea, the Last Supper, the trial before Pontius Pilate, the Crucifixion, and the Resurrection.

The next component is the Daily Examen. I used the model of Alexander Michael Peck that used the acronym TEACH for the elements of The Examen. TEACH stands for Thanksgiving to God, Enlightenment prayer, Accounting of one’s actions, Contrition and sorrow, and Hopeful resolution for the future.<sup>59</sup> I used George Aschenbrenner’s writings on the Examen for questions for the enlightenment and accounting moments.<sup>60</sup>

Unfortunately, with the choice to limit the guide to seven days, I decided to eliminate issues like the meditation on hell or meditation on sin. However, I hope that the Daily Examen will lead the individual to confession. As Baptists in the South, preaching on hell is ubiquitous, and confession for us is often connected to understanding the hell from which confession of Jesus as Lord saves us. I wanted to include more of the life of Jesus, but confess a fear that my choices focus too much in Passion Week. At the same time, I cannot imagine contemplating the life of Jesus without a focus on the Passion and Resurrection.

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<sup>58</sup> Shurden, 69-71.

<sup>59</sup> Peck, 4.

<sup>60</sup> Aschenbrenner SJ and English SJ.

Silence will be a key component of each day. As shown in the literature, silence is a key component to listening to God for both Ignatius and the Friends.<sup>61</sup> In the attached devotional guide, days one and two include three minutes of silence, days three to five have five minutes, and the last two days moved to seven minutes of quiet. Three minutes does not sound like much, but my tradition does not often include extended times of silence. In my experience, silences of more than a minute are rare. By starting with three minutes and increasing to seven during the week, members will be ready for an extended time of silence in the gathered meeting.

Finally, the member has time to journal about any leadings of the Spirit. The words of Jesus in the Garden remind members that, just as Jesus made himself open to the will of the Father, believers are called to be open to the will of God. By noting leadings, members can attend each day to promptings of the Spirit.

### **Step 2: Invitation to Communal Discernment**

As the group assembles as a gathered community, they will apply certain Friends' practices as shown on page 140 in the Appendix. After an opening prayer, the moderator will present the issue for discernment. The moderator will use this time to clarify the process for the rest of the meeting. This time of clarification is critical, especially the first time, as everyone will need education on how to proceed.

Because Baptists in the South have a long tradition of what is called "Prayer Meeting," I used the form of that traditional meeting with the added elements of Friends' practices. Singing hymns is an important part of our tradition, and I feel singing will aid

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<sup>61</sup> Wakefield and Ignatius, 22.

the body to move to the right mindset. Clearly other hymns might fit a different church context, but I picked *Breathe on Me Breath of God* as a hymn that has a deep meaning in our context and is often connected to listening for the Holy Spirit.

The next movement is the reading of Psalm 131 and saying of the “Prayer of Quiet Trust.” I purposefully placed these as two separate elements of worship. *Lectio Divina* is not a significant part of Baptist tradition, and, although we use Scripture in our prayers, we seldom use Scripture as our prayer. For this reason, the Scripture Reading was placed before the prayer so members could see that the moderator is asking them to pray in a way that reflects the Psalm.

The community then shares in the “Prayer of Indifference,” where members pray that they will focus fully on God’s will. In this movement, I placed side-by-side both Mary’s response and Jesus’ response to God’s will. This connection of the human response to God should remind participants even more deeply of their need to focus on God’s will for the Church. As in the first prayer, I placed the prayer after hearing the Scripture so the Scripture will frame our prayer.

The community then moves into silence together. As I noted earlier, such extended times of silence are not a consistent part of my tradition, and for this reason, I include times of silence in the individual devotional guide. By practicing that during the week, members will be more prepared when the larger gathering comes to silence.

Before entering the silence, the moderator should once again be clear on the intention. Silence is not just a minute to get a participant’s thoughts together; instead, the silence is a time of holy listening for the still, small voice of God. To put it simply,



Christians cannot listen for God when they are talking, and a gathered body needs to be patient to give the time necessary to quiet themselves so that they can listen.

Finally, the body deliberates. I carefully choose the word deliberate because the discussion needs to be intentional to listen for the Holy Spirit. The moderator needs to understand members are not just sharing opinions; they are sharing leadings of the Spirit. We must listen for the leadings of the Spirit, whether they are in the silence or from one another. The community shares this revelation, and the body must be intentionally deliberate to hear God's voice.

### **Moving Forward**

As the story in Chapter One illustrates, I have often been frustrated by the decision making process used by many of the churches in my tradition. I never had language for the issue, but I was uncomfortable with the system we so often employed: Opening prayer, an hour or more of business like a secular organization, and then a closing prayer. This work has given me a language for the issue. Such processes are *decision making*, but I am looking for *discernment*.

The process I have described here is a modest proposal towards that end. It takes seriously the history of discernment practices and draws from that history certain elements we can apply today. The process also can be true to my tradition as it uses elements like focusing on Scripture, prayer meetings, and daily devotionals in new ways to aid the movement to discernment. It uses both Ignatian spirituality and Friends' discernment practices in ways that, I believe, will move the Church from decision making to discernment.

“[Spiritual discernment] opens our sails as church to the Spirit whose winds we believe are always blowing and will always move us closer to Christ, closer to one another, and closer to the world that God wills.”<sup>62</sup> Although discernment is not measurable, this process can be measured if it leads to a more irenic congregation that seeks after God’s will. Does the process indeed move the congregation closer to God, one another, and the world? Most importantly, does the process move the body from decision making to discernment? My tradition has often confused a majoritarian vote with discernment. The process I have illuminated here gives a way forward for churches like First Baptist. Hear these words from Ignatius and George Fox respectively:

The first Annotation is that by this name of Spiritual Exercises is meant every way of examining one’s conscience, of meditating, of contemplating, of praying vocally and mentally, and of performing other spiritual actions, as will be said later. For as strolling, walking and running are bodily exercises, so every way of preparing and disposing the soul to rid itself of all the disordered tendencies, and, after it is rid, to seek and find the Divine Will as to the management of one’s life for the salvation of the soul, is called a Spiritual Exercise.<sup>63</sup>

Discernment requires trusting that God has a will for thee, that thee can learn what God’s will for thee is through the agency of Jesus Christ, and that then thee can be obedient to the proddings of the Holy Spirit. The way to Discern God’s will is to Quiet the self so thee can hear the Christ Within, the Seed, the Light, the Truth.<sup>64</sup>

Discernment for Ignatius and Fox is about seeking the Divine Will; I hope this will become more a part of our seeking after Christ as a Baptist community.

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<sup>62</sup> Bryant, 2.

<sup>63</sup> Ignatius, *The Spiritual Exercises of St. Ignatius*.

<sup>64</sup> Fox and Jones, *George Fox, an Autobiography*.

## Appendix

### Moving From Decision Making to Discernment:



**First Baptist Church of Mount Holly**



*A word about what we are doing...*

We have entered this process because we have a decision before us. That's why we are meeting next week.

However, we have a choice even before then. We need to choose: Are we just going to make a decision, or are we going to discern what we believe the Holy Spirit is calling us to do? There is a difference. *Decision making* is a human process where we think through options and decide, by vote in our case, which is best. *Discernment* is about listening for the still, small voice of God to see what we feel the Holy Spirit is leading us to do.

This guide takes seriously that we want to be a church that does discernment. In these pages, you will find devotional exercises for each day this week to help you to listen for the Holy Spirit in your life, and we can bring those leadings together to see what we believe the Holy Spirit is calling us to do.

Let me tell you a key to the journey for this week. **It's not about you or me; it's about Jesus.** Our goal this week is to think and pray about Jesus so we can listen to Him and have His Spirit teach us. His life for us will be our focus this week.

The **Life of Christ** section each day is copied directly from *The Spiritual Exercises* of Ignatius of Loyola and has been used by Christians for over four centuries! Ignatius was a 16<sup>th</sup> Century Christian who spent many years writing this classic on learning God's will. He is the founder of the monastic order called the Jesuits.

Ignatius invites you to spend your week walking with Jesus through key experiences of His life. Each day Ignatius will give you three points about the life of Jesus that will remind you about the Savior. He uses three points to remind you of the Holy Trinity. The **Daily Examen** is Ignatius' call to pray so we can detect God's presence and direction.

Here are a few suggestions on how to do this. Allow about 20 minutes a day for this, although you may want to take longer if so led. Find an *uninterrupted* time each day to think and pray with this devotional guide. Have this guide, a Bible, and a pen handy. You may want a watch or timer because there will be a few minutes of silence – a time of quiet of mind and body to listen for God - each day. If you miss a day, feel free to double up.

Most of all, enjoy it. Enjoy communing with Jesus and listening for His voice. I pray we will all listen together.

Grace and Peace, Kendell

## *Day 1—The Temptation of Jesus*

### **Scripture Reading**

Read Luke 4:1-14

### **Life of Christ**

**First:** After being baptized, He went to the Desert, where He fasted forty days and forty nights.

**Second:** He was tempted by the enemy three times. “The tempter coming to Him said to Him: ‘If Thou be the Son of God, say that these stones be turned into bread. Cast Thyself down from here. If prostrate on the earth Thou wilt adore me, I will give Thee all this which Thou seest.’”

**Third:** “The Angels came and ministered to Him.”

### **Daily Examen**

T Thanksgiving to God

What have I got to be grateful for today?

How much do I take for granted?

E Enlightenment

How was I drawn to God today: a friend, an event, a book, the beauty of nature?

Have I learned anything about God and His ways: in ordinary occasions or spare moments?

A Accounting of one’s actions

Have I been a sign of God’s presence and love to the people I met today?

Did I go out to: the lonely, the sorrowful, the discouraged, and the needy?

Is there some part of my life still untouched by Jesus Christ, and where He is calling me to a change of heart?

C Contrition and sorrow

*produce a repentance that leads to salvation and brings no regret (2 Cor. 7:10)*

H Hopeful resolution for the future

*The Lord is compassionate and gracious, slow to anger and abounding in loving kindness. He has not dealt with us according to our sins, nor rewarded us according to our iniquities. For as high as the heavens are above the earth, so great is His loving kindness toward those who fear Him. As far as the east is from the west, so far has He removed our transgressions from us. Psalm 103.8, 10-12*

### **Silence**

Take 3 minutes of silence to listen to what God has in store for you.

### **Leading**

Pray for God’s leading: “Not my will but Thine.” Write down any thoughts you have of God’s word for you today.

## Day 2—The Sermon on the Mount

### Scripture Reading

Read Matthew 5:1-14

### Life of Christ

**First:** To His beloved Disciples He speaks apart about the Eight Beatitudes: “Blessed the poor of spirit, the meek, the merciful, those who weep, those who suffer hunger and thirst for justice, the clean of heart, the peaceful, and those who suffer persecution.”

**Second:** He exhorts them to use their talents well: “So let your light shine before men, that they may see your good works and glorify your Father Who is in the heavens.”

**Third:** He shows Himself not a transgressor, but a perfecter of the law; explaining the precept of not killing, not committing fornication, not being guilty of perjury, and of loving enemies. “I say to you that you love your enemies and do good to them that hate you.”

### Daily Examen

T Thanksgiving to God

What have I got to be grateful for today?

How much do I take for granted?

E Enlightenment

How was I drawn to God today: a friend, an event, a book, the beauty of nature?

Have I learned anything about God and His ways: in ordinary occasions or spare moments?

A Accounting of one’s actions

Have I been a sign of God’s presence and love to the people I met today?

Did I go out to: the lonely, the sorrowful, the discouraged, and the needy?

Is there some part of my life still untouched by Jesus Christ, and where He is calling me to a change of heart?

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### Silence

Take 3 minutes of silence to listen to what God has in store for you.

### Leading

Pray for God’s leading: “Not my will but Thine.” Write down any thoughts you have of God’s word for you today.

### *Day 3—The Calming of the Sea*

#### **Scripture Reading**

Read Matthew 8:23-28

#### **Life of Christ**

**First:** Christ our Lord being asleep at sea, a great tempest arose.

**Second:** His Disciples, frightened, awakened Him. Whom He reprehends for the little faith which they had, saying to them: “What do you fear, ye of little faith!”

**Third:** He commanded the winds and the sea to cease: and, so ceasing, the sea became calm: at which the men wondered, saying: “Who is this whom the wind and the sea obey?”

#### **Daily Examen**

T Thanksgiving to God

What have I got to be grateful for today?

How much do I take for granted?

E Enlightenment

How was I drawn to God today: a friend, an event, a book, the beauty of nature?

Have I learned anything about God and His ways: in ordinary occasions or spare moments?

A Accounting of one’s actions

Have I been a sign of God’s presence and love to the people I met today?

Did I go out to: the lonely, the sorrowful, the discouraged, and the needy?

Is there some part of my life still untouched by Jesus Christ, and where He is calling me to a change of heart?

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#### **Silence**

Take 5 minutes of silence to listen to what God has in store for you.

#### **Leading**

Pray for God’s leading: “Not my will but Thine.” Write down any thoughts you have of God’s word for you today.

## *Day 4—The Last Supper*

### **Scripture Reading**

Read Luke 22:7-23; John 13:1-17;33-35

### **Life of Christ**

**First:** He ate the Paschal Lamb with His twelve Apostles, to whom He foretold His death. “In truth, I say to you that one of you is to sell Me.”

**Second:** He washed the Disciples’ feet, even those of Judas, commencing from St. Peter, who, considering the Majesty of the Lord and his own baseness, not wanting to consent, said: “Lord, dost Thou wash my feet?” But St. Peter did not know that in that He gave an example of humility, and for this He said: “I have given you an example, that you may do as I did.”

**Third:** He instituted the most sacred sacrifice of the Eucharist, to be the greatest mark of His love, saying: “Take and eat.” The Supper finished, Judas went forth to sell Christ our Lord.

### **Daily Examen**

T Thanksgiving to God

What have I got to be grateful for today?

How much do I take for granted?

E Enlightenment

How was I drawn to God today: a friend, an event, a book, the beauty of nature?

Have I learned anything about God and His ways: in ordinary occasions or spare moments?

A Accounting of one’s actions

Have I been a sign of God’s presence and love to the people I met today?

Did I go out to: the lonely, the sorrowful, the discouraged, and the needy?

Is there some part of my life still untouched by Jesus Christ, and where He is calling me to a change of heart?

C Contrition and sorrow

*produce a repentance that leads to salvation and brings no regret (2 Cor. 7:10)*

H Hopeful resolution for the future

*The Lord is compassionate and gracious, slow to anger and abounding in loving kindness. He has not dealt with us according to our sins, nor rewarded us according to our iniquities. For as high as the heavens are above the earth, so great is His loving kindness toward those who fear Him. As far as the east is from the west, so far has He removed our transgressions from us. Psalm 103.8, 10-12*

### **Silence**

Take 5 minutes of silence to listen to what God has in store for you.

### **Leading**

Pray for God’s leading: “Not my will but Thine.” Write down any thoughts you have of God’s word for you today.



## *Day 5— The King of the Jews*

### **Scripture Reading**

Read John 19:1-20

### **Life of Christ**

**First:** Pilate, seated as judge, delivered Jesus to them to crucify Him, after the Jews had denied Him for king, saying: “We have no king but Caesar!”

**Second:** He took the Cross on His shoulders and not being able to carry it, Simon of Cyrene was constrained to carry it after Jesus.

**Third:** They crucified Him between two thieves, setting this title: “Jesus of Nazareth, King of the Jews.”

### **Daily Examen**

T Thanksgiving to God

What have I got to be grateful for today?

How much do I take for granted?

E Enlightenment

How was I drawn to God today: a friend, an event, a book, the beauty of nature?

Have I learned anything about God and His ways: in ordinary occasions or spare moments?

A Accounting of one’s actions

Have I been a sign of God’s presence and love to the people I met today?

Did I go out to: the lonely, the sorrowful, the discouraged, and the needy?

Is there some part of my life still untouched by Jesus Christ, and where He is calling me to a change of heart?

C Contrition and sorrow

*produce a repentance that leads to salvation and brings no regret (2 Cor. 7:10)*

H Hopeful resolution for the future

*The Lord is compassionate and gracious, slow to anger and abounding in loving kindness. He has not dealt with us according to our sins, nor rewarded us according to our iniquities. For as high as the heavens are above the earth, so great is His loving kindness toward those who fear Him. As far as the east is from the west, so far has He removed our transgressions from us. Psalm 103.8, 10-12*

### **Silence**

Take 5 minutes of silence to listen to what God has in store for you.

### **Leading**

Pray for God’s leading: “Not my will but Thine.” Write down any thoughts you have of God’s word for you today.

## Day 6—The Mysteries of the Cross

### Scripture Reading

John 19:25-37

### Life of Christ

**First:** He spoke seven words on the Cross: He prayed for those who were crucifying Him; He pardoned the thief; He recommended St. John to His Mother and His Mother to St. John; He said with a loud voice: “I thirst,” and they gave Him gall and vinegar; He said that He was abandoned; He said: “It is finished;” He said: “Father, into Thy hands I commend My spirit!”

**Second:** The sun was darkened, the stones broken, the graves opened, the veil of the Temple was rent in two from above below.

**Third:** They blaspheme Him, saying: “Thou wert He who destroyest the Temple of God; come down from the Cross.” His garments were divided; His side, struck with the lance, sent forth water and blood.

### Daily Examen

T Thanksgiving to God

What have I got to be grateful for today?

How much do I take for granted?

E Enlightenment

How was I drawn to God today: a friend, an event, a book, the beauty of nature?

Have I learned anything about God and His ways: in ordinary occasions or spare moments?

A Accounting of one’s actions

Have I been a sign of God’s presence and love to the people I met today?

Did I go out to: the lonely, the sorrowful, the discouraged, and the needy?

Is there some part of my life still untouched by Jesus Christ, and where He is calling me to a change of heart?

C Contrition and sorrow

*produce a repentance that leads to salvation and brings no regret (2 Cor. 7:10)*

H Hopeful resolution for the future

*The Lord is compassionate and gracious, slow to anger and abounding in loving kindness. He has not dealt with us according to our sins, nor rewarded us according to our iniquities. For as high as the heavens are above the earth, so great is His loving kindness toward those who fear Him. As far as the east is from the west, so far has He removed our transgressions from us. Psalm 103.8, 10-12*

### Silence

Take 7 minutes of silence to listen to what God has in store for you.

### Leading

Pray for God’s leading: “Not my will but Thine.” Write down any thoughts you have of God’s word for you today.

## *Day 7—The Resurrection*

### **Scripture Reading**

John 20:1-18

### **Life of Christ**

**First:** Having heard from the women that Christ was risen, St. Peter went quickly to the Sepulchre.

**Second:** Entering into the Sepulchre, he saw only the cloths with which the Body of Christ our Lord had been covered, and nothing else.

**Third:** As St. Peter was thinking of these things, Christ appeared to Him, and therefore the Apostles said: “Truly the Lord has risen and appeared to Simon.”“

### **Daily Examen**

T Thanksgiving to God

What have I got to be grateful for today?

How much do I take for granted?

E Enlightenment

How was I drawn to God today: a friend, an event, a book, the beauty of nature?

Have I learned anything about God and His ways: in ordinary occasions or spare moments?

A Accounting of one's actions

Have I been a sign of God's presence and love to the people I met today?

Did I go out to: the lonely, the sorrowful, the discouraged, and the needy?

Is there some part of my life still untouched by Jesus Christ, and where He is calling me to a change of heart?

C Contrition and sorrow

*produce a repentance that leads to salvation and brings no regret (2 Cor. 7:10)*

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*The Lord is compassionate and gracious, slow to anger and abounding in loving kindness. He has not dealt with us according to our sins, nor rewarded us according to our iniquities. For as high as the heavens are above the earth, so great is His loving kindness toward those who fear Him. As far as the east is from the west, so far has He removed our transgressions from us. Psalm 103.8, 10-12*

### **Silence**

Take 7 minutes of silence to listen to what God has in store for you.

### **Leading**

Pray for God's leading: “Not my will but Thine.” Write down any thoughts you have of God's word for you today.

### *Coming Together*

The following will be the agenda for our worship. Our focus will be on listening for God's Spirit to talk to us. We come together trusting God will speak; may we enter together prayerfully. Please note that our "agreement" at the end of our time today may be that we do not have a moving of God's Spirit that leads to unity. God's Spirit speaks in God's time, and we must wait for the Spirit.

#### **Opening Prayer**

#### **Moderator Presents the Issue**

**Hymn** *Breathe on Me Breath of God*

#### **Scripture Reading**

*Psalm 131*

*A song of ascents. Of David.*

1 My heart is not proud, O LORD, my eyes are not haughty; I do not concern myself with great matters or things too wonderful for me.

2 But I have stilled and quieted my soul; like a weaned child with its mother, like a weaned child is my soul within me.

3 O Israel, put your hope in the LORD both now and forevermore.

#### **Prayer of Quiet Trust**

Acknowledge our utter dependence on God for all things that are too great and wonderful for us. Pray our hearts will be still and quiet.

#### **Scripture Reading**

*Luke 1:38*

"I am the Lord's servant," Mary answered, "May it be to me as you have said."

*Luke 22:42*

Saying, "Father, if thou be willing, remove this cup from me: nevertheless not my will, but thine, be done."

#### **Prayer for Indifference**

Let us ask God to make us indifferent to anything but the will of God.

#### **Silence**

Let us sit in silence and wait for God to speak to us.

#### **Sharing of Leadings of the Holy Spirit**

#### **Moving to Agreement**

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