

Some Leading Ideas on Discernment

Discernment is the process of clarifying the presence, the movements of God's Spirit inviting response in our lives. It is a grace-filled and challenging process.

Discernment requires:

1. a certain docility to God's Spirit who is giving and revealing God's being in me, and thereby revealing and giving me to myself (via the school of self-knowledge)
2. awareness – a pronounced presence to the reality
3. understanding – a penetration below the surface of reality
4. judgment and genuine choice in which particular means of action are chosen for commitment
5. discerned action entails joy, peace, and freedom.

Thomas Clarke, SJ

Discernment requires examining the spontaneous movements within us ... How is the Lord moving me, moving in my consciousness?

For many today, spontaneity is everything! If this is crushed, life is still-born...yet what about what Socrates claimed: the unexamined life is not worth living? Also what about a certain naiveté that that overlooks the fact, that welling up in the consciousness and experience of each of us are two spontaneities, one good and of God, and one not good and not of God. These two spontaneous movements happen to all of us. The challenge is to be able to sift out these various spontaneous urges and give full ratification to those from and for God.

George Aschenbrenner, SJ

Discernment is concerned about how the Lord is affecting and moving deep in our own affective consciousness. What is happening in our consciousness is prior to and so important to our actions. It is obedience (thoroughly listening) in faith...being concerned about how the Lord is moving within us: leading the false self to its death and allowing the true self more and more to be embraced.

Thomas Merton

There is a paschal quality to the ongoing process of Christian discernment: a constant call to enter into the process of dying/letting go of that which is not life/truth for ourselves (and thus affecting our lives with others)...so that we can be transformed and rise into the new wholeness and integrity that is God's gift to us and our gift choice for ourselves and others.

Mary Ann Flanagan

It is important to distinguish between discernment and decision-making. The latter is an intellectual process weighing alternatives and assessing the relative strengths and weaknesses of various options. While discernment includes this, it goes beyond it. The process of discernment is a spiritual process that is built upon and utterly dependent on a regular and well developed prayer life. The skills of decision-making can help the discernment process, but without prayers, genuine spiritual discernment is impossible.

Leonard Altiglia, SJ