

Essential **presuppositions for discernment:**

- Decisions to be discerned are always between two (or more) goods, never between good & bad.
- God is active in the world and in us.
- There is a choice that is better.
- We are free to make choices; we're not predetermined puppets.

John Carroll Futrell SJ has defined discernment thus:
"To see, to choose and to do the best act of love of God and of other people".

What's involved?

- awareness of ones inner movements, the movements of spirits.
- social and interpersonal context
- Christian ethics, morals, norms; Biblical/Kingdom values; sense of vocation.
-

Three Methods of Discerning, as proposed by Ignatius of Loyola:

(in his own words, "three times when a correct and good choice of a way of life may be made....")

- First, when God moves us in an undeniable & immediate way (*e.g., conversion of Paul*)
- Second, through careful attention to the diverse movements of the inner soul; by weighing up our various swings of creative moods & feelings and their opposites
- Third, in a state of balance & tranquillity, note all the pros and cons down on paper in four columns. These columns are: advantages and disadvantages for doing such-and-such, and similarly for not doing such-and-such.
- Then seek confirmation (see below)

Ignatius also proposes some other ways, of which these points are examples:

- I could think of myself advising a man I had never met, for whom I nonetheless desired complete perfection; and so I should consider what I would advise him to do. I should then do the same and "keep the rule I propose to others"
- "Let me consider and picture myself as standing in the presence of my judge on the last day, and reflect what decision in the present matter I would then wish to have made"
- I imagine myself at the moment of death and then consider what decision I would want to have made as I look back on my life!

Seeking God's confirmation:

- after making a choice or decision, one must then turn to prayer to God, making a conscious and explicit offering of the decision, that God may accept and confirm it.
- BUT NB: we never lose our personal responsibility. The goal of this process might well turn out to be a Life of Discernment, rather than a clearly worked-out specific decision.