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**RECOVERING THE GIFT OF DISCERNING OF SPIRITS: HISTORY,
HERMENEUTIC, AND PRACTICAL TOOL FOR MINISTRY**

**A PROJECT SUBMITTED TO THE
DOCTOR OF MINISTRY COMMITTEE
IN CANDIDACY FOR THE DEGREE OF
DOCTOR OF MINISTRY**

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Abstract

Churches and ministries need to identify and recruit effective leaders. Employing the gift of discerning of spirits can help ministries identify quality leaders and avoid problems and pitfalls. This project aims to equip Pastors and Church Leaders to rediscover and utilize discerning of spirits in their leadership selection process. The significance of this project is that although there has been much written about spiritual gifts, little has been written specifically about the Discerning of Spirits and its application to leadership recruitment and development in modern ministry. It offers church and ministry leaders another avenue to recover and utilize the gift of Discerning of Spirits to better serve their ministry contexts. This project argues that there is a historical, Biblical/Theological and pragmatic rationale for employing the gift of Discerning of Spirits as a tool for Pastors and ministry leaders to identify committed and effective ministry leaders. A historical analysis of Bernard of Clairvaux, Hildegard of Bingen and Ignatius of Loyola reveal their encounters with and uses of discerning of spirits that leaders can use today. Each experienced the *charism* in different and unique ways and provided original and useful insights into the gift. A hermeneutic study of 1 Cor. 12:10 revealed that in discernment of spirits the main action, the discerning, is accomplished by the Holy Spirit who then shares that information with the gifted person. It was found that the gift is not specifically connected prophecy and false prophecy, nor is it intended as the instrument for testing the spirits in 1 John 4:1. The definition of discerning of spirits was provided with a discussion of how charismatic gifts work in general. With regard to how gifts are obtained, the principle of Ask-Seek-Knock with a scriptural analysis was offered as well the idea that the Spirit gives gifts to whom He wills. The method of how the charismata work and ways God communicates is

expounded with a special emphasis on the physical body as an instrument of discernment.

Finally discerning of spirits is presented as a practical tool for ministry, choosing leaders, the necessity of a ministry team in the process, and as a means to identify and avoid problems.

**RECOVERING THE GIFT OF DISCERNING OF SPIRITS: HISTORY, HERMENEUTIC, AND PRACTICAL TOOL
FOR MINISTRY**

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Introduction

I have always sensed there was more. Even as child I remember having a pronounced awareness that my physical senses were not telling the whole story. Somehow, somewhere things were hidden but present. The stories of Jesus captivated me and the spiritual realm was more than fictional. I became a believer early and as I grew into the teen years, just when I would rather have my awareness of spiritual things decrease, the opposite occurred. I was launched into a world outside my theological paradigm, but that felt like home. The faint echoes of an unknown homeland that beckoned in childhood were now front and center, undeniable and waiting to be explored.

With this new reality came information that I was unprepared for. I was given insight and information that did not originate within and I did not know what to do with it. In time and with help I learned a great deal about what or rather who was happening. While this new world was exciting, it was not altogether safe. I would need tools and weapons to navigate it. As I entered ministry, I found that it too was a wild spiritual world. I encountered people and situations that I somehow had not been prepared for in Seminary. I was thrust into a campus ministry that I had no training for and as it grew, I needed reliable, quality leaders to partner with me. But how does one identify good leaders? How can one tell if a leader will be a good fit with other leaders and the culture of ministry? How do you know if they have hidden issues or problems? How can their gifts and callings be identified when even they may be unaware or unable to articulate them? Enter Discerning of Spirits. This gift has become a primary tool for ministry. Through it gifts, callings, potential, and problems have been identified. Pitfalls were

detected and avoided before they became problems. It has become reliable tool and weapon in navigating the unpredictable waters of modern ministry. But what exactly is discerning of spirits? What insight can be gleaned from the lives of believers in history? What does the Bible say of this gift? What does it have to do with the gift of prophecy or the testing of spirits? How can it be recovered and employed as a practical tool for ministry today?

The problem addressed by this project is the difficulty Christian leaders have in finding the best people to put in leadership positions. The cost of not identifying the right person, or even worse, putting the wrong person in a leadership position is great. Having help from the Holy Spirit in choosing the right people at the right time is invaluable. Yet many Christian ministry leaders are unaware that a spiritual gift exists for this very purpose or how to employ it. The significance of this project is that although there has been much written about spiritual gifts, little has been written specifically about the Discerning of Spirits and its application to leadership recruitment and development in modern ministry. For ministry leaders to lead their communities effectively, they will need to be able to discern the character, motivation, gifts and callings of people in order to identify, recruit and develop new leaders. This project will show the value of this gift from historical, Biblical/Theological, and modern perspectives. It will offer church and ministry leaders another avenue to understand, recover and utilize the gift of Discerning of Spirits to better serve their ministry contexts. This project argues that there is a Biblical/Theological, historical and pragmatic rationale for employing the gift of Discerning of Spirits as a tool for Christian ministry leaders to effectively identify gifted potential leaders for ministry. Pastors and ministry leaders can use the gift of discerning of spirits to identify committed, gifted and effective ministry leaders.

Chapter 1

Three Notable Cases of Discerning of Spirits: Bernard, Hildegard and Ignatius

In order to grasp a historical perspective on *discretio spirituum* I will present ideas and perspectives on the *charism* by three fathers and mothers of the Church. It is my intent to show how these Saints understood and used the gift as a means to hear and interpret God's voice. *Discretio* is far more than mere prudence or a tool to seek God's will, it is a revelatory charism and as such may be developed and expanded with increasing spiritual maturity and greater personal surrender. It is a gift from God and as such cannot be manipulated. In this chapter I will present thoughts on discerning of spirits from Bernard of Clairvaux, Hildegard Von Bingen and Ignatius of Loyola. While this will by no means be an exhaustive historical survey, it will provide the reader some idea of how discerning of spirits has been understood throughout the history of Christianity providing context for comprehending and using the gift today.

St. Bernard of Clairvaux

Bernard of Clairvaux was a Cistercian Monk, Abbott of Clairvaux, and is seen as the last church father bridging the Medieval and Modern periods. (LeClercq, Vandenbroucke and Bouyer 1968, 193) "He was 'mellifluous' in the sense that he makes the hidden 'flow' from the text itself." (LeClercq, Vandenbroucke and Bouyer 1968) Though the source is unknown, Bernard was given the title "Mellifluous' Doctor" due to the "beauty of his preaching and

writings". (O'Cinnsealaigh 2010, 76) It has been said of Bernard that he was both "genius" and "saint" and that "he made no new discoveries, but he threw a fresh light on the experience and teaching of his predecessors." (LeClercq, Vandenbroucke and Bouyer 1968, 191-200) While this summation is not entirely accurate as will be shown below, Bernard was a powerful and authoritative figure whose influence is felt even today.

Bernard's beliefs on Discernment of Spirits are probably most clearly put forth in his Occasional Sermons. It is important to remember that these sermons were delivered at Clairvaux to other Cistercian monks. Anderson argues that because these sermons were given in a "monastic context" that Bernard would have understood *discretio spirituum* as the province of those were committed to deep spiritual growth, namely other monks. (W. L. Anderson, *The Discernment of Spirits: Assessing Visions and Visionsaries in the Late Middle Ages* 2011, 41) This being the case, Discerning of Spirits would have been regarded by Bernard as a tool for serious, devoted, committed, contemplative, seasoned believers rather than something to be dabbled in by the immature. Specifically speaking, Bernard would have understood the charism to be the providence of clergy.

In his Sermons it is clear that Bernard believed not only in the existence of a spiritual realm, but also in the profound influence of that world on ours. He understood that the Christian mind is profoundly impacted by many voices and that these voices may be divine, demonic or carnal. "But, because there are diverse types of spirits, it is necessary for us to discern spirits, especially since, as we learn from the apostle, not every spirit should be trusted. It can seem to the less educated, and to those who have not sufficiently exercised their senses,

that every thought is a conversation within the human spirit itself rather than with another. The reliable truth of faith proves that isn't so, as does the witness of divine Scriptures." (Clairvaux 2016, 106) St. Bernard makes several important statements here. He points out that because there are many different kinds of spirits in operation that the believer should be aware of their presence and as some are evil, the various kinds need to be discerned. In fact, Bernard lists seven specific kinds of spiritual influences that can "impinge on a monk's life: the devil, demons and other diabolical accomplices, the body, the world, God, good angels, (and finally) the monk's own spirit." (W. L. Anderson, *The Discernment of Spirits: Assessing Visions and Visionsaries in the Late Middle Ages* 2011, 40) In this passage Bernard makes clear that not every voice in our thoughts belongs to us. Our thoughts are not simply our thoughts but are a spiritual theater in which ideas, concepts, desires and wants are heard and fought over. These thoughts may be derived from external spirits of the enemy, from our own carnal desires, from worldly spirits, our own spirit, angelic spirits or from the Holy Spirit. To decipher which voice is speaking in our mind, we need Discernment of Spirits. He sees the flesh as being a spirit with a voice of its own that tempts the believer toward physical comforts, appetites and desires. The spirit of the world drives one toward ambition and arrogance, while the Evil spirit seeks to work within the soul to stir one up "to anger, to impatience, to envy, to bitterness of soul." (Clairvaux 2016, 107) Bernard understands Discerning of Spirits as a tool to reveal the spiritual source of thoughts that play across the mind as a means of apprehending them, exposing them so as to "dash them against the rock, casting away the spiteful spirit along with his temptations, away from the perception of our hearts and reducing him to nothing." (Clairvaux 2016, 3) Yet Bernard takes his assertion further. Rather than being solely focused on the flesh or the Devil as the

object of Discernment of Spirits, Bernard reminds his audience in Sermon 23 that another voice is often heard in the theater of the mind. “But on the other hand, as often as a wholesome thought turns in the mind, thoughts about castigating the body, humbling the heart, preserving unity, and showing charity to the brothers, or acquiring, preserving, and increasing the other virtues, then without doubt it is the divine Spirit who speaks, either by himself or through his angel. And just as we said about the human and the spiteful spirit, so also concerning the angelic and divine Spirit; it is not easy to discern who speaks or to ignore the danger, especially since it is certain that a good angel never speaks on his own, but it is God who speaks in him. (Clairvaux 2016, 3) In this statement Bernard proffers that the *charism* of Discernment of Spirits can be a useful tool to identify not only the source of malevolent spiritual activity and carnal thoughts, but may also detect when the source of a message is Divine, whether delivered by angels or spoken directly by the Holy Spirit. This seems to be an original take on the subject by Bernard that leads to two further ideas.

Discerning of Spirits as Meta-Charism

In discussing this new facet of Discernment of Spirits, Bernard may be stealthily addressing another issue. As Lerner has shown, in Bernard’s era there were many claiming divine inspiration for biblical interpretation. (Lerner 1992-01, 34-42) Additionally, there were others claiming visions, ecstatic experiences and prophetic messages. Yet Bernard avoids addressing these directly when it would have been natural within his sermons to do so. Anderson points out that one of the most outstanding features of Bernard’s teaching on

Discerning of Spirits is his “*avoidance* of that most troublesome gift, prophecy”. (W. L. Anderson, *The Discernment of Spirits: Assessing Visions and Visionsaries in the Late Middle Ages* 2011, 41) Clearly Bernard is not ignorant of these issues and one wonders if he is in fact displaying his humble genius, avoiding controversy and personal conflict with contemporaries by taking the high road of scriptural interpretation. He does so by focusing on the larger issue of how to discern the divine via *discretio* rather than to address specific persons or their alleged revelations. It is at this point that Bernard takes a very unusual and original tact on Discerning of Spirits.

Though he has already progressed from the model of *discretio spirituum* as mere demon detection and has added to it the discerning of divine sources, he goes further still. In a departure from patristic teaching, Bernard invokes *discretio spirituum* as something completely different: the ability to distinguish between different modes of *operatio sancti Spiritus*. (W. L. Anderson, *The Discernment of Spirits: Assessing Visions and Visionsaries in the Late Middle Ages* 2011) Bernard argues that monks with the charism have the ability to distinguish between spiritual gifts intended for their own edification (e.g., compunction, devotion, understanding), prophetic revelation intended to be given to others for the exhortation of others (e.g., words of knowledge or wisdom), as well as specific charisms and works of the Holy Spirit operating in others. The importance of this statement is that Bernard is inserting a new and original layer into the understanding of Discerning of Spirits. Discerning of Spirits was previously understood primarily as a tool provided by the Holy Spirit to discern the source of internal voices and motivations and in determining the provenance of prophetic speech, but in Sermon 88 Bernard envisions Discernment of Spirits as a “sort of ‘meta-charism’ or a spiritual gift that operates on

all other spiritual gifts." (W. L. Anderson, *The Discernment of Spirits: Assessing Visions and Visionsaries in the Late Middle Ages* 2011, 41) Bernard understands the gift as providing the ability of "discerning between different classes of spiritual gifts rather than internal or external spirits". Anderson declares that Bernard offers this with no "patristic warrant" and that this understanding was not popularized in later writings. (W. L. Anderson, *The Discernment of Spirits: Assessing Visions and Visionsaries in the Late Middle Ages* 2011, 41) This is a new, fresh and somewhat shocking interpretation of *discretio spirituum*. Bernard sees this gift as far more than an ability to identify differing spiritual sources of information or internal movements in oneself or in others. Bernard understands the gift as also having the unique feature of being able to discern individual charisms and callings operating in *others* as well. In other words, the gift of Discerning of Spirits may endow the gifted person with information about specific ways in which the Holy Spirit is empowering and working within others. It may allow someone to be aware of God's gifts, anointings and callings at work in someone else.

In Sermon 88 "Concerning Four Ways the Holy Spirit Works Within Us" Bernard embarks on a short but dynamic teaching on Discerning of Spirits and the Gifts of the Holy Spirit in general. (Clairvaux 2016, 239) He reminds the monks that the work of the Holy Spirit is "double" in that there are some charisms that are inward focused and have the purpose of informing, equipping and edifying the self, to provide the believer with information needed for their own spiritual growth and well-being *and* to provide supernatural knowledge about a situation or a person one is ministering to. (Clairvaux 2016, 239) "Naturally the work of the Holy Spirit is double. I mean, he does one work within us for our sake; he does another for the sake of our neighbors." (Clairvaux 2016, 239) Some gifts provide internally-focused revelation

concerning the object of ministry, given solely for the minister's instruction on how to proceed in a certain situation or to minister effectively and is not for the knowledge of the object of ministry. At the same time, there are gifts with an exterior focus. These gifts provide direct revelation, such as a word of knowledge or a word of wisdom, to a person receiving ministry as a message to them from God to help them in their life with Christ, whether for direction or a warning or encouragement, etc. For this Bernard offers Discerning of Spirits as a meta-charism to guide the monk in knowing what to share with others and what is not for sharing and that which is for internal use only. "Therefore, the order of our progress is proper, that is, we first strive to be fulfilled by those gifts, I mean compunction and the other virtues, and then if through grace of the Holy Spirit the others increase, that is, wisdom and knowledge, then we take care for them to be distributed to our neighbors. So to be sure we shall obtain that gift of the Holy Spirit that is called discernment of spirits, if also that which only pertains to us we reserve for us, and those gifts that were assigned to the benefit of others we give generously to ourselves and to neighbors." (Clairvaux 2016, 239-40) With this statement Bernard offers discerning of spirits as a sort of gateway gift. It operates as a router or a traffic signal. Discerning of Spirits is given not only to receive revelation and detect the source of the revelation, but also to direct charismatic revelation to its intended target. The simple message is that not every revelation or piece of information given by the Holy Spirit is meant to be shared. If one is operating in discerning of spirits, the Spirit will reveal that which is to be shared and that which is not.

It is here that perhaps Bernard is offering gentle correction to his charismatic contemporaries. Just because a piece of information is received from the Holy Spirit, that

doesn't mean that it is for general consumption. A person may well be operating in an incredibly legitimate gifting, but there is a greater gifting that can direct them regarding who should hear this revelation or perhaps even the timing of when it should be delivered. Bernard is not questioning the authenticity of those claiming gifts necessarily, but he certainly seems to be questioning their wisdom and warns them that gifts can be a double-edged sword.

For if we take what is for the benefit of others and we retain it only for ourselves, then we have not charity, and it is said to us, Wisdom that is hidden and treasure that is not seen, what benefit is there in them both? On the other hand, if we wish to make known God's gifts to human beings rather than please God in the secrecy of our hearts, then we lose humility, and rightly we are rebuked by that voice. What do you have that you did not receive? Thus we are endangered both ways, the latter by losing humility, the former by losing charity. And who can become saved without humility or charity? (Clairvaux 2016, 239)

There are inherent dangers in gifting. If one keeps revelation to themselves and does not share when they should, then the gifted person is selfish and is demonstrating a lack of love. If another uses charismatic revelation from God for their own purposes, they are operating out of selfishness. Bernard points out that even if the revelation is genuine, the gift was given by God, not derived from self. The result of genuine charismatic ministry done with lack of love or humility can be disastrous. Even though a revelation is legitimately from God, it is incumbent on the receiver to use discerning of spirits to understand their own motives as well as who and when the revelation should be shared with, if at all. The warning is clear and echoes Jesus' words in Matthew 7:21-23, "Not everyone who says to me, 'Lord, Lord,' will enter the kingdom of heaven, but the one who does the will of my Father who is in heaven. On that day many will say to me, 'Lord, Lord, did we not prophesy in your name, and cast out demons in your name,

and do many mighty works in your name?’ And then will I declare to them, ‘I never knew you; depart from me, you workers of lawlessness.’” [ESV] Gifting does not equal God’s endorsement, approval or even the salvation of the gifted. Character is greater than gifting. Yet the gift itself, as it is the grace of God in action, and its operation in a believer’s life can have a profound effect on their spiritual growth and maturity.

Discerning of Spirits as a Battle for Spiritual Growth

Benke argues that Bernard understands Discerning of Spirits through the lens of spiritual growth and spiritual warfare in the life of a believer as they strive for more oneness with God and fight to be free from the influences of the enemy. The goal of the Christian life is a return to the Father, a homecoming, a marriage. (Benke 2001, 301) “From the life form of Jesus goes then formative power when man becomes one after his conversion” in a “lifelong process of transformation (*reformatio*, transformation) submitting himself by willingly consenting to this work of grace. The aim of this process is to conform (*conformatio*) with the Archetype, the approximation to Jesus Christ. (Benke 2001, 300-01) As the Christian grows deeper and is more aware of the voices that surround, press, distract and beckon, the need for Discerning of Spirits becomes ever more urgent. This is even more important as the spiritual life is seen as a “fight”, and believers are seen as soldiers as was understood via the concept of “militia Christi among the early Cistercians”, with constant need to clearly discern orders from the Commander. (Benke 2001, 301) How does one clearly hear the voice of the Leader with so many other voices

resounding in the innermost depths of the soul in the “frenzy of battle”? The ability to distinguish the spirits...becomes vital.” (Benke 2001).

The Principle of *Conformitas*

To grasp Bernard’s understanding of Discerning of Spirits, one must fathom the influence of Bernard’s first basic rule: *Conformitas*. (Benke 2001, 302) “Know Jesus as the Crucified on the one hand with *conformitas* on the other.” (Benke 2001) “Bernard is convinced: Only that One who strives for holiness and for a life of prayer recognizes the ‘stimulation of the good’”. (Benke 2001) This is precisely where character meets gifting. Discerning between the voices of the spirits is possible only to those who are intentionally, purposefully conforming themselves to Christ, growing deeper spiritually, allowing Him greater control and dying to themselves. As the purity of Christ grows in the heart, conscripting and sublimating other desires and impulses, the voice of the Shepherd becomes more distinct, natural and familiar. Once the believer has immersed themselves in Christ, is following and imitating Jesus, then and only then can they clearly receive the “inner stimulus”. (Benke 2001)

The truth is that character and gifting are frequently incongruent. From the church at Corinth to the Montanists to some of the mystics of Bernard’s own time, employing the *charismata* is fraught with danger, especially in those who are spiritually less mature. The Corinthian church demonstrated great gifting but sorely lacked maturity leading to mistakes, pain and the tarnishing of the name of Jesus. Too frequently genuine gifting has been mixed with pain, rejection and selfish ambition producing a poisonous amalgamation delivered in the name of the Lord. Thus, the importance of *conformitas*. If the gifted person hasn’t known the

crucified Christ and conformed their life and character to His, dying to themselves, there will be too much uncrucified-self mixed in with their gift and the product will be impure. Until there is a high level of *conformitas*, the gift cannot be trusted, because the message may be garbled and unclear. Therefore, spiritual growth and maturity are keys to operating and growing in the gift of Discerning of Spirits and for Bernard, the path to growth in Christ is intimacy.

Love, Longing, Presence and Absence

Benke refers to Bernard's Sermon on the Song of Songs to point out that his mysticism is centered in love and presence. Just as there is interplay in the Song of Songs between husband and wife, so there is for the spiritual Bridegroom and Bride. As marriage for a husband and wife is a mystic union, a "great mystery", in the same way there exists a spiritual union between "Christ and the Church". (Eph. 5:32 [ESV]) According to Bernard, the 'bride' (*sponsa*) is to be understood as the soul who 'Thirsts for God'. The 'bride groom' (*sponsus*) is a 'jealous lover' who visits the 'bride' and maintains familiar contact with her." (Benke 2001, 307) This relationship of love is most aptly understood as 'conversation', as 'love pleasure' or as 'love game'. (Benke 2001, 307) Benke says that in Bernard it is within this relationship of spiritual interplay in which the Bridegroom subsequently appears and retreats that the two become one, where *conformitas* is actualized. It is in this place where healing, union, sanctification, maturity and "conversation (*locutio-responsio*)" converge. This is essential for growth and development of both the individual and the relationship. Bernard contends that equally

important with seasons of intimacy are times apart when God withdraws to create “longing”. (Benke 2001, 308) An encounter with God leaves the soul with a desire, a longing. It is “neither a superficial feeling of desire and melancholy, nor is it liable to any sentimental note.” (Benke 2001, 308) This longing is much greater than mere emotion, it is a deep internal drive towards home. This longing-fulfillment-longing cycle creates a “spiral” in which desire intensifies with absence and “proves its authenticity”. (Benke 2001, 310)

Fruitful Love

The fruit, the offspring of this intensive bridal paradigm is obedient action. For Bernard spiritual intimacy takes place in contemplation, of which the product is action. “Every *actio* lives from the overflow of the *contemplatio*.” (Benke 2001, 311) The outflow of time with the Bridegroom in *contemplatio* is the work of evangelism. “Finally you hear the Bride, she should get up and hurry, surely to win souls.” (Benke 2001, 311) In this way the joy of contemplation is increased as it results in ever increasing numbers of people experiencing this communion, thus building the church with other lovers of the Bridegroom, becoming the prime occupation of a smitten Bride. Benke reminds the reader that moderns may have some difficulty in applying Bernard’s teaching on Discernment of Spirits. We live in a very different world and ecclesia. It is even difficult to define what *is* Christian today with so many voices, religions and “ideological pluralism”. (Benke 2001, 312) “Bernhard [sic] moved in the ecclesiastical-monastic context, that is in the inner space of faith.” Yet it is precisely in this place that we may find commonality and a rediscovery of Discerning of Spirits in a modern context. It is not the *location* of *contemplio*

that matters, it is the *desire* for and the *fulfillment* of the act that counts. If one is seeking to find a scientific, purely objective “system...like a ‘spiritual logarithm table’ in order to achieve mathematical certainty in questions of spiritual experience or in decision-making processes” they will be disappointed. (Benke 2001, 313) For Bernard the *charism* is inseparable from the intercourse. There is no gift without intimate and joyful marriage to the giver, an ever upward spiraling intensity and drive to share that joy with others for the love of the Bridegroom.

St. Bernard Conclusion

While there are innumerable ways Bernard’s teachings influence our understanding of *discretio spirituum*, for our purposes, I will focus on three. 1) Discerning of Spirits is a means of distinguishing not only the voices of evil, the world and the flesh, but also of the angelic and divine as well. 2) The gift can also function as a gateway or meta-charism to distinguish differing movements in the *operatio sancti Spiritus* specifically in discerning whether divine messages received are intended for the internal use of the hearer and or are messages that should be shared with others. This original Bernardine concept envisions Discerning of Spirits as a spirit-given ability to not only discern revelatory sources, but to discern the intent of God as to the purpose and target of the revelation. 3) The gift can be enhanced and developed through deep spiritual growth and maturity. Through *conformitas*, as the believer dies to self and gains the ability to hear God more clearly with less distortion, Discerning of Spirits can emerge as a powerful guide. With deeper growth and intimacy with Christ, character is transformed and spiritual hearing becomes increasingly clear, enabling the believer to be a more effective

minister and ultimately, an evangelist. Perhaps heeding his own advice, Bernard offers these teachings, shedding greater light on the gift of discerning of spirits while also addressing some problematic issues of his time with a beautiful humility. We take from this study these three key teachings as we proceed to Hildegard of Bingen.

Hildegard von Bingen

Biography

The next character in the study of *discretio spirituum* is Hildegard of Bingen. Hildegard is an interesting and surprising person who seemed ahead of her time while living with brilliant clarity of her own time. I chose Hildegard as I did Bernard of Clairvaux because they featured heavily in my coursework. It was my intention to discover her teachings on Discerning of Spirits from her writings and then distill them into a simple catalog of treatments on the subject. Yet as I researched, it became obvious that Hildegard wrote very little directly on the subject of Discerning of Spirits. I nearly abandoned the project when it dawned on me that though she may not have written much on the topic, that most of her life and ministry had been subject to it, if not largely defined by it. It is to that life we turn to in order to gain insight into how *discretio spirituum* was understood and practiced at the time of St. Hildegard.

Hildegard was born in 1098 to Hildebert and Mechthilde, who “although wealthy and engaged in worldly affairs, were not unmindful of the gifts of the Creator and dedicated their

daughter to the service of God.” (Flanagan 1990, 1) Little is known about Hildegard’s parents but they were apparently wealthy and of the nobility. Her father served Meginhard, Count of Spanheim as a soldier and may have been part of the family Stein, though that is debated. (Mershman 1910) Much of Hildegard’s early life is simply unknown as information such as her place and date of birth were apparently not significant to Godfrey, her Biographer and Secretary. (Flanagan 1990, 1) Hildegard was a “weak and sickly child” and as such received very little in the way of education. (Mershman 1910) As her parents had promised her to God they chose to place her under the care of Jutta, the sister of Count Meginhard when Hildegard was eight years old. “Rather than choosing to enter their daughter formally as a child in a convent where she would be brought up to become a nun, Hildegard’s parents had taken the more radical step of enclosing their daughter, apparently for life, in the cell of an anchoress, attached to the Benedictine monastery at Disibodenberg. Jutta, it should be said, was not merely a pious woman, but the young and beautiful daughter of a local count.” (Flanagan 1990, 2) Here Hildegard was instructed to “read and sing the Latin Psalms” but she did not learn to write. (Mershman 1910) She was often ill, “frequently scarcely able to walk and often deprived even of the use of her eyes.” (Mershman 1910) It is perhaps these very afflictions that caused her to live a more “interior” life, enabling her to be more spiritually in tune than she otherwise might have been, experiencing her first vision at five years old. (Flanagan 1990, 2)

Jutta’s work began to gain notoriety and other families sent their daughters to

Disibodenberg:

But as with other religious movements and institutions, such as the Egyptian hermits and the Cistercians, extraordinary spirituality soon attracted a large following of would-be disciples, with the result that the original institution was forced to diversify. So, it was at Disibodenberg, where the daughters of the local nobility were sent by their parents,

and the cell which had sufficed for Jutta, Hildegard, and one or two others now had to accommodate a much larger number of people than at first intended. Thus, by the time Hildegard had reached the age of thirteen or fourteen (c. 1112), the recluse's cell had become, to all intents and purposes, a small Benedictine convent, attached to and dependent on the monastery at Disibodenberg." (Flanagan 1990, 2)

After the death of Jutta, Hildegard was unanimously elected to lead her group and "As the ideal of humility requires, Hildegard resisted the election with all her power but was compelled by the command of the abbot and the urging of her sisters to assume the office of 'Prioress'".

(Stoudt 2013, 21)

Soon thereafter Hildegard received a vision that would change her life. "And it came to pass in the eleven hundred and forty-first year of the incarnation of Jesus Christ, Son of God, when I was forty-two years and seven months old, that the heavens were opened and a blinding light of exceptional brilliance flowed through my entire brain. And so it kindled my whole heart and breast like a flame, not burning but warming...and suddenly I understood the meaning of the expositions of the books, that is to say of the psalter, the evangelists, and other catholic books of the Old and New Testaments." (Flanagan 1990, 3)

She would go on to record these visions over ten years and title them the "Scivias" or Way of Knowledge. Although the visionary was commanded in the visions to write them down, she resisted "out of humility" until finally she suffered an affliction she referred to as the "scourge of God" and relented. With the help of Volmar, "who had become Hildegard's teacher, trusted assistant, and friend", who had known Hildegard from her childhood as Jutta's ward and about her visions, and with the permission of Abbot Kuno, she recorded the visions. (Flanagan 1990, 4) "Hildegard was now doubly legitimized— through the election of her sisters and her appointment as 'prioress,' and as a prophet." (Stoudt 2013, 21) Yet Hildegard's star was to rise higher still as "At some stage Abbot Kuno informed Archbishop Henry of Mainz about Hildegard's work and it was through him that Pope Eugenius (1145– 53), a Cistercian protégé of

St Bernard, came to hear about it at the synod held in Trier between November 1147 and February 1148.” (Flanagan 1990, 4)

While it is unlikely that Hildegard and St. Bernard ever met, they did exchange letters and she garnered his support. After Heinrich Bishop of Mainz broached the subject of Hildegard’s visions with Pope Eugenius III, he sent two legates to visit her and acquire an as yet unfinished copy of *The Scivias*. The council was impressed and Bernard advocated for her with the result that:

Eugenius sent Hildegard a letter of greeting, giving her apostolic license to continue writing. From this point on, her fame and her circle of correspondents grew steadily until her death. Once Hildegard had become a celebrity, her convent at St. Disibod began to attract so many postulants that the monastery could not house them. For this reason she decided to move, founding a new community at the Rupertsberg opposite Bingen— a site revealed to her in a vision.” (Newman 1987, 13)

Rupertsberg was not a paradise and lacked many of the comforts of Disibod, yet Hildegard persevered and eventually reacquired the rights to the doweries of her charges and enjoyed a little more comfort. Though she experienced frequent illnesses throughout her life she was able to complete several books including the *Scivias*, *Nine Books on the Subtleties of Different Kinds of Creatures*, the *Book of Compound Medicine*, the *Book of Life’s Merits*, and *On the Activity of God*. The Prophetess also composed liturgical poetry and music, inventing her own style of musical notation and indeed inventing her own language. She wrote many letters and was very involved in influencing the politics of both Church and State. “Hildegard's correspondence spans the three decades from 1147 to her death and ranges over all sectors of society, from popes, emperors, and prelates to abbots and abbesses, priests, monks, and laypeople.” (Newman 1987, 14) She undertook four public preaching tours, the last of which while she was

in her seventies. Though one of her biographers, Theodric, calls her a saint, no formal canonization has ever taken place, but her name is in the Roman Martyrology and her feast is celebrated in the Dioceses of Speyer, Mainz, Trier, and Limburg, also in the Abbey of Solesmes, where a proper office is said.” (Mershman 1910) Hildegard shattered many cultural norms of her era, in many ways due directly to *discretio spirituum*. But what did Discerning of Spirits look like in Hildegard’s time? How was it exercised by the Church and why was it so prevalent and pervasive?

The Rise of Women Visionaries and Discerning of Spirits

First, every teaching of women, especially that expressed in solemn word or writing, is to be held suspect, unless it has first been diligently examined by another...and much more than the teaching of men. Why? The reason is clear; because not only ordinary but divine law forbids such things. Why? Because women are too easily seduced, because they are too obstinately seducers, because it is not fitting that they should be knowers of divine wisdom. (Gerson 1960, 9: 468)

It could not have been easy to be a woman Visionary in the twelfth century. As the words of Jean Gerson above remind us, women were not to be trusted with divine things. (Voaden 1999, 20) The teachings and prophetic words of women were obviously more to be scrutinized than those of men because women are “seduced” and “obstinately seducers” and unfit for receiving or even knowing God’s oracles. (Ibid) Yet it was an age that experienced a marked rise of prophetic female voices:

The period from the twelfth to the fifteenth centuries saw the flowering of women's visionary writing. During this period a large number of remarkable women recorded their visionary experiences, experiences which were eagerly read by their contemporaries, both men and women, and which have continued to exert an influence up to the present day. Among them were Elisabeth of Schonau (d. 1165), Hildegard of Bingen (d. 1179), Marie d'Oignies (d. 1213), Hadewijch of Brabant (d. 1269), the three Helfta nuns, Mechthild of Magdeburg (d. 1282), Mechtild of Hackeborn (d. 1298), and Gertrude the Great (d. 1302), Angela of Foligno (d. 1309), Bridget of Sweden (d. 1373), Catherine of Siena (d. 1380), Julian of Norwich (d. ca. 1416) and Margery Kempe (d. after 1438). (Voaden 1999, 38)

But what was the catalyst for this most precipitous prophetic movement in the church since Montanism? Perhaps it was the fact that clergy membership was only available to males. Maybe the claim to visionary experience was a path for women to have and exert influence in a time when power was not much available to them. It could have been that some simply wanted their five minutes of fame. It could also have been that the Holy Spirit was moving in that time in the same way as He moved through the daughters of Philip. Hildegard had her own theory, “she insisted that God had chosen a poor, frail, untutored woman like herself to reveal his mysteries only because those to whom he had first entrusted them— the wise, learned, and masculine clergy— had failed to obey. She lived in a ‘womanish age’ (*muliebre tempus*) in which men had become so lax, weak, and sensual— in a word, effeminate— that God had to confound them by making women virile.” (Flanagan 1990, 10) The leadership of the church had become so weak, so ineffective and unspiritual, that God had chosen a foolish thing to confound the wise. With the mission suffering because of weak leadership, Hildegard saw it as her mission “to unlock the mysteries of Scripture, to proclaim the way of salvation, to admonish priests and prelates, to instruct the people of God. And all this was entrusted by God to a

woman, despite the transgression of Eve, because ‘the wise and the strong’ had fallen even lower than women.” (Flanagan 1990, 10)

This was extremely problematic for the Church. Since it was impossible to reject prophetic utterances out of hand, how were they to discern which voices were God and which were by some other spirit? Obviously, the answer is *discretio spirituum*. Even in the 1 Corinthians 12:10 passage, Discerning of Spirits immediately follows the charism of Prophecy, linking them via proximity. This also makes sense given the injunction in 1 Corinthians 14:29 to “Let two or three prophets speak, and let the others weigh what is said.” (1 Cor. 14:29 [ESV]) But how, by what process should this happen? By what mechanism does the Church “weigh” a potential prophetic utterance or visionary experience? How does a person, a body or church do Discerning of Spirits?

By Hildegard’s time *discretio* was in the process of becoming established and was not without myriad flaws and pitfalls. Through trial and error, *discretio spirituum* was as much a dance as it was a decision. The process was years, sometimes lifetimes long and even after so much time and energy were spent there was not always wide acceptance of either the prophet or the prophecy. Voaden states that the:

doctrine was, in effect, a discourse, developed and elaborated by ecclesiastical authorities, a discourse which provided both a vocabulary to articulate visionary experience and a set of criteria to evaluate the vision and the visionary. In addition, *discretio spirituum* supplied a pattern for self-fashioning which extended to behaviour, demeanour [sic] and modes of expression. Familiarity with, and skill in, the discourse was a vital factor in the textual - and physical - survival of the visionary. Facility with *discretio spirituum* empowered medieval women visionaries and enabled them to fulfil their divine mandate to communicate revelation. (Voaden 17-18)

At this juncture the question arises, what did the discourse of *discretio* look like? Why was it so necessary and how did it shape the life of the Visionary?

A Medieval Understanding of the Feminine

The statement...by Jean Gerson, fifteenth-century French theologian, mystic and influential churchman, neatly encapsulates centuries of belief about the nature of women, its effect on their spiritual capacity, and the consequent restrictions which should be placed on their participation in the life of the Church. Theological attitudes towards women derived from two main convictions: first, that women are by nature corporeal, sensual, and carnal, and second, that all women bear the taint of Eve. The first conviction arose from the primary identification of women with their reproductive function; the second from the belief that all women are prone to being deceived, incapable of distinguishing God's truth from the devil's blandishments, willing to deceive in their turn and a source of spiritual contamination. Medieval Christian thought held that women are subordinate to men in the order of creation, although they are equal in the order of salvation: souls are equal, bodies are not. (Voaden 20-21)

Perhaps the greatest wonder here is that it stayed this way for so very long and for some it has not yet changed. It is difficult to fathom why the prejudices lasted for so long when God through Paul was clear that “There is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither slave nor free, there is no male and female, for you are all one in Christ Jesus.” (Gal. 3:28 [ESV]) Perhaps other difficulties have contributed to the misunderstanding such as when Paul says “you may all prophesy one by one” and then shortly thereafter commands that “As in all the churches of the saints, the women should keep silent in the churches. For they are not permitted to speak, but should be in submission, as the Law also says. If there is anything they desire to learn, let them ask their husbands at home. For it is shameful for a woman to speak in church.” (1 Cor.

14:31:33-35 [ESV]) How can “all prophecy” but the women “keep silent”? Is this an occasion in which Paul is addressing some particular problem such as a few overly chatty females in the congregation or does he mean that women were never allowed to utter words in church? If this is so, how then were there four daughters of Philip the Evangelist who prophesied? (Acts 21:9) How could it be in the last days that “sons and daughters” would prophesy, if daughters could not actually speak when the *ecclesia* was gathered? (Acts 2:17) Where would they have prophesied if not in a church gathering? Since prophecy is *vocal charism*, they could not have both prophesied and been silent. It is unimaginable that Mary Magdalene would not have been allowed to bear witness to what Jesus said to her at the tomb in a church gathering or that Mary the sister of Lazarus would be forbidden to share what she learned at Jesus’ feet. Would anyone have banned Rhoda the servant girl from sharing her story of seeing the supernaturally freed Peter at the gate and mistaking him for his angel? It seems that we must have misunderstood, perhaps due in part to only having half of the conversation and not knowing the specific issue or issues Paul was addressing. Of course, for some, this understanding is convenient as a mechanism of control and for others it simply fits well with accepted or desired cultural norms as it certainly would have in the Middle Ages. “Medieval theology generally associated men with intellect, women with the senses; men and intellect were superior, women and sense inferior; the spiritual lives of both sexes were shaped by these assumptions.” (Voaden 24) Undoubtedly these assumptions would have played a colossal role in how men and women understood themselves and each other and their corresponding spiritual and ecclesial roles. With this theological underpinning it would be hard for men not to doubt the spiritual purity of women and for women to doubt themselves. Add to this the belief that men had a

natural bent towards the intellectual, which was highly valued, while women had a predilection for the experiential or sensual, which was not. "The preference for intellectual over 'spiritual' vision bestows upon men, who were deemed capable of intellection, a more reliable and more valued spiritual experience than that generally accorded to women, who were seen as irretrievably hampered by the moral and mental distortions and limitations induced by their natures. Women were therefore judged only capable of a spiritual experience which was also sensual, suspect and subordinate." (Voaden 1999, 28) This is where we encounter the double bind. Women are non-intellectual and only capable of spiritual experience, which is by its nature completely open to error, highly subjective, emotional and therefore unstable as well as possessing a propensity for being easily deceived. Given these beliefs, how could a prophetic word given through a woman ever be trusted? "In addition to the major risk of woman as devil's gateway...the risks which women visionaries posed can be divided into three categories: i) the gullibility of women; ii) the desire of women for attention, even notoriety; iii) the contaminating effect of women." (Voaden 1999, 132) Even Hildegard herself relates similar thoughts, though framed within a message that allows a dimension of egalitarianism between clergy and visionary, a kind of sameness within a difference:

Similarly, Hildegard of Bingen recounts a vision which suggests a complementarity between the roles of priest and visionary. God tells her that, while women cannot administer the sacraments, those who have dedicated themselves to Christ can experience union with him, which endows them with the equivalent spiritual graces. 'So too those of female sex should not approach the office of My altar; for they are an infirm and weak habitation, appointed to bear children and diligently nurture them...A virgin betrothed to My Son will receive Him as Bridegroom, for she has shut her body away from a physical husband; and in her Bridegroom she has the priesthood and all the ministry of My altar, and with Him possesses all its riches.' (Voaden 1999, 106)

This message illustrates the “effeminate age” concept by simultaneously agreeing with the idea of the inherent weakness of the female while claiming an equity with male clergy via an experiential relationship with Christ. Equal, but not equal, but equal.

Enter *Discretio Spirituum*

The situation in Hildegard’s time held a tension. Male and female, reason and emotion, intellectual and experiential. The Church recognized and valued true visionary experience and believed that God still spoke in prophetic utterances, yet many of those utterances came through weak and suspect women who may have only been pretending to speak for God in order to gain fame, respectability, and/or a pulpit. “William Christian, in his study of apparitions and visions in late-medieval and renaissance Spain writes of ‘a general feeling that women were tempted to have visions as a way of gaining the power and attention they lacked in society.’” (Voaden 1999, 197) Worse still, these visionary women may have been used by the Devil as a mouthpiece to deceive and tempt, just like their mother Eve. How was the Church to discern which visions or visionaries they would approve, accept and promote and which ones they were to condemn as false prophets? Was Discerning of Spirits a charismatic action, a tribunal or a committee process? The answer is yes.

Often modern people condemn the Middle Ages for sexism and rightly so, yet in this case the Church takes extravagant lengths and makes expensive investments of money and manpower to determine whether or not these women were speaking for God when it would

have been easier, simpler and cheaper to shut them down out of hand. The Church has made many remarkable mistakes over the centuries, but we should give it credit for times it did well. It could certainly be said that sometimes *discretio spirituum* was applied in an uneven or sometimes unfair manner, but in Hildegard's case, they got it right, owing in no small part to Hildegard's unique history and grasp of the process and the internal workings of the Medieval church.

Voaden describes *discretio spirituum* as a discourse:

The construction blueprint with which this thesis is principally concerned is the ecclesiastical doctrine of *discretio spirituum*, the discerning of spirits. Although scholars of medieval visionaries, particularly of women visionaries, have sometimes briefly acknowledged this doctrine as a factor in the lives and texts of their subjects, its importance as a mechanism whereby visionaries were controlled, authorized, and empowered has not hitherto been fully recognized. *Discretio spirituum* defined the visionary experience, decreed the virtue and deportment of the visionary, established forms of expression and laid down criteria for assessment. And it facilitated - or restricted - dissemination of the writing of visionaries, under an implicit imprimatur. It argues that the doctrine was, in effect, a discourse, developed and elaborated by ecclesiastical authorities, a discourse which provided both a vocabulary to articulate visionary experience and a set of criteria to evaluate the vision and the visionary. In addition, *discretio spirituum* supplied a pattern for self-fashioning which extended to behaviour, demeanour [sic] and modes of expression. Familiarity with, and skill in, the discourse was a vital factor in the textual – and physical - survival of the visionary. Facility with *discretio spirituum* empowered medieval women visionaries and enabled them to fulfil their divine mandate to communicate revelation. (Voaden 1999, 17-18)

The discourse or process of *discretio spirituum* was in existence yet still in development in Hildegard's time. Christianity was 1200 years old. Discerning of spirits had been part of the vocabulary of the early church since Paul mentioned in 1 Corinthians 12:10 and Voaden points out that early on Augustine had defined Discerning of Spirits:

“As Saint Augustine states...*discretio spirituum* is the ability to distinguish spirits sent by God from those sent by the devil. This facility is a fundamental requirement for a

religion which, as Christianity does, believes in the immanence of supernatural forces and the possibility of their irruption into everyday life. It is even more necessary in a culture which perceives God and the devil in a constant struggle for souls, and which believes that trickery and deceit are the devil's most potent weapons against God's absolute power. In this context, the ability to distinguish between the will of God and the wiles of the devil is a spiritual survival technique." (Voaden 1999, 94-95)

In the intervening years however, the concept was not much addressed until Montanus. The Montanist prophets that sent the church into a frenzy of confusion, confrontation and condemnation had happened 1,000 years prior to Hildegard and when that controversy ended so did the focus on *discretio spirituum*. Yet with the rise of visionary claims in the Late Middle Ages "the discourse on discernment of spirits must be understood as an evolving and often self-contradictory series of responses to specific moments of crisis or contested authority in the history of the late medieval Church." (W. L. Anderson, *Free Spirits, Presumptuous Women, and False Prophets: The Discernment of Spirits in the Late Middle Ages* 2002). Indeed, Voaden agrees stating that:

The transmission of the principles of *discretio spirituum* takes two fundamental forms. First, as a formal doctrine, it is discussed, described and embodied in scriptural sources, and therefore appears in subsequent patristic and scholastic treatises, although, as mentioned above, the treatment is uneven. Secondly, by the late Middle Ages, the criteria which constitute *discretio spirituum* have become so fundamental to Christian belief and behaviour [sic] that they form a cultural substratum which informs and pervades spiritual experience. The multifaceted nature of the concept assists in this absorption, with some of its aspects overlapping with folklore: identifying a demon by its stench, knowing that the devil can quote scripture. (Voaden 1999, 100)

In later years the discourse would become increasingly formalized and stringent, though it never seemed to be able to reach a consensus of absolute authority. Bishop Alfonso of Jaen wrote two hundred years following Hildegard "that there are seven signs whereby one may tell

a true visionary. The first, and most definite sign is whether the person lives a virtuous life under the rule of a spiritual director.” (Voaden 1999, 101)

*“The ferst most serteyn sygne is yat
ye vision is of god when yat persone
seinge visions is really meke and
levis undir obediens of sum
spiritual fadir vutuos and expert
in spiritual lyff.”(Ibid)*

The second sign is that, as a result of the vision, the soul feels inflamed by God's love and charity, and her faith, obedience and reverence to Holy Mother Church are strengthened. Third, that the visionary feels a deep inward knowledge of the truth of the revelation. Fourth, that the revelations are always and only of true things, and in accord with Scripture and accepted teachings. Fifth, a true vision is known by the fruit which it bears. Sixth, true visionaries will have the day and hour of their death revealed to them. And finally, seventh, posthumous miracles will establish the status of the visionary beyond all question.” (Ibid)

Later, circa 1400, Jean Gerson in his *De distinctione* provides a list of five points or ways to discern the validity of a prophetic vision. “Theologians must act as moneychangers distinguishing true and counterfeit coinage - the simile is taken from Cassian - and the coin of revelation must be tested on five points: weight (which is to say humility), flexibility (discretion), durability (patience), conformability (truth), and color (charity).” (W. L. Anderson, *Free Spirits, Presumptuous Women, and False Prophets: The Discernment of Spirits in the Late Middle Ages* 2002, 257) It is evident in Gerson’s synthesis of ideas and thoughts on Discerning

of Spirits of the previous centuries, that there is nothing approaching a hard and fast diagnostic tool. The discourse had become precipitously subjective and dangerously dependent on the personality, character, temperament, education and prejudices of Spiritual Directors. One could easily imagine the same visionary simultaneously approved or condemned by different directors using Gerson's and Alfonso's criteria, simply because they are different people and reached different conclusions based on their differences as human beings.

The Spiritual Director

“By the late Middle Ages, the spiritual director is seen as absolutely vital to discretio spirituum. The charism of discretio spirituum is effectively reserved to the clergy, and one of the principles repeatedly emphasized is the danger of visionaries relying on their own judgements.”
(Voaden 1999, 114)

The subjective nature and application of *discretio spirituum* in the late Middle Ages is further illustrated and continued in the assignment of spiritual directors to visionaries, male and female. The spiritual director would have been a clergy person, male of course, educated theologically, theoretically having experienced personal spiritual encounters with God and ideally possessing the charism of Discerning of Spirits. It was believed that for the spiritual director:

The ability to exercise *discretio spirituum* can be acquired, with, of course, the assistance of grace, through study and reflection, through familiarity with mystical theology, the lives of ascetics, and the teachings of Holy Writ and Holy Church. Ideally,

however, the spiritual director should also possess the charism of *discretio spirituum*. Both Alfonso and Gerson argue that the director should himself have had transcendental experiences; Gerson writes that at the very least, he should be a sound theologian and an advanced contemplative.” (Voaden 1999, 116)

It is not clear exactly how a spiritual director was appointed to a particular visionary. It appears that at times the director may have been assigned by a higher authority, while on other occasions they were simply the local priest or monk and thus spiritual director by default, while in other instances the visionary was allowed to choose their own. Following the death of her beloved priest, confessor and spiritual director Volmar, Hildegard had to demand that a spiritual director be appointed to her. “Although Disibodenberg was required to provide a replacement, difficulties ensued when they refused to do so. Hildegard complained to the pope (Letter 10), who instructed Wezelin, abbot of St. Andreas in Cologne (and Hildegard’s nephew), to take care of the matter. (Letter 10r) Eventually the monk Gottfried was sent from Disibodenberg.” (Meconi 2018, 62) In Hildegard’s era the prophetic vetting process was often initiated by notifying a local authority of visionary experience. In Hildegard’s case this began with Jutta notifying Abbot Kuno at the Benedictine monastery at Disibodenberg of Hildegard’s revelations. This of course led eventually up the chain of command to Archbishop Henry of Mainz and then later to Pope Eugenius, protégé of St. Bernard.

Both the relationship and the role of the spiritual director in the life of the visionary is often ambiguous and must be judged and analyzed on an individual basis. While it may be assumed in the modern context that the spiritual director would act as a critic and/or judge of the visionary, it appears this was often not true. “The relationship between spiritual director and visionary is, of necessity, complex, since *discretio spirituum* is not a single test but, as

argued earlier, a discourse. It involves continual evaluation and validation of visionary and vision on multiple levels.” (Voaden 1999, 115) For many visionaries the role of the male spiritual director was myriad in that he may serve as judge, guardian, teacher, protector, biographer, secretary, confidant and friend. For Hildegard this was certainly the case:

In 1173 Volmar died. Under any circumstances Hildegard would have grieved; he had served as her provost, confessor, and priest for decades. But he was also the individual who had urged her to pursue her work and had helped make it possible, being her closest collaborator over the years; she called herself an orphan after his death. Indeed, she was never again to work with anyone as satisfactorily. This loss of a close and doubtless beloved friend ushered in the turmoil of the final phase of her life. (Meconi 2018, 62)

Hildegard’s depth of grief is revealing in that no one grieves the loss of a critical, judgmental, condemning person in their lives; to the contrary, that is generally something to be celebrated. Her grief bears witness to her love for Volmar, indicating that he was a positive and joyful presence in her life. It seems clear that the relationship between spiritual director and visionary was indeed complex and in some cases it was perhaps not always entirely healthy. While still generally positive, Caciola states for some female visionaries “Their main source of male supervision was their confessor, who often acted more as a willing chief devotee than as a stern spiritual director.” (Caciola 2015, 35) Clearly this would have been extremely unhealthy and unproductive for the integrity of the discourse as there would have been the loss of any unbiased or professional application of *discretio spirituum*. This was demonstrated in the relationship of Catherine of Sienna “who did indeed address her confessors and devotees as sons, as they called her “mommy (mamma).” (Caciola 2015, 325) If the intent was to distinguish between spirits and judge whether or not the visionary was listening to the Spirit of God or

some other spirit, these emotional bonds could influence or sway the judgment and impartiality of the spiritual director. At the same time, from a psychological point of view, human beings that spend considerable amounts of time together are likely, especially in pursuit of spiritual knowledge, to form emotional bonds. That is both danger and advantage. Ideally “Visionary and amanuensis were a construction team, working according to a number of culturally determined blueprints - read discourses - to build, to the best of their abilities, the edifice which was the text testifying to the immanence of the divine.” (Voaden 1999, 16)

Hildegard von Bingen Conclusion

It seems that the discourse of *discretio* was far more dance than diagnostic. As a modern, or post-modern, I find this somewhat frustrating. As I read the accounts, stories and writings of how the discourse was invented, reinvented, ignored, added to, misapplied, half-applied and occasionally manipulated, and observed the enormous amount of subjectivity throughout every instance, it seemed that on the whole *discretio spirituum* in the late Middle Ages was frequently an exercise in futility. That conclusion, however, would be a mistake. Since the beginning of the twentieth century, perhaps best marked by the Azusa Street Outpouring, there has been a huge surge of Pentecostalism globally and with it the rise of prophecy and many claiming to be prophets. By what process does the Church judge which of these prophets are legitimately hearing from God and which are being led by some other spirit? Complicating matters further, since the Protestant Reformation, there is no central authority to act as a clearing house. Clergy are under different authorities or no authority and have very different

backgrounds, levels of education with differing and sometimes incompatible theologies. How can we discern the spirits? Given these questions, the discourse of *discretio spirituum* has a very practical appeal. Perhaps by its very nature the pursuit of spiritual truth must be subjective. Until a spiritual litmus test is devised by which we can test the spiritual by or through the material, it always will be completely subjective and fraught with the dangers of deception. While this conclusion is frustrating and unsatisfying, I believe it is nevertheless accurate.

With regards to Hildegard and the Discerning of Spirits, I found this pursuit equally frustrating. As stated above, my intent was to examine the writing of Hildegard, find her teachings on Discerning of Spirits, synthesize them and present them as I did with Bernard of Clairvaux. Yet there were almost no references in Hildegard's letters, teachings or visions referring directly to the *charism*, the discourse or related scriptural teachings. After several weeks I nearly abandoned the subject and choose another person. Yet in pondering the situation it became clear that Hildegard did not write much about *discretio spirituum* because she could not have and should not have. The discourse was a double-edged sword for Hildegard:

It is important to realize that *discretio spirituum*, although supremely influential, is not necessarily, or only, a restrictive factor in the experience of women visionaries. It can also empower them. Because it was so familiar a concept, with knowledge of its components disseminated widely, in a variety of ways, it provided visionary women with a complete model for behaviour and communication, a model which facilitated the communication and acceptance of their divine message. In this sense, *discretio spirituum* offered a means for visionary women to use the prescriptions and proscriptions of ecclesiastical authorities to accomplish their own ends, ends that they understood as divinely ordained. (Voaden 1999, 89)

On one hand, the discourse provided the skeletal backdrop for her ministry; a vocabulary, a framework, ways of interacting and models of how to act, react and to present oneself, an accepted and sanctioned path of acceptance, approval and promotion of the divine imperative she felt. On the other, it was restrictive, cumbersome and subjectively applied. It was a means of legitimacy, but it could quickly be turned against her. Hildegard had internalized the system well, most likely from her earliest days at Disibodenberg learning first-hand from Jutta how to work, move, breathe in and use the system of language, behavior, protocol, bearing and place to not only survive, but to thrive. The ecclesial system of *discretio spirituum* gave her legitimacy and promotion. It would have been missionally and possibly physically suicidal to alter it or even comment on it. Given the broad support she received from Heinrich Bishop of Mainz, Pope Eugenius III, and Bernard, to teach specifically on the process that empowered her would simply make no sense. While Bernard was free to comment, teach and expound the scriptures on the intercourse of discernment because he was male, clergy, an important and well-connected part of the system, due to her *Sitz im Leben* Hildegard could not, and was wise enough and humble enough to comprehend that very unfair fact and to work the system so the Way of the Lord shown to her could be known, promoted and celebrated by others. Although Hildegard could expound no specific teaching on the topic of Discerning of Spirits, her very life is a rich commentary on the subject. She used humility as deftly as a weapon to empower her to write, compose, invent, influence church and governmental politics and even go on three different preaching tours which was unheard of for a female visionary of her era. Yet this “poor little female” accomplished it all. (Newman 1987, 9)

Ignatius of Loyola

Ignatius had not been a holy man. He wasn't particularly evil either, but when the eyes of his heart were opened, he saw something that changed his life and the concept of spiritual discernment forever.

Biography

"Up to his twenty-sixth year the heart of Ignatius was enthralled by the vanities of the world." (I. o. Loyola 1900, 6)

Ignatius was born to Don Beltrán Yañez de Oñez y Loyola and Marina Saenz de Lieona y Balda in 1491 at the castle of Loyola. He was named "Inigo" after St. Enecus but adopted the name "Ignatius" in later years while in Rome. (Pollen 1910) He became a cleric at an early age but for some unknown reason was released from those vows. He grew up in the house of Juan Velásquez de Cuellar, contador Mayor to Ferdinand and Isabella and would likely have attended court. (Pollen 1910) He was involved in court life and intrigues, was overly concerned with his hair and his looks and was "consumed with the desire of winning glory". (Pollen 1910) In 1517 he became a soldier in the army, loved military life and was known for his bravery in action. The French army invaded and held Pampeluna under siege, but Ignatius refused to surrender and during the fighting was wounded in both legs by a cannon ball. (I. o. Loyola 1900, 6) The French

army seized control of the town but as they greatly admired Ignatius' bravery, he was given medical attention and his wounds were treated as best they could. He was carried on a litter to Loyola where further surgeries followed and though he suffered mightily, his health began to improve, though he could not stand for very long. It was at this time that a powerful change took place.

Ignatius enjoyed reading and requested romances to pass away the time while he healed, but because they had no such material present "they gave him The Life of Christ, by Rudolph, the Carthusian, and another book called the Flowers of the Saints, both in Spanish. (I. o. Loyola 1900, 7) By frequent reading of these books, he began to develop a love for spiritual things. This reading led him to meditate on holy things, yet sometimes his mind wandered to "thoughts which he had been accustomed to dwell upon before." (I. o. Loyola 1900, 7) It was during this time that Ignatius would find himself lost in thought, sometimes for hours. Daydreaming may also be an appropriate term. During these periods he began to imagine himself gaining great glory and fame. "He pictured to himself what he should do in honor of an illustrious lady, how he should journey to the city where she was, in what words he would address her, and what bright and pleasant sayings he would make use of, what manner of warlike exploits he should perform to please her." (I. o. Loyola 1900, 7) He was so caught up in these fantasies that it did not occur to him how completely unrealistic they were. Yet his imaginations were not totally devoid of meaning or utility. With the introduction of his new spiritually-oriented reading material came new daydreams. "What if I should do what St. Francis did? What if I should act like St. Dominic?" He pondered over these things continually proposing to himself serious and difficult missions. He seemed to feel a certain readiness for

doing them, with no other reason except this thought: "St. Dominic did this; I, too, will do it. St. Francis did this; therefore, I will do it." (I. o. Loyola 1900, 7) These kinds of daydreams continued for some time producing very little worthwhile, until in a moment of revelation, a new thought occurred. Ignatius noticed that that his perusing's left him with certain feelings. He noticed that the daydreams left him with an emotional residual. "When he was thinking about the things of the world, he took much delight in them, but afterwards, when he was tired and put them aside, he found that he was dry and discontented. But when he thought of going to Jerusalem, barefoot and eating nothing but herbs and undergoing all the other rigors that he saw the saints had endured, not only was he consoled when he had these thoughts, but even after putting them aside, he remained content and happy." (Gallagher 2005, 34) Gallagher says it this way, "When Ignatius ceases reflecting on the worldly project he finds himself 'dry and discontented.' Yet after he has considered the project of imitating the saints, the delight remains. He continues enduringly to be 'content and happy.'" (Gallagher 2005, 35) This reflection on the connection between certain types of thought and their corresponding feelings led to a moment of divine revelation when "his eyes were opened a little". (Gallagher 2005, 35)

At this moment Ignatius steps into a whole new spiritual arena. A contrasting affective experience, linked to two contrasting projects of life, has been taking place in Ignatius's heart, but he has not been aware of it. Now the experience continues to occur, but his spiritual eyes have been opened a little, enough so that he is now aware of these differing patterns within his heart. In this moment, when Ignatius first notices the contrasting affective spiritual experience in his heart, his teaching on discernment of spirits is born. (Gallagher 2005, 35)

Following this revelation Ignatius further pondered the affective consonance and dissonance resulting from these divergent trains of thought. He began to understand that thoughts that left him feeling positive were divine in origin, while thoughts that left him feeling dry and empty

were of demonic sources. With this conclusion the Spiritual Exercises were born and were comprised of three basic steps, “becoming aware, understanding and taking action”. Shortly following this insight Ignatius received an open vision in which he clearly saw the image of Mary with the Infant Jesus. The result of this experiencing this vision was a deep repentance for past sins and a complete removal of sexual desire. Altogether these events were so powerful that Pollen states they caused his conversion to be “complete”. (Pollen 1910) Subsequent to this Ignatius wandered, travelling first to Montserrat then to Manresa. All the while his thoughts were full of repentance and penance. He was troubled by constant thoughts of sins long forgotten and therefore unrepented of. He found a cave and spent time in anguished “prayer, austerities, and contemplation” along with begging for alms. (Pollen 1910) His heart was so forlorn over his sins that he contemplated suicide but there came a sudden resolution, a change in his heart by God, and he found the long sought for peace and afterwards received many “graces and visions”. (Pollen 1910) It was at this time that he began to take notes on what he had experienced during his convalescence that would later become The Spiritual Exercises.

Ignatius then endeavored to take a pilgrimage to Jerusalem which was long, arduous and painful being often hungry, exposed, beaten and even imprisoned. He arrived in the Holy City but did not remain long as the Turkish presence had made it dangerous and the Franciscan monks who had charge of the holy places commanded him to return home which he did once it was made apparent that they had authority from the pope to do this. He began pursuing education and travelled to Barcelona and then Paris where he received his Master of Arts and Doctor of Philosophy on March 14, 1535. It was here that Ignatius “learned by experience how the life of prayer and penance might be combined with that of teaching and study, an

invaluable acquirement to the future founder of the Society of Jesus". (Pollen 1910) Following this Ignatius experienced many more trials such as beatings, imprisonments, plague and constant trouble with Inquisitors. A group of followers formed called the "Company of Jesus" and this group traveled to Rome to get the approval of the pope to begin a new order. There were many obstacles but eventually the new order was approved and named "The Society of Jesus" though they were also called "Jesuits", initially a term of derision. In 1541 Ignatius was elected, under his own protest, the first General, and the Society of Jesus was official.

The Spiritual Exercises, while having been begun twenty years previously in Loyola and later continued in Paris, were taught at Manresa as early as 1522, although it wasn't until 1541 that an official text was produced which was given papal approval in 1548. (Pollen 1910) Ignatius went on to found eight colleges including the notable Roman College and the German College. He remained in charge of the Jesuits, if unofficially, until his death. He attempted retirement in 1541 but it was refused. In 1556 he contracted Roman fever and though expected to recover, he passed away on July 1. He left a powerful legacy of spiritual growth and commitment with many followers that carried on his work.

The Spiritual Exercises and Rules

*I assume that my thoughts are of three sorts, one my own, arising
of my own free choice, the other two coming from outside, one
from the good spirit, the other from the bad spirit.*

(S. I. Loyola 2012)

The Spiritual Exercises are not so much a document to be read and understood as they are four weeks of daily regimen consisting of questions and instruction. It is intended to be undertaken by someone seeking spiritual direction and growth in a retreat setting under the guidance of a trained spiritual director. The purpose is to help the exercitant discover the will of God in regard to their future, and to give them energy and courage to follow that will. The exercitant (under ideal circumstances) is guided through four weeks of meditations: the first week on sin and its consequences, the second on Christ's life on earth, the third on his passion, the fourth on His risen life; and a certain number of instructions (called "rules", "additions", "notes") are added to teach him how to pray, how to avoid scruples, and how to elect a vocation in life without being swayed by the love of self or of the world. (Pollen 1910) It is to these Spiritual Exercises with an emphasis on the Rules that we turn to discover Ignatius' teachings on Discerning of Spirits. It is difficult to estimate the effect The Exercises have had in Christian history. Many volumes have been written to explain, expound and export the notion

that if Christians focus and learn to pay attention to their affective states, that they can recognize the sources of internal thoughts, rejecting the ones emanating from the Enemy of our souls and choosing the ones sent from God. These Exercises have been invaluable to the Church Universal in seeking God's will and direction and continues to do so encompassing a very wide range from Catholicism to the Charismatic Movement. (Coleman 2018) The question that invariably surfaces is this: Is Ignatian Discernment the *charism* of discerning of spirits?

Ignatian Discernment of Spirits seems to be a departure from the previous predominant thinking at the time of Bernard and Hildegard. Ignatius sees discerning of spirits primarily in terms of Consolation or Desolation. Consolation is a feeling of peace and the sign of a Good Spirit operating internally while Desolation is a negative feeling and as such is the product of an Evil Spirit at work. The focus is on identifying which spirit is at work within oneself at a given moment in time. Ignatian spiritual battling has more to do with identifying the spiritual activity within one's own inner space and determining which spiritual influences are operating therein as opposed to attempting to determine the source of spiritual activity and influence in the environment or within someone else. It is important to remember that Ignatius is not writing a primer on spiritual warfare, he has written a retreat manual specifically for serious Christians who have decided to delve deeper into their spiritual lives and plumb the depths of their own souls in order to pursue more perfectly the presence of God. Ignatius was not attempting to write a discourse on *discretio spirituum*, he was attempting to help people recognize the source of spiritual influences within their beings so that they could eliminate that which was detrimental and pursue and accentuate that which was from God. It was a general rather than a

specific approach. The goal was not to precisely identify every specific spirit, it was simply to identify their origin generally in order to choose to allow or eliminate that influence.

The Evolution of Discerning of Spirits

The issue in no small part is influenced by the evolution of what was meant by the term *spirits*. It seems clear that most of Christendom held the belief, and many still do, that there are spiritual entities, invisible yet powerful, that exist to cause evil, destruction and to thwart the plan of God on earth and in others that work to further the advancement of the Kingdom of God. The prime objective of demonic spirits appears to be to influence humans to do works of evil causing harm to themselves and others. They are personal, individual, and are working as a collective. In the book of Daniel 10:13 they have names such as the Prince of Persia and in Luke 8:30 Jesus has a conversation with a demon named Legion. In [That Hideous Strength](#) C.S. Lewis describes them as “macrobes”. In modern times many have begun to doubt the reality of such spiritual forces, yet Bertrand reminds us that “The authentic spiritual person does not waste time asking whether devils exist. One knows through personal experience and spiritual counseling that the ability to uncover their action is a valuable asset. On the one hand it allows us to keep the devil from stifling our consciences; on the other hand, it helps us to find the only sure foothold in these encounters. The fact that arguing with the devil or with ourselves serves no other purpose than that of getting entangled further still.” (Bertrand 2001, 4) Yet as is often the case in Christianity, theological consensus appears with a frequency similar to that of unicorns. Ignatian Discernment is not concerned with identifying names or specific types of

entities. It is not an attempt to identify a particular angel or demon either in name or type. It is simply a way to recognize the origin of a particular thought or train of thought or affection as being generally from God or the Devil. There is no casting out or dramatic spiritual battles, it is simply an exercise to help people identify sources of internal movements and then to choose the good source while rejecting the bad.

The evolution of *discretio spirituum* is documented well by Lienhard. He traces a particular progression in how *discretio* was perceived in the teaching of John Cassian. Cassian was a disciple of John Chrysostom in Constantinople.

Chrysostom twice discusses the phrase “discernment of spirits.” In the first place, he explains that Corinth was, in Paul's time, heavily addicted to Greek customs, so that soothsayers abounded. For this reason, Corinthian Christians received discernment of spirits, “so as to discern and know who is speaking by a clean spirit and who by an unclean.” In the second place, Chrysostom writes: “What is 'discernings of spirits’? It is knowing who is a spiritual man [*pneumatikos*] and who is not; who is a prophet and who is a deceiver,” and explains that Paul wanted prophecy to be respected (referring to 1 Thess 5:20-21), but that false prophets abounded at that time. For Chrysostom, therefore, discernment of spirits was a gift whereby a Christian could identify the kind of spirit that spoke through a man (soothsayer, prophet or deceiver—i.e., false prophet) and also distinguish different kinds of persons, those who are spiritual from those who are not. (Lienhard 1980, 5-6)

For Chrysostom discerning of spirits was about actual spirits. Yet his disciple would present a different idea.

At the beginning of the conference Cassian cites 1 Cor 12:10 ("*discretio spirituum*")—the only time he does so—and calls this gift "the greatest reward of divine grace." But the "spirits," for Cassian, are not demons but rather spirits that rise up in the monk himself ("*ascendentium in sese spirituum*"). Moreover, when he goes on to speak of acquiring ("*conquiescere*") discernment, he writes that this is done by humility and that the test of humility consists in submitting all one's actions and even thoughts to the judgment of

the elders and acquiescing in their decisions on all matters. Cassian calls discernment the *fortis* and *radix* of all virtues and shows by a number of cautionary tales that a terrible end awaits an ascetic who lacks it. But this discernment is a form of moderation, and it is an acquired virtue. Cassian is aware that Paul mentions "spirits," but he is unsure of what to do with them. (Lienhard 1980, 25-26)

The word "spirits" begins to take on a new meaning. While the idea of malevolent spiritual entities continue, as is illustrated richly in Athanasius' The Life of Antony, the meaning begins to shift:

Like Athanasius' Antony, Pityrion takes "spirits" as referring to evil spirits. But these are no longer the demons of the desert, but rather the passions—or at least it is the passion that is experienced, and Pityrion teaches that a demon stands behind it. As an example, he adds: "Once you have conquered gluttony, you also drive out its demon." Discernment is no longer called a gift or a grace; in fact, it has begun to lose its importance. The important thing is no longer discernment of spirits or of demons, but of passions. This shift is symptomatic of a change in the understanding of discernment of spirits, and this relatively early text is an important piece of evidence for the beginning of that change. (Lienhard 1980, 15)

The idea here is that spiritual warfare changed conceptually from one being at war with an evil spirit to being at war with one's inner self. If the Christian conquered their personal sin of gluttony, then the spiritual force behind it was also defeated. There was no need to discern spirits because innate passions were the enemy, not a spiritual entity. "On the second question, the identity of the 'spirits': the Antiochene exegetes thought primarily of the demons who were believed to inspire soothsayers, who had to be distinguished from prophets in the Church. Origen thinks of the good and evil spirits who inhabit the sublunary air. Athanasius is concerned with the highly individualistic, personal demons who plague the ascetic with all kinds of tricks and deceptions. After Athanasius, there is a quickly growing tendency to identify the demons with the passions, or even more specifically with the eight capital sins." (Lienhard 1980, 25)

Discerning of Spirits was understood less and less as a *charism* necessary to identify spirits behind prophetic speech or motivations and came to be seen as a virtue or skill that could be acquired with experience. For some like Benedict it became a kind of meta-virtue, a “control on other virtues”. (Lienhard 1980, 24) Discerning of spirits was becoming thought of as a “technique needed by every ascetic to prevent him from falling victim to excess or bad judgment”. (Lienhard 1980, 26) At this point it should be clarified that this stream of thought was not the only one concerning *discretio spirituum*. It was one stream among many, but was becoming increasingly prevalent. Spirits were understood by some as passions, feelings, affectations, even moods. This concept survives in modern vernacular with phrases like “Christmas spirit”, “That’s the spirit!”, “low spirits”, “good spirits”, “community spirit”, even having “school spirit” or “spirit rallies”.

Sluhovsky also works to detail the historical development of Discerning of Spirits. In the chapter “Discernment” he catalogs several attempts (notably Gerson and Langenstein) to codify or at least classify methods to discern spirits and how each attempt ultimately failed. These endeavors almost always focused on visionaries, mostly female, and pointed mainly to behavior as the way to tell which spirit was in operation. Inevitably the arguments became circular and each failed. Sluhovsky concludes that due to changes in forms of mysticism and through the popular influence of the Spiritual Exercises that there were fewer visionaries and increasing self-policing of experience. He surmises that these changes caused the notion of direct demonic influence and the need for Discerning of Spirits to fade. One point of interest here is that he says that “Demonic possession was now defined solely by reference to a few preternatural signs, such as the ability to speak in tongues and to reveal hidden secrets.” (Sluhovsky 2007,

267) It is surprising that the Church would reach this conclusion since *glossolalia* and prophetic utterances are biblically encouraged and promoted as signs of *divine* possession. “Despise not prophesying” and “you may all prophesy” are imperatives given by the Apostle Paul. (1 Thess. 5:20 and 1. Cor. 14:32) He instructs the Corinthians that Prophecy in a known language is better than one in an unknown language as it will reveal the mysteries of people’s hearts so that they will know God is real and among them. (1 Cor. 14:24-25) Paul also declares that he speaks in tongues more than all them put together. (1 Cor. 14:18) If this is the case then by the criteria pointed by Sluhovsky above, one must conclude that Paul was possessed by an evil spirit. Yet this is obviously not so. They declared the very *charisms* given by the Holy Spirit for the growth and edification of the church to be signs of the Devil and with that the baby is firmly thrown out with the bathwater. Perhaps it was easier to get rid of the confusing *charisms* than to have to try to figure out what was God and what was not. No wonder cessationism later gained such a stronghold. Into these very muddy theological waters sails Ignatius and the Spiritual Exercises. In order to answer the question of whether or not Ignatian Discernment is actually the *charism of discretio spirituum*, we turn to the Rules to briefly analyze Rules One through Five with this question at the forefront.

The Rules of St. Ignatius

The Rules are primarily an outline of how spiritual forces work within human beings. They provide a way to recognize how God is typically at work and how the Enemy usually works within human emotions to lead or guide people in their respective directions. The Rules are not

commands or laws that must be followed but instead they are a descriptive outline of how to recognize spiritual forces at work within us. “They are directed, first, toward instructing us concerning the elements involved in discernment of spirits and, second, toward giving us practical norms regarding the corresponding action to be taken with respect to the instruction we have received. They are concise guidelines related to specific spiritual realities in discernment, containing directives concerning how to handle them. They are practical rather than speculative. In this sense, Ignatius calls his text a set of rules.” (Gallagher 2005, 37-38) The Rules are a Strategic Guide for those that desire to grow deeper in their relationship with God to learn to cooperate with Him while also learning the strategies of the Enemy including concrete ways to recognize him and specific actions to take to counter those movements. In some ways they are like directions for a spiritual battle or chess match. The Rules rely on what Gallagher calls the “Three-Fold Paradigm: Become Aware; Understand; Take Action: Accept-Reject”. (Gallagher 2005, 38)

Becoming Aware is an emotional and spiritual designation. It begins with that moment of the dawning of spiritual awakening, that first glimpse or insight into spiritual reality.

In Ignatius’s own experience this is the moment when his “eyes were opened a little”. In the first situation stirrings of thought and affectivity are occurring and impacting the direction of a person’s spiritual journey, but the person does not perceive this, is not aware that this is happening. In the second situation these inner stirrings are taking place, but the person perceives this, now is aware that this is occurring. These are the persons whose spiritual eyes are now “opened a little” and who have noticed their interior spiritual experience. Without this transition no discernment of spirits is possible; “becoming aware” is the gateway to all discernment. And we cannot take this awareness for granted. How aware are we of our own interior spiritual experience? How habitually are we aware of it? How often during the day do we advert to it? Do we ever consciously stop to become aware of what is stirring spiritually within? This is a major question in the spiritual life, and it cannot be emphasized too much. It is the issue that Ignatius highlights at the outset of his rules for discernment. (Gallagher 2005, 39)

Without this initial awakening, this awareness, this view into the reality of the spiritual realm, discerning of spirits is not a possibility. Ignatius is proposing a deep dive into one's own interior life, an exploration of inner space. It is the awareness of the existence of this inner place that makes discernment accessible. It should be noted that all interior space is not the same. Many people are aware of an inner life or inner space of thoughts, feelings, reasonings, emotional stirring, even thoughts and perceptions of right and wrong. They have a "psychological" and "moral awareness", but this is different and separate from a "spiritual awareness". (Gallagher 2005, 42) This spiritual space within us is hidden. "It is, however, an awareness with immense importance for the whole of his spiritual life as what follows in his narrative powerfully demonstrates. We find here, therefore, not a moral nor a simply psychological awareness but a specifically spiritual awareness, of the greatest value for the life of faith." (Gallagher 2005, 44) Though it is invisible, this spiritual inner space it is a kind of meta-reality in which spiritual forces vie for our attention and obedience through the planting of thoughts and feelings to guide either towards life or destruction. Without this awareness, people will be ignorant of the deeper motivations struggling within. Why then, if it is so important, is this Spiritual Space invisible to so many? Gallagher posits that:

Goods of the senses are more visible, more tangible, and more readily apparent to us than those of the mind and of the spiritual order. Consequently, we are easily drawn 'without,' toward what our senses can grasp, while greater effort is required to attend to the less perceptible world 'within.' Electronic means of filling the quiet spaces continue to multiply: portable televisions, cell phones, the Internet, and the like. A secularized worldview questions faith and the reality itself of an interior spiritual life. Accordingly, the value of noticing different spiritual voices in our hearts is simply unrecognized. (Gallagher 2005, 40-41)

Simply put, we are unaware because we are distracted. We are focused outwardly because we are thrust outwardly with constant media bombardment, information overload, celebrity worship and non-stop sensory input. On top of this, there is an active push in some quadrants of our increasingly secularized world to shame faith and relegate spiritual things to an old-fashioned, hate-based, culturally insensitive, tone deaf, bigoted monolith that is no longer relevant or wanted in a woke world. This interior life of the spiritual is not merely invisible, it is actively shunned. We are not aware of the spiritual life because we are too distracted, we don't believe it exists and don't want it if it does. What would Ignatius do? He would tell us that all of this is an example of exactly how the Enemy works. Let us move to an analysis of The Rules.

Rule One

In the persons who go from mortal sin to mortal sin, the enemy is commonly used to propose to them apparent pleasures, making them imagine sensual delights and pleasures in order to hold them more and make them grow in their vices and sins. In these persons the good spirit uses the opposite method, pricking them and biting their consciences through the process of reason.

(S. I. Loyola 2018, 71)

This Rule is for the person who is beginning the Exercises and who struggles commonly with mortal sins. Ignatius is helping them by exposing the normal process used by the Enemy to

tempt them and keep them from escaping the power of sin. He refers to both the enemy and the good spirit. It seems clear that when using these phrases, he is not referring to impersonal forces or strictly natural stirring of the passions. Ignatius means that there are actual, real, personal and individual spiritual entities that are working within the interior life or soul to sway human beings one way or the other. The enemy uses the imagination to propose pleasures to tempt the soul in order to maintain control. The good spirit uses the mind and reason to stir the conscience in order to free the soul from the trap of the enemy. Ignatius does not believe that the impulses, affectations or passions themselves are the enemy, but these are used by the enemy as well as the good spirit to communicate, lead and sometimes manipulate personally, though subconsciously.

Rule Two

In the persons who are going on intensely cleansing their sins and rising from good to better in the service of God our Lord, it is the method contrary to that in the first Rule, for then it is the way of the evil spirit to bite, sadden and put obstacles, disquieting with false reasons, that one may not go on; and it is proper to the good to give courage and strength, consolations, tears, inspirations and quiet, easing, and putting away all obstacles, that one may go on in well doing.

(S. I. Loyola 2018, 71)

In Rule 2 Ignatius moves from the person who struggles regularly with mortal sin to the person who wants to grow deeper in the things of God, beyond the carnal life. We are again presented with the two opposing forces idea, but in this rule, the strategy has changed. While in Rule One the good spirit bites the conscience of the person who lives from sin to sin, for the person who wants to grow deeper it is the evil spirit who bites with false logic, guilt and shame to discourage them from pressing in. It is the good spirit that works within the interior life to console, exhort and encourage the seeker to keep going regardless of the opposition. There is no advice to seek out or identify any specific spirit, there is simply the admonition to recognize the source as generally being good or evil. The point of this rule is to provide the seeker with the usual strategy of both spiritual sides so they can clearly recognize which is the source of the thoughts within them and having recognized the source, to know which to allow and which to discard. In a sense this is certainly a form of Discerning of Spirits because the exercitant is quite literally distinguishing between spiritual Kingdoms at work within them. However, is this the *charism* at work or something closer to Emotional Intelligence?

The Spiritual Exercises presents a process to teach Christians how to recognize spiritual influences within their inner space and then having learned this skill to seek the Godly influences and reject the demonic ones. While one could certainly make the argument that the leading and guiding influence of the Holy Spirit is to be assumed and indeed the Exercises count on it, this may not necessarily be the *charism* of *discretio spirituum*. The discovery of the spiritual sources behind thoughts through the resulting consolation or desolation is an exercise in learning to see one's own emotional state as evidence or markers of particular spiritual influences. Again, this is not to say the Holy Spirit is not involved, He certainly is or there is no

point to the Exercises at all. However, is the means of this spiritual source-recognition intellectual or charismatic? It could be argued that there is rarely a situation where there is not some kind of combination of the two. In any situation in which a *charism* is granted there is a mixture to some degree of the work of the Holy Spirit and also the person through whom the gift is manifested. The personality, intellect, emotional state, personal history, vocabulary, sense of humor and personal style will all effect how the *charism* is used and presented. It should not be assumed that while a *charism* is at work that the person through which it comes is somehow put on hold and the Holy Spirit assumes total control. This is not a form of Divine Possession in which the gifted person is taken over and their mind, will and body is borrowed by the Divine entity. This scenario might actually be preferred as it would certainly be purer, with no admixture of the human propensity for mistakes, foibles, agendas and adding or subtracting from the work of the Holy Spirit. Yet this is always the case. It is impossible to do otherwise. Not everything uttered in a prophetic word can be taken as purely from the Holy Spirit. There are frequently additions, omissions, misunderstandings of the Holy Spirit's message by the messenger, misapplications and misinterpretations. This is why in 1 Cor. 14 that while all are allowed to prophesy, there is also the command to judge the prophetic words. Sometimes people have bad days, give messages that seem good but aren't from God, are spoken out of pain or rejection or sometimes out of an overly joyful exuberance. They may have prophesied accurately many times before, but on a certain day, they simply miss it. This is one of the difficulties of discerning of spirits and the other *charisms*. They will never operate perfectly because people do not operate perfectly. The temptation then is to eliminate *charisms* if they can't always be pure and perfect. However, this would be in direct violation of

the scriptural command to “despise not prophesying”. It would be a mistake to throw out the very tools God has provided for ministry for a form of Christianity with no power. Does it make sense to eliminate *charisms* because humans sometimes make a mess of them? With spiritual growth, loving accountability, maturity, grace and nurturing discipleship, the *charisms* can be received by grace, developed, honed and employed effectively. As people learn the gifts they can also learn to recognize and distinguish between their emotional state and what God is saying or doing through them. It will take time and practice in a healthy, nurturing environment rooted firmly in the anchoring power of scripture, authentically loving accountability and personal holiness, but it can be done. The Spiritual Exercises is a fantastic place to start that journey, but is it actually the *charism* of discerning of spirits? We will return to this question below.

Rule Three: Of Spiritual Consolation

I call it consolation when some interior movement in the soul is caused, through which the soul comes to be inflamed with love of its Creator and Lord; and when it can in consequence love no created thing on the face of the earth in itself, but in the Creator of them all. Likewise, when it sheds tears that move to love of its Lord, whether out of sorrow for one's sins, or for the Passion of Christ our Lord, or because of other things directly connected with His service and praise. Finally, I call consolation every increase of hope, faith and charity, and all interior joy which calls and attracts to heavenly things and to the salvation of one's soul, quieting it and giving it peace in its Creator and Lord.
(S. I. Loyola 2018, 71)

Rules Three and Four are critical to Ignatian Discernment. It could be said that within these Rules hangs the balance of the Spiritual Exercises. It was the recognition and awareness

these feelings or movements that first led to Ignatius' awakening. But what are the feelings of consolation and desolation? Habito describes them this way: "Consolation refers to a feeling of inner peace, harmony, contentment, and joy, accompanied by a general sense of well-being. It may also come with a feeling of uplifting exhilaration, yet grounded in a deep sense of tranquility. Desolation refers to a sense of listlessness, anxiety, and disharmony, a feeling of being low even to a point of depression." (Habito 2013) Many if not most people feel these kinds of emotions on a regular basis though perhaps not always with the extreme peaks or valleys of euphoria or depression. Happiness and sadness are quite common to the human experience. The difference is awareness. While most feel emotions, and indeed we often ride an emotional roller coaster, many people are simply carried along with the experience of the moment without analyzing what these feelings are, why they are experiencing them and most importantly to the task here, their spiritual origin. While many are intensely aware of *what* they are feeling, many do not question *why*. For the spiritually awakened, feelings are acknowledged, analyzed and attributed to a spiritual source. Ignatian Discernment is the practice, discipline and art of distinguishing between the spiritual sources of feelings of Consolation and Desolation in order to choose the better path.

At this point it is important to note that the Ignatian concept of Consolation should not be confused with generally good feelings. Consolation is more than "good vibrations" or happy thoughts and feelings. Consolation has a very specific meaning. It is a movement within the heart, a movement initiated by the Holy Spirit, that results in intense feelings of love *for God*. This love is incapable of loving created things merely for themselves, it loves them because God created them and because He is moving in them. It furiously loves the *Him* in *them*. This love for

Jesus will have the effect of moving the lover to tears of regret and repentance over what their sin cost Him personally in the passion and perhaps tears of joy over other things that God has done. Consolation is all the hope, faith, love and joy we have from pursuing Him and being pursued by Him. It is the peace found in His presence. Consolation is a good feeling, but far more than mere good feelings. It is the moving of love, joy and peace in the person of Christ communing with the one that He loves. It is a kind of peaceful ecstasy found in the person who is the Prince of Peace.

Rule Four: Spiritual Desolation

I call desolation all the contrary of the third rule, such as darkness of soul, disturbance in it, movement to things low and earthly, the unquiet of different agitations and temptations, moving to want of confidence, without hope, without love, when one finds oneself all lazy, tepid, sad, and as if separated from his Creator and Lord. Because, as consolation is contrary to desolation, in the same way the thoughts which come from consolation are contrary to the thoughts which come from desolation.

(S. I. Loyola 2018, 71)

If Consolation is the presence of the Prince of Peace, Desolation is the feeling of His absence. Desolation is not a loss of salvation or a return to an unconverted state, but it is an

emotional state brought on by a malevolent spirit to shock a person out of or to prevent them from reaching consolation. This is shown by Ignatius' use of "as if separated". (Ibid) The believer is not separated from God, but *feels* as though they are. This is sometimes referred to as a spiritual attack or an attack of the enemy. Ignatius wants the retreatant to be aware of the tactics of the enemy in his ability to create affectations within their own soul. This is done to cause confusion, doubt and fear. Desolation can be so powerful and all-encompassing that it can cause the Christian to doubt the reality of their experience of Consolation and even the authenticity of their relationship with Christ. As such Desolation should not be thought of as merely feeling down, confused or mildly depressed. It is a devastating affect like one who has loved and been in love but lost that love. It is an unrelenting feeling of hopelessness, bereft of joy and the intense perception that one is truly and utterly alone. It is a kind of Hell on earth. It is of course an illusion, but it is an incredibly powerful illusion. In this state the Christian becomes spiritually tired, lackadaisical, Luke-warm, and does not have the energy or will to pursue God or even to want to do good.¹ It is Ignatius' aim to forewarn the exercitant so that when these kinds of feeling begin, they are able to recognize them and their source and to deal with them appropriately. This is the crux of Ignatian Discernment. To be aware of what one is feeling, to recognize the source of those feelings and choose an appropriate course of action.

¹ In Chapter Four Gallagher tells a series of stories to illustrate Spiritual Desolation. He does a marvelous job of telling very simple and relatable stories that add much to helping us understand what Desolation might look like in real life.

Rule Five

In time of desolation never to make a change; but to be firm and constant in the resolutions and determination in which one was the day preceding such desolation, or in the determination in which he was in the preceding consolation. Because, as in consolation it is rather the good spirit who guides and counsels us, so in desolation it is the bad, with whose counsels we cannot take a course to decide rightly.

(S. I. Loyola 2018, 71)

Ignatius counsels the seeker that when one is under attack in a time of Desolation to make no change, but to remain steadfast in keeping the commitments and following the decisions made either before the time of Desolation or in Consolation. The reason being that when in a state of Desolation, the exercitant is heavily under the influence of an evil spirit which causes human reasoning to be confused and unreliable. The path forward and out of Desolation is to stay the course previously determined when thoughts and decisions were guided by the good Spirit. This may seem obvious, but when inside the cloud of Desolation, when one is doubting even their own salvation, many confusing thoughts may materialize and can seem right. Many have left the faith under just such an attack. Rule Five is good advice indeed.

The remaining Rules, while incredibly insightful and informative, basically involve guidelines for action and further detection of the strategies of both the good and bad spirits. They follow the Awareness – Understand – Take Action paradigm. They instruct the exercitant on how to achieve awareness, how to understand what is happening to them and how to proactively proceed to go on to greater depths. However, as they do not inform our query, we leave the rules and proceed to answer the question of whether or not Ignatian Discernment is *discretio spirituum*.

Ignatian Discernment: *Discretio Spirituum* or Something Else?

The Spiritual Exercises are wholly dependent on a process of discernment. It is a deep dive into one's own interior world in order to read the affective states to determine their spiritual source and to react or respond accordingly. "By self-examination of our own internal conscience, Ignatius believes we can find and discern the non-human sources of moral ideas that either darken or purify the human soul: good and evil spirits or the Holy Spirit of God and the devil." (Klingenschmitt 2012, 98) Gallagher voices a similar thought:

Discernment, in the sense intended here, signifies the process of distinguishing one thing or idea from another. To discern (from the Latin *discernere*—to separate things according to their qualities, to distinguish between one thing and another) is to identify one spiritual reality as different from another. The phrase of spirits describes what is to be discerned, that is, which spiritual realities are to be distinguished, one from the other. The word spirits, as Ignatius uses it in this context, indicates those affective stirrings in the heart—joy, sadness, hope, fear, peace, anxiety, and similar feelings—with their related thoughts, that influence our life of faith and our progress toward God.

At this point, therefore, we may say that, for Ignatius, discernment of spirits describes the process by which we seek to distinguish between different kinds of spiritual stirrings in our hearts, identifying those that are of God and those that are not, in order to accept the former and to reject the latter. (Gallagher 2005, 24)

Gallagher sees discerning of spirits within an Ignatian context as distinguishing between good and evil spiritual realities. He understands Ignatian Discernment to be a type or form of discerning of spirits. "The term (good spirit) expresses as well God's working in us through the gift of grace implanted in us at baptism: sanctifying grace, the theological, cardinal, and moral virtues, the gifts of the Holy Spirit, and individual charisms." (Gallagher 2005, 58) For Gallagher Discerning of Spirits is part of the work of God imparted at Baptism. The act of discerning the spiritual source of affective stirrings is a learned art, ability or skill. Consider the following:

Here, as elsewhere in speaking of discernment (SpirEx, 10, 334), Ignatius refers to the ordinary ways in which the enemy is accustomed to act. Reflection on the spiritual experience he encounters reveals to him that the enemy, in certain kinds of people and in certain spiritual situations, ordinarily acts in certain ways. The codification in succinct and practical language of the enemy's customary patterns of action is one of the many efficacious aids Ignatius offers us in his rules. Once we have learned these patterns well, we will discern them more quickly and more accurately. (Gallagher 2005, 57)

He describes Ignatius as having learned the strategy of the enemy so well as to have been able to codify them and assumes that others can learn these patterns as well. If Ignatian Discernment is something that can be learned, if it is about recognizing affective patterns and strategies, is Ignatian Discernment *discretio spirituum* or something else? If Ignatian Discernment is primarily an act of the cognitive mind, the intellect, is it a *charism* or simply the mind reading a pattern of emotion and reaching a rational conclusion? Is it revelation, reason or something else?

Emotional Intelligence

The concept of Emotional Intelligence is an exciting, if controversial, field of study. The theory of Emotional Intelligence (EQ following) is that by consciously being aware of affective states and the effects they have on the rational mind, that a person can recognize emotive patterns and use that information to exercise self-control and to make better choices to reach desired outcomes. "Emotional intelligence involves a set of skills that defines how effectively you perceive, understand, use and manage your own and others' feelings. It is the most important factor in how well you get on with others professionally as well as personally."

(Hasson 2015) Is it possible that Ignatius' eye-opening experience was actually an early form of EQ? Ignatius realized that his experience of feeling Consolation and Desolation was more than random feelings. He began to see a pattern in them and from that information made reasoned deductions. Ignatius understood that emotions are a vital source of important internal information. This is the fundamental principle behind the idea of EQ:

The ability theory of EI highlights how emotions serve as a source of important information. For example, the feelings of people in a situation provide important signals about what is going on and how those individuals will interact. Analyzing situations in

part according to their emotional information can help people make better decisions. People often report that their head and heart are in conflict when making important decisions. Choosing between the head and the heart is a necessity only so long as they are viewed as two separate systems. If, however, thoughts and feelings are seen as integrated— as they are viewed in the ability theory of EI— then emotional intelligence can be used to reason through at least some of the conflicts, understanding a dilemma more completely, and be used to integrate both thoughts about feelings, and feelings about thoughts.” (Ciarrochi, Forgas and Mayer 2006, 21-22)

Daniel Goleman, perhaps the Father of EQ, says it this way, “We can be effective only when the two systems—our emotional brain and our thinking brain—work together. That working relationship, which encompasses most of what we do in life, is the essence of emotional intelligence.” (Goleman 1998, 21) This sounds very much like Ignatius. It becomes even more familiar when we recall the Three-Fold Paradigm discussed by Gallagher above: Become Aware; Understand; Take Action: Accept-Reject. Indeed, Goleman’s first point of EQ in the article is Self-Awareness. This is also the starting point for most writers on the subject of EQ, but this is not where the similarities end. It is important to note that Ignatius did not receive information from positive feelings alone. It could be argued that he garnered as much or even more information from the negative feelings of Desolation. He formed a very detailed action plan in the Rules on how to deal with these negative emotions and what they mean, another sign of EQ. Forgas and Wyland echo this idea stating that, “The emotionally intelligent individual understands that mild negative mood states are not always harmful and can indeed be beneficial and confer cognitive benefits in certain problem-solving tasks and in certain social situations.” (Ciarrochi, Forgas and Mayer 2006, 92) They go on to say that there are times when negative affect is actually beneficial and can aid in clearer analytical thinking. This is true in Ignatian Discernment as feelings of Desolation actually reveal the strategy of the enemy. Points

of commonality are also found in the Six Seconds Model of EQ. “This model of EQ-in-Action begins with three important pursuits: to become more aware (noticing what you do), more intentional (doing what you mean), and more purposeful (doing it for a reason).” (Freedman 2021) This is almost identical to the Ignatian Three-Fold Paradigm: Become Aware; Understand; Take Action: Accept-Reject. The meanings diverge somewhat and Freedman goes on to add steps to further explain his model, but it remains very similar.

With all these similarities, can we conclude that Ignatian Discernment is EQ? It is clear that there is substantial overlap between the two and that Ignatius was far ahead of his time in understanding human emotional intelligence. It is also true that Ignatius understood that affective information is necessary and real information that reveals the motions of inner space. Yet Ignatius recognized that not all the forces behind his emotions originated solely within himself and that is where he differs from EQ. While there are multiple similarities between Ignatian Discernment and EQ, they are not the same. Ignatian Discernment is something more. While Ignatius certainly understood his affective states as emotional information, he saw that these affects did not originate within himself. As he paid attention to his feelings, he recognized patterns in them which indicate organized thought, thus intelligence, but the intellect behind the inner movements did not originate within himself. While EQ is understanding and regulating one’s own emotions and even understanding and helping to control emotional situations within one’s environment, it does not acknowledge inner affect as having a source other than the individual. Clearly, Ignatian Discernment has elements similar to EQ but is something more. The theory behind EQ is that it is a necessary component or ability that causes

IQ to work effectively and at a higher, more beneficial level. Is there yet another intelligence that further informs EQ and IQ? Could this intelligence be Ignatian Discernment?

Spiritual Intelligence

Spiritual Intelligence (SQ hereafter) is a more recent idea than EQ and perhaps even more controversial. The idea behind SQ is that because human beings are spiritual creatures, unlike other animal life they have a third source of intelligence. “Unlike I.Q., which computers have, and E.Q., which exists in higher mammals and some other living beings like ants and honey bees, S.Q. is uniquely human and perhaps the most fundamental of the three. It is linked to humanity’s need for meaning, an issue very much at the forefront of people’s minds.”

(Manghrani 2011, 43) However, what does spirituality have to do with intelligence? This is an interesting question in an increasingly secular world where spirituality and religion are often seen more as sources of irrational belief than of intelligence. The concept of SQ may provide a helpful solution to this kind of bias. Emmons postulates that:

Religion and intelligence are two words that are not often used together. Linking spirituality with intelligence can provide an antidote for antireligious intellectualism (Marsden, 1997) in which religious and spiritual world views are seen as irrational, emotional, and illogical, akin to superstitious thinking. Arguing from a similar perspective in their theory of emotional intelligence, Mayer and Salovey (1997) began with the premise that emotions and intelligence are often viewed as incompatible because the former are perceived as an “intrinsically irrational and disruptive force” (p. 9). Instead of dichotomizing faith and reason, this way of thinking about spirituality

recognizes that spiritual processing can contribute to effective cognitive functioning rather than preclude it. (Emmons 2000, 19)

If SQ can contribute to better cognitive function and is as necessary as EQ for the maximization of IQ, what exactly is SQ? For Emmons SQ is a “set of capacities and abilities that enable people to solve problems and attain goals in their everyday lives”. (Emmons 2000, 1) He identifies the five components of SQ as: “(a) the capacity for transcendence; (b) the ability to enter into heightened spiritual states of consciousness; (c) the ability to invest everyday activities, events, and relationships with a sense of the sacred; (d) the ability to utilize spiritual resources to solve problems in living; and (e) the capacity to engage in virtuous behavior (to show forgiveness, to express gratitude, to be humble, to display compassion).” (Emmons 2000, 1) It should be noted that he later dropped the last component due to criticism from Mayer. (Skrzypińska 2021, 502) Manghrani sees SQ “as referring to the skills, abilities and behaviors required to develop and maintain a relationship to the Ultimate Source of all Being, succeed in the search for meaning in life, find a moral and ethical path which guide us through life, and act out our sense of meaning and values in our personal life and in our interpersonal relationships to handle our day to day problems of life.” (Manghrani 2011, 42) While there seems to be a kind of general agreement as to what SQ is, definitions are divergent. Zohar and Marshall understand SQ as:

...the intelligence with which we access our deepest meanings, values, purposes, and highest motivations. It is how we use these in our thinking processes, in the decisions that we make, and the things that we think it is worthwhile to do. These decisions include how we make and how we allocate our material wealth. Spiritual intelligence is our moral intelligence, giving us an innate ability to distinguish right from wrong. It is the intelligence with which we exercise goodness, truth, beauty, and compassion in our lives. It is, if you like, the soul’s intelligence, if you think of the soul as that channeling capacity in human beings that brings things up from the deeper and richer dimensions of imagination and spirit into our daily lives, families, organizations, and institutions. (Zohar and Marshall 2004, 2)

Manghrani proffers that perhaps this soul or spiritual center is located in part of the brain, the “God Spot” in the Temporal Lobe. (Manghrani 2011, 43) While the study of SQ will no doubt continue to be developed and debated, is SQ what Ignatius tapped into? Is SQ the source of Ignatian Discernment?

When one compares Ignatius’ story and the Spiritual Exercises to Emmon’s Core Components of Spiritual Intelligence above, it is clear that he meets every one. It is therefore safe to state that St. Ignatius certainly had the ability of SQ as it is defined today. It could be assumed that he always had this innate ability and that perhaps it was through this that he was able to connect with God and to recognize spiritual movements within himself. Yet by his own admission he had never been spiritually inclined before he was wounded and was more interested in his hair than spiritual things. Even while recuperating he still fantasized about the romantic deeds he might accomplish for a certain lady more than he did about the Saints and spiritual things. Yet over time his thoughts began to run more in a theological direction to the point that he experienced a conversion. It wasn’t so much that he delved deep inside his being and discovered his spiritual center as it was that he received revelation from God; and there are other differences.

In the Rules, Ignatius is very clear that all things spiritual are not good. Spirituality is not value-neutral. While I certainly have not read all there is to read about SQ it is apparent that when referring to the spiritual, most authors assumed that “spiritual” equals “good”. Ignatius was under no such impression. He understood that spiritual things are not automatically good. Just as some microbes can be beneficial while others are often harmful, macrobes may be well-

intentioned or malevolent spiritual entities. In Ignatius' case, this truth was not something that was taught so much as revealed. In *Consolation and Desolation*, the Saint recognized the affective evidence of two spiritual sides with very different agendas. There is great danger in seeing all things spiritual as good or even neutral. In most of the literature researched for this work on SQ, the authors were almost always in lock-step agreement that religion plays very little part in SQ. There is an insistence that this ability taps into something described as "spiritual" with little or no definition as to what that means. The general feeling is that there is somehow a spiritual component to human beings, perhaps called the soul or spirit, that is deep within. This spiritual center is a sort of communication hub that connects us with each other and perhaps taps into some "Ultimate Source of All Being". SQ is not attached to morality or specific behaviors though it may be connected to higher human ideals. As noted above Emmons originally associated "the capacity to engage in virtuous behavior (to show forgiveness, to express gratitude, to be humble, to display compassion)", but later removed this as a marker of SQ. For most of these writers, SQ is an ability to tap into something spiritual within one's self in order to live a deeper, fuller, more meaningful existence and of course, for problem solving. Yet there are obvious dangers. If SQ actually exists, why is it assumed that spirituality is automatically good? Most of the world religions understand that there is good and evil in the spirit world. To take the stance that spiritual things are always good or neutral is to ignore a great deal of evidence and to create openings for beings that may have evil intentions. Those that do not believe in evil are blind to it when it appears and may even call it good. It could be at this point where science unwittingly becomes sorcery.

It is interesting to note that the notions of SQ and EQ were developed largely in the business world with the goal of producing more tuned in leaders and therefore more productive environments and employees. The idea is simple, using SQ makes more money. If business leaders can tap into their own spiritual intelligence to connect with their colleagues, employees, consumers and other spiritual sources of information, it will enable them to communicate better, access greater depths of imagination and creativity and to access a higher source of being in order to move more product. Revelation is directed at revenue. One has to wonder if the desire to separate spirituality from religion and objective morality is so that spirituality or spiritual information can be used or accessed, unfettered by right and wrong, to accomplish whatever ends are desired. If SQ is an innate ability to tap into spiritual realities, to acquire mysterious, hidden information, it could be very dangerous. If SQ can open a human being to a spiritual world that everyone assumes is full of only good entities, then SQ could easily be manipulated by evil ones, particularly if the goal in using it is to make more money, because a gateway opens both ways. The story of the servant girl who could foretell the future because she was captive to a malevolent macrobe and made money for her owners in Acts 16 is a cautionary tale for the misuse of SQ. It is exactly this kind of manipulation and misuse that Ignatius warns against in the Rules. Ignatian Discernment is not SQ.

St. Ignatius Conclusion

At this point we have arrived at the decision that neither EQ nor SQ, though each may be sources of affective information, are not Ignatian Discernment. However, is Ignatian Discernment the *charism of discretio spirituum*? The best explanation may come from Gallagher:

As Fiorito, *Discernimiento y Lucha*, 258–59, writes, discernment of spirits may be obtained in one of two forms: either as a “gift or charism of the Spirit,” or “by application of the rules for discernment.” He continues: “St. Ignatius explains, in his spiritual teaching found in the Spiritual Exercises, the second form, through discernment of ‘the different movements—or spirits—which are caused in the soul, the good, to receive them, and the bad to reject them ...’ (SpirEx, 313); nonetheless he gives repeated and clear proofs of possessing—if one reads his Autobiography and his many letters—the ‘connatural’ grace or charism of discernment. Above all, however, St. Ignatius was given the grace to write—for those who wish to be spiritually discerning through ‘discernment of spirits’—his rules for discernment, which we have examined in this book.” The first path to discernment (as gift or charism of the Spirit) may be simply given by God; the second, common path to discernment (through learning and applying the rules for discernment), occurs gradually and through repeated practice. This second path has been the focus of our reflections in this book as well. (Gallagher 2005, 240)

Ignatian Discernment is a second form or second path of Discerning of Spirits. It is the idea that through observation, listening to one’s inner space, being aware of one’s affective states and questioning their sources, by learning, practice and application the Rules, one can discern spiritual entities and their motivations as well as to be able to counter them or participate with them accordingly. As stated above, Ignatian Discernment as presented in The Exercises and Rules is not *discretio spirituum*, but is another form of Discerning of Spirits. This is not to say it is not valuable. The insight given through the Rules should be mandatory reading for all believers. The elucidation of the tactics of the enemy through the movements within the soul is necessary knowledge and could bring great relief, hope and joy to many struggling to follow Christ but are being thwarted by feelings they do not understand and assume are coming from within

themselves. While Ignatian Discernment is not the *charism*, Ignatius may well have received this concept via another *charism*: prophetic revelation in the gift of prophecy. It is hard to imagine such deep spiritual wisdom originating anywhere else. It was certainly God that opened Ignatius' eyes and led him to understand that his emotions could be used to detect the movements of spiritual warfare and His Church is so much the better for it.

The lives of these three venerable saints reveal different thoughts, approaches and understandings of Discerning of Spirits. Each story reveals enormous contributions that help us to see the complexity and difficulty of defining and describing what the charism is, how it is accessed and how it works. Both the thoughts and reflections, successes and failures, and spiritual battles won and lost have revealed how these faithful people wrestled with the gift to apprehend it, understand it and harness it. We wrestle still. How do faithful believers in the modern world understand Discerning of Spirits? How do we access it and use it in life and ministry? Just what is the charism and how can it be used to enhance pastoral leadership?

Chapter 2

Discerning of Spirits: Definition and Hermeneutic

Up to this point we have examined several historic figures and how they approached, taught and were affected by the concept of Discerning of Spirits, yet we have not attempted to define it. Just what is Discerning of Spirits, what is its purpose and how does it work? How can it be used in a modern pastoral ministry setting today? To answer these questions, the search must begin with the biblical text. We will begin with 1 Cor. 12:10 and follow the trail. It should be noted that a full interpretive treatment of all texts concerning Discerning of Spirits would constitute a Dissertation of its own and while a basic hermeneutical discussion will be presented, a full interpretive treatment is beyond the scope of this project.

ἄλλω δὲ διακρίσεις πνευμάτων

“Now to another discerning of spirits.” This simple phrase has captured the imagination and attention of generations of Christians. It is of course found within the Apostle Paul’s enumeration of some of the *charismata* or gifts of the Holy Spirit in 1 Cor. 12. These gifts are special abilities endowed by the Spirit of God to empower ordinary believers to do extraordinary things. Lienhard states it this way:

The term "discernment of spirits" is found once in the Bible, at 1 Cor. 12:10. Paul is writing there about "spiritual gifts" (*tapnewnatika*). He lists nine examples of these: the utterance of wisdom, the utterance of knowledge, faith, gifts of healing, the working of miracles, prophecy, the ability to distinguish between spirits (*diakriseis pneumatōn*), various kinds of tongues, and the interpretation of tongues (12:8-10). Paul makes three points concerning this variety of gifts: they have a single source ("the same Spirit," "the same Lord," "the same God who inspires them all in every one," "all these are inspired by one and the same Spirit" [w.5-6, 10]); their end is "the common good" (v. 7); and their cause is "inspiration" (*energein* [w. 6, 11]). (Lienhard 1980, 4)

Paul believed in the spirit world. He believed that God Himself is a spirit and that humans have a spirit as well (2 Cor. 3:17-18; 1 Cor. 2:11; Rom. 8:16). He understood that humans were drawn into a great cosmological battle, where the forces of Satan are personally working to destroy and disrupt the plan of God to save humanity from the ravages of sin. (Eph. 6:10-20) Speaking of this, Munzinger states that, “First, it is important to acknowledge how pervasive Paul’s dualistic framework is. There is a cosmological battle of good and evil, which has an effect on all areas of life. Within this battle Paul recognises [sic] the existence of various personal spiritual

beings who possess authority in the spiritual realm.” (Munzinger 2007, 65) In order to really grasp the meaning, we need to see that Paul believes that there literally is a spirit realm or realms. There is a layer of reality superimposed on ours that is powerful and invisible. This is not a psychological phenomenon. It is real and it effects daily human life. Yet the question remains, what is actually meant by διακρίσεις πνευμάτων? What was the Apostle’s purpose and why did he not elaborate further on such an important topic?

Διακρίσεις

Diakrisis is feminine plural noun in the Nominative Case which modifies the word *spirits*. Διακρίσεις is the subject while πνευμάτων is the object. The *spirits* are to be discerned or distinguished, but how are we to more specifically interpret this? What does Paul want us to understand here? Oddly both *diakrisis* and *pneumatôn* only appear three times in scripture. The verbal root is *diakrinô* which Williams translates as “to judge through.” (Williams, *Renewal Theology: Salvation, the Holy Spirit, and Christian Living* 1990, 388) “But it must be noted that both the noun and the verb have a wide range of meaning. It is not at all unlikely that Paul would have used *diakrisis* in 1 Corinthians 12:10 to mean “distinguishing” (among different kinds of spirits) while using *diakrinô* in 14:29 to mean something quite different, such as “evaluate” or “judge” (prophetic utterances). In fact, in 1 Corinthians alone Paul uses the verb *diakrinô* in several senses.” (W. Grudem, *The Gift of Prophecy in the New Testament and Today*

2000, 54)² HELP Word Studies understands *diakrisis* as “a *thorough* judgment, i.e.

a *discernment (conclusion)* which distinguishes “look-alikes,” i.e. things that *appear* to be the same.” (Archer and Hill 1987) Williams argues that *diakrisis* could be translated as “discernings” due its plural form and may refer to a “judging through” which he calls a “piercing through what is outward to an inward reality”. (Williams, *Renewal Theology: Salvation, the Holy Spirit, and Christian Living* 1990, 388) With its similarity to *diakrinō*, there is the temptation to define *diakrisis* as something like “judging between” but as judgement is the product of mental processes or intellect instead of a gift of the Holy Spirit, the meaning simply does not fit the context. How then should we understand *diakrisis* in 12:10?

The distinguishing or discerning between spirit sources and perhaps identification of specific spiritual sources is knowledge that does not originate within a human intellect. The intellect does *receive* the information indirectly but does not *derive* it. It is given from God’s mind to a human mind. One might say it is downloaded from God’s mind to a human mind through their spirit. The *charism of discretio spirituum* is a tool given to a believer through which the Holy Spirit sends specific information about the source or sources of spiritual activity in another person or in their environment. The human being is not doing the distinguishing or discerning. The Holy Spirit is doing the discerning and then transmitting the information to the human being who is a receiver. The gift may in some ways be similar to an App or Software that is encoded to receive. Many Americans have Smart Phones and all the information on the internet is available to all of them, but unless your phone has the Amazon Music App for

² Grudem provides a much more in-depth treatment of *diakrinō* and its relationship to both Discerning of Spirits and Prophecy, pp. 53-62.

instance and you have paid for the subscription, you cannot use the App or listen to songs on Amazon Music. The icon may appear on your phone, but it doesn't work. While this is not a perfect analogy it is similar enough to make the point. As the difficulty is distinguishing between spirits that appear to be the same, as per the definition above, the charism is a gift of information and is not an ability *per se*. The person with the gift of discerning of spirits has received the download of the specific spiritual software package that allows them to receive that information. The same would be true of the other revelatory gifts of Prophecy, Word of Knowledge and Word of Wisdom. The Holy Spirit communicates certain kinds of knowledge through specifically installed spiritual channels or *charisms* that have different functions and uses. Why the diversity? So that believers need each other and seek each other out in order to foster *κοινωνία*, community and interdependence.

Πνευμάτων

The word Paul uses for spirit here is *πνευμάτων*, the exact meaning of which is debated and its root somewhat “fluid”. (Munzinger 2007, 67) The noun is in the Genitive Case, Neutral and Plural. “Of spirits” is the obvious literal translation, but what is less obvious is which spirits are to be distinguished. What is the object of the charismatic action? Since *πνευμάτων* is anarthrous here, Dunn and Tibbs agree that a possible accurate translation is “holy spirits” meaning that the object to be discerned are various spirits that come from God. (E. C. Tibbs

2008, 330-31) Much of this argument hinges on whether one interprets the phrase through a Jewish/Early Christian pneumatology or via an Athanasian-Cappadocian pneumatology. (Ibid) *πνευμάτων* is unspecific and could refer to angels, the Holy Spirit, or even gifts, callings and anointings given to people by God, thus rendering “holy spirits” possible. However, limiting the object to “holy” spirits leaves half of a dualistic spirit cosmology undistinguished. Bullinger contends that *πνευμάτων* “standing alone (without any qualifying words), is never used of men in any form, state or condition.” (Bullinger 1905, 213) Tibbs agrees stating that Paul never uses *πνευμάτων* to refer to humans. (E. C. Tibbs 2008, 326) However, since Paul only uses the word three times total including in this instance, it is hardly a definitive argument. Dautzenberg sees the action in the phrase as relating to the Holy Spirit, and while he believes the action is primarily related to prophecy and judging or interpreting prophecy in 1 Cor. 14:29, if the emphasis is placed on *πνευμάτων*, it is possible to interpret the meaning of the gift as *discernings of the Holy Spirit* (Dautzenberg, *Urchristliche Prophetie : ihre Erforschung ihre Voraussetzungen im Judentum und ihre Struktur im ersten Korintherbrief* 1975, 135-142). In other words, the focus of the gift is on the Giver, the Holy Spirit is providing a revelation of proximate spirits in operation. J. Rodman Williams asserts that while the *charism* comes through the Holy Spirit that the object of the gift is to reveal spirits operating over a “wide range of the human, the demonic, even angels. All human beings are embodied spirits, the spirit being the inmost essence of human nature; demons are evil, unclean spirits; and angels are ‘ministering spirits’ (Heb. 1:14). Hence, discerning of spirits can well relate to a whole range of spirits possibly operating in a given situation.” (Williams, *Renewal Theology: Salvation, the Holy Spirit, and Christian Living* 1990, 389) Munzinger agrees stating that “I propose that on the

basis of a broader understanding of πνευμάτᾱ (as spirits and their manifestations as argued below), the gift in 12.10 depicts a broad range of discernment.” (Munzinger 2007, 53) This idea falls perfectly in line with Bernardine Discernment as stated above in that *discretio spirituum* has a very broad application, can reveal specific gifts and callings in others and can operate as a meta-charism.

In employing πνευμάτων in 12:10 Paul is being intentionally unspecific. He is attempting to communicate that this *charism*, this tool, is not limited to the identification of spiritual sources such as holy spirits or demonic spirits but has a much wider application. We may wish that he had expounded further, but it was not his focus or point at the time. 1 Cor. 12 is merely an introduction at best on a subject that was causing confusion and disturbance within the church at Corinth. Paul must have introduced the subject at some previous occasion, as gifts were in use and indeed being abused, but written instruction was needed to correct the misuse and misunderstanding of the gifts. Yet even in this instruction it was not the Apostle’s purpose in 12:10 to fully explain or extrapolate the gift of discerning of spirits, it was merely his intent to list it as an example of one of the known *charisms*. As he never revisits or discusses this gift anywhere else in scripture, we are left to analyze words and phrases in order to strain out meaning. Yet it is possible that he may have left the meaning purposely ambiguous so that his readers would not unnecessarily constrain it. Perhaps this is because like with any other tool, skill comes with experience and with skill comes increased understanding of the capabilities of the tool. Given that 12:10 is written for the instruction of those misusing and possibly abusing spiritual gifts, specific teaching on any particular gift was not Pauls’ purpose in writing. It is likely that he left specifics of discerning of spirits intentionally vague because a full

explanation was outside the scope of his purpose. Further, a full didactic at that juncture would have taken an incredible amount of space while anything less would increase the probability of more misunderstanding, misuse and could cause some to place unnecessary restrictions or limitations on a *charism* that is inherently expandable with the exercise of it, individual spiritual growth and *conformitas*. While less than satisfying for modern readers, it could have been that Paul's use of the ambiguous *πνευμάτων* was necessarily and intentionally vague. Paul intended his reader to understand *πνευμάτων* to refer to many kinds of spirits. This would include holy spirits, devilish spirits and human spirits. Distinguishing between holy spirits can refer to angelic activity, perhaps to identify a particular angel or kind of ministering spirit, to identifying the motive or purpose of God in various situations or to identify specific gifts, offices and callings of God at work in someone's life. With unholy spirits the gift may identify a specific type of demonic spirit at work such as bitterness, greed or lust and/or uncover the precise kind of attack or strategy or the plans and motivations of the enemy. With human spirits the gift may reveal that a person is struggling with some particular emotion, attitude, problem or situation, or the motives and intentions of the heart, good or bad. *Πνευμάτων* therefore is indeed fluid, somewhat amorphous and can carry different shades of meanings and does so here, perhaps purposely, to carry that meaning in 12:10.

Relation to Prophecy

Over the years there have been attempts to link prophetic utterances and discerning of spirits. This is of course natural as discerning of spirits and prophecy are listed next to each other in 1 Cor. 12:10 and are in context with the overall Spiritual Gifts discourse in chapters 12-14. This is particularly true of 14:29 which has prophetic utterances being judged or evaluated. How would one evaluate a prophetic word except through discerning of spirits? Dautzenberg makes this argument claiming that *diakrinō* and *diakrisis* mean *interpret* and *interpretation* respectively, giving discerning of spirits an interpretive and evaluative function and connecting it with prophecy. (Dautzenberg, *Urchristliche Prophetie : ihre Erforschung ihre Voraussetzungen im Judentum und ihre Struktur im ersten Korintherbrief* 1975, 122ff.) Munzinger proffers that his argument can be summed up as follows:

First, he postulates that there is a direct connection between prophecy and *διακρίσεις πνευμάτων* in 1 Cor. 12.10 just as there is in 14.29. This connection is parallel to the other gifts in 12.8–10, which, he postulates, are also grouped together (word of knowledge/word of wisdom; tongues/interpretation and faith/healings/miracles).⁹ Then he claims that *διακρίσεις* and *διακρίνω* mean ‘interpretation’ and ‘interpret’ in these verses. This assertion is based on a lexical and historical study demonstrating that *διακρίσεις* and *διακρίνω* belong to Greek interpretation terminology. (Munzinger 2007, 47-48)

Tibbs agrees that sometimes "discernment of spirits" is thought to refer to "an evaluation, an investigating, a testing, a weighing of the prophetic utterance" but points out that the term *pneumata* does not mean "prophetic utterance" or "prophecy." (E. C. Tibbs 2008, 323) While *discerning of spirits* is occasionally associated with prophecy due to its location in 12:10 and to 14:29, particularly where *discretio spirituum* functions as a *meta-charism*, I agree with Munzinger and Grudem that there is no necessary link between the two. (Munzinger 2007, 52)

Grudem makes the argument that outside of tongues and interpretation of tongues that Paul never intended any groupings or linking of any individual *charismata* and “simply listed several gifts in 1 Cor. 12: 8-10 as they came to mind, without intending to imply any special interrelationships among them.” (W. Grudem, A Response to Gerhard Dautzenberg on 1 Cor. 12: 10 1978, 256) If this is indeed the case then there is simply no reason to assume that discerning of spirits is coupled with prophecy and that each gift, while they certainly do at times work in conjunction with one another, are essentially independent.

1 John 4:1 also stands as a frequent common connector between discerning of spirits and prophecy. In this case “testing of spirits” is indubitably associated with false prophets. John warns the *ecclesia* to be wary about immediately assuming that every prophetic utterance is proceeding from God. He instructs the church to “test the spirits” but does not say specifically how this is to be accomplished. Naturally discerning of spirits is a logical point of connection as a means of testing the spirits, and it is a short hop from there to tying discerning of spirits to false prophecy, but how does “testing the spirits” work? “Despite persistent concern about the possibility of false leadership within the Church, there was no consensus in the New Testament canon about procedures for testing the spirits.” (Caciola 2015, 23) While John provides a kind of test for determining the spiritual source behind a prophetic voice, it is not a direct litmus test. It appears as though the point John is making in the verses following verse 4 is that the spirit behind the prophet may be revealed by observing their behavior as to whether or not they display genuine love for their fellow believers (4:20-21) and how well they obey the commandments of Christ (5:2-3) If this is the case and John is referring to observation of actions and behavior as the testing of spirits, then it is certainly not related at all to the *charism*.

While there is some logical link between discerning of spirits and testing the spirits, it is at best circuitous and less than direct. There is certainly some lingual similarity, πνεύματα/πνευμάτων, and conceptual likeness, i.e., testing/discerning, but if there is no shared connection to prophecy or false prophecy, and there is not, then one must conclude that in spite of some similarities, that these are two different subjects. Discerning of spirits in 1 Cor. 12:10 and testing the spirits in 1 John 4:1 is not the same thing. While it has to be conceded that they may be related on some level, they are different. Discerning of spirits is therefore a stand-alone gift, is not attached to or grouped with prophecy, and does not function only in relation to prophecy or false prophets. It is much, much more. As Grudem concisely states, “it is not legitimate simply to suppose that 1 Corinthians 12:10 is restricted to the testing of prophets and prophecies.” (W. Grudem, *The Gift of Prophecy in the New Testament and Today* 2000, 54)

Chapter 3

Discerning of Spirits as a Practical Tool for Ministry

Introduction

What exactly is the gift of Discerning of Spirits? As we have seen the answer has been long sought after and not easily obtained. One of the reasons I chose this project is because this gift has been what I have often referred to as my “bread and butter” gift. I have frequently been on the receiving end of this gift providing me with invaluable information as I navigated the often-troubled waters of life and ministry. It has helped me make decisions, avoid

problems, choose leaders, confront issues and work through pain. I do not always understand the messages or know how to apply them in the moment, but I have come to rely on this gift especially as it pertains to church leadership.

To truly understand gifts of the Holy Spirit one cannot be content to be a spectator, one must participate. To do this you must actually be a converted, born-again, justified and regenerated believer in Jesus Christ, be filled with God's Spirit and live a lifestyle in pursuit of personal holiness and intimacy with the Holy Spirit. This is non-negotiable. The Gifts are not Offices, Titles or Ecclesial positions. They do not operate *ex-officio* or come with a title or church station. They are not earned or deserved. They are given as part of an intimate partnering, the product of deep relationship, experiential knowledge and true trust. The Gifts are manifestations of the Holy Spirit that come through intimacy with Him. This does not mean that the gifts are only given to mature believers, even novices can move in the gifts, because the gifts are not things or abilities, they are *Him*. They should not be confused with talents, traits or natural abilities. The gifts are manifestations of the Holy Spirit. They do not belong to the user, but one gift or another may manifest more regularly than others leading someone to say that they "have" a certain gift. The gifts are distributed by the Holy Spirit for the need of any given moment according to His purpose and should be thought of as tools for ministry. They do not indicate God's approval, endorsement or favor on an individual or a ministry.

There has been and continues to be misunderstanding, misapplication and mistrust of the gifts and the gifted. In many ways we remain ignorant about spiritual gifts, yet this was not Paul's desire. He wanted the church at Corinth, which was struggling with the gifts, to be able to understand and use them. We must be careful to guard against pre-conceived notions about

the *charismata*. Too often they have been associated with snake-handling, pew-jumping, wild-eyed, emotion-driven, intellectually challenged persons. Whole traditions have grown up around the gifts and their use, often ignoring Biblical instruction. Subjectivity should not equal lunacy. Though the gifts do operate through the soul and spirit this does not mean that they are of less value. Indeed, it means that we are to depend less on our own ability to reason and increase in our dependence on God and work at receiving communication from Him. Let those who have ears to hear, hear. This is not an easy path or one that is entirely safe. Neither is it one that should be pursued alone. The gifts were never intended to be an individual pursuit. They are not for our personal use but are given for the “common good”. If a Pastor or leader is looking for a clean, danger-free way of discerning spirits, or using any of the gifts, they will be disappointed. The gifts are quite simply, communication with another person; with a person that is so alien to our natural world that we call Him “holy”. There will be times we misunderstand the message or image communicated. There will be times when we mingle our own feelings with His. There will be times when we simply get it wrong. This will lead some to abandon the pursuit of the *charismata*, yet Paul clearly told us that we need them to fully function as the Body of Christ. To abandon them is to abandon Him and our call to each other.

The key to the *charimata* is relationship. The gifts are not objects that God distributes, they are manifestation of *Himself*. As we grow deeper in relationship with Him, the gifts that *are Him* also grow and expand in use and function. This what Bernard was getting at with the notion of *conformitas*. As we grow deeper in conformity with the image of Christ and become more like Him, more in love with Him, our capacity for Him grows, as well as for the gifts. As the leader becomes more dependent on this relationship, becomes more subject to the Holy Spirit,

becomes more intimate with Christ, the communication becomes sharper and clearer. If a leader is looking for a tool that does not require deeper intimacy, this is not it. The gifts of the Holy Spirit are not about using God's power, it is about God partnering with and using you. You are at *His* disposal, not the other way around. The gifted person does not wield God's power like a magic wand, in a sense *they* are the empowered wand in *His* hand. While the analogy is helpful, it fails because in actuality there is no wand at all, there is simply the regenerated, spirit-filled passionate lover of God submitting and actively partnering with the Spirit of God to accomplish the dreams of God on earth. While I believe that personal holiness is important if not critical to the proper function and growth of the gifts, Villegas disagrees saying, "In 1 Cor 12:10 Paul refers to the charism of discernment of spirits, that is, the free gift of grace that allows the person to distinguish inspired speech. This free, infused gift of grace, is independent of the person's holiness and is given for the good of the community." (Villegas 1986, 11) In a sense she is right. In Romans 11:29 Paul declares that "the gifts and callings of God are irrevocable". [ESV] The word for gift here is *charismata*, though the context is in reference to the Jews remaining God's chosen people even as they opposed the Church. Even if this verse is applied to discerning of spirits or other gifts and the meaning is that once a gift is distributed it is never taken back by God no matter what, that is no indication that the gift is still active or functional. Even if it functions to some degree, unless the gifted person is pursuing their relationship with Christ with *conformitas*, it can never reach its potential. Indeed, even if the *charismata* still function under such conditions, they may serve more as a thorn in the flesh or goad to be kicked than a gift to be enjoyed.

To truly understand *distinctio spirituum*, the theologian must also be participant. (Lienhard 1980, 508) As one of my former Professors, the late Dr. Bob Otto of Mercer University used to say, true theology is not merely reflection *on*, but is also participation *in* the Christian Faith. In other words, genuine Christian theology cannot be practiced by a casual observer or an outside party. True theology requires participation in the life of God and His Church. Anything else is speculation or mere religious philosophy. The same could be said of the *charismata* of the Holy Spirit. For example, I have often read theological works that describe the gift of languages as an ecstatic gift. Apparently, it is believed by some that one must work themselves up into some sort of divine loquacious lather, an affective rapture or some extra-mental emotional state in order to experience *glossolalia*.³ However, I have experienced this gift for decades, with not even the smallest fleck of foam leaving my mouth or with the slightest elevated emotional state. I cannot imagine how that would work or even possibly be helpful. This particular gift is there to be accessed at will, anytime, regardless of my emotional state. I simply engage the gift of a personal prayer language whenever *I choose*. It is a form of prayer given by the Grace of God. Quite simply put, it is a way to allow the Holy Spirit to pray through my own regenerated spirit, in a sense bypassing my brain, although my brain is very aware of what is happening. It is really very quiet and calming, not ecstatic in any way. I often use it while traveling or in public and have even engaged in it during classes under my breath as it were, so no one else is even aware. Ecstasy is simply not part of its calculus and is unnecessary.

³ J. Rodman Williams covers this phenomenon extremely well and argues that a better word for “ecstatic” is “transcendent” or perhaps “suprarational”. He objects to the word ecstatic on the grounds that it sometimes connotes “frenzied and uncontrolled behavior” or speech that is “irrational”. It can suggest “unbalance, lack of control and even madness”. His footnote #24 in Chapter Nine also explains why some scholars have understood the gifts of languages as ecstatic speech. He treats the subject further in Chapter 14, pp. 394-402. (Williams, *Renewal Theology: Salvation, the Holy Spirit, and Christian Living* 1990, 214-215)

An ecstatic state would be an impediment to the gift. I can access the charism because I asked for it, took a leap of faith and He gave it. That's it. I do not know what language I'm using, whether it is earthly or heavenly. It is beautiful and rolls off the tongue easily. It has the effect of bringing peace, release of negative emotions and feeling closer to God. I use it for edification and when I simply do not know how to pray. It is essentially getting in the passenger seat and allowing the Holy Spirit to drive. There is emotion involved at times but emotion is not required for the operation of the gift. Ecstasy has been assumed most likely due to the mistaken belief that the gift of languages is similar to some Pagan practices assumed by non-gifted theologians theorizing with no actual charismatic experience. It is easy to understand how it was misunderstood. To grasp the true nature and function of the *charismata* one needs more than reflection on them, one also needs participation in them.

A Preliminary Discussion

Chrysostom writes: "What is 'discernings of spirits'? It is knowing who is a spiritual man [*pneumatikos*] and who is not; who is a prophet and who a deceiver," and explains that Paul wanted prophecy to be respected (referring to 1 Thess 5:20-21), but that false prophets abounded at that time. For Chrysostom, therefore, discernment of spirits was a gift whereby a Christian could identify the kind of spirit that spoke through a man (soothsayer, prophet or deceiver—i.e., false prophet) and also distinguish different kinds of persons, those who are spiritual from those who are not.
(Lienhard 1980, 509-510)

As we have seen from discussions above, Pauls' tiny mention of the *charism* of discerning of spirits in 1 Cor. 12:10 gave rise to an avalanche of historical attempts to

understand and apply it. Ignatius saw the need for spiritual discernment to understand and counter the strategies of the enemy and through another revelatory gift was shown a path of spiritual discovery in oneself. In Hildegard's time with the rise of prophetic and visionary voices attempts were made to discern the source of both visions and visionaries. Efforts were made to codify or systematize a method for discerning between good and evil sources through predominately logic and perception, but these ultimately failed. Bernard embraced the *charism* as both necessary and important to the Christian life, though he relegated its use almost exclusively to clergy. (W. L. Anderson, *The Discernment of Spirits: Assessing Visions and Visionaries in the Late Middle Ages* 2011, 41) He understood the gift as a *meta-charism* on other gifts and that the gift itself could expand and grow with its use, deep spiritual growth he saw as a bridal paradigm and *conformitas*. While this historical perspective is interesting and helpful, how are we to understand this gift today? Further, how can it be used in a practical way to advance pastoral leadership within a church or ministry?

This last query begs the question of subjectivity. If *discretio spirituum* operates primarily outside of logical, rational or mostly mental processes, how can it be practically used, accessed or even trusted? How can it be a practical tool for ministry today? Modern people tend to have a natural distrust of the extrarational. We often have disdain for emotion or emotional thinking, tending only to trust logical and rational thinking. "Some are suspicious of affective and experiential evidences because they occur in a completely subjective manner, and rely on the perceptions of the affected subject." (Coleman 2018, 108) Yet we have now moved far into the Postmodern era and emotion has made a comeback. Not too long ago, Emotional Intelligence would have been considered an oxymoron, but is now commonly seen as science and is

embraced and employed in the Business world and other spheres. Ignatius understood the value of affect as information and used it brilliantly. “For Ignatius, discernment of spirits describes the process by which we seek to distinguish between different kinds of spiritual stirrings in our hearts, identifying those that are of God and those that are not, in order to accept the former and to reject the latter. (Gallagher 2005, 24)

Coleman continues this train of thought stating that:

In his first rule for the second week, Ignatius points out that the good spirit will leave ‘spiritual gladness’ while the evil spirit will leave ‘spiritual sadness’. Therefore, the individual must call upon his or her own affective experience in order to determine his or her spiritual condition. Discerning spirits and making theological judgments, then requires an understanding of personal affective experience. Methodologically, Ignatius’s understanding of consolation and desolation thus require an affective self-understanding in order to make theological judgments. (Coleman 2018, 106)

Ignatius came to see that emotion is information. Far from relegating feeling to irrelevance he saw that his emotive states were valid, informative markers. External realities impacted his inner space leaving emotive residue that he could then read like a hunter tracking prey or a detective following clues. “By paying attention to the concrete outer entities which humans experience, one is able to identify their inner realities. The spiritual is revealed in the concrete actualities of human life in empirical process.” (Oliverio 2012, 239) If we are to discern spirits, we will have to get past our own reluctance to accept affective information and instead, study it, learn it and utilize it. We will have to be willing to explore, be aware of and map our own inner space. The analytical will have to interface with the affective. The notion that we are mostly rational or can only trust the logical is not true. We constantly engage in extrarational

thinking and decision-making which marketing people are experts at manipulating. Human beings are incapable of purely logical thought. We were not created that way. God speaks most often to or through the heart and we need to learn to speak His language. We will need to integrate and correlate the rational, emotional and spiritual to hear the language of the Spirit.

Yong states this idea convincingly:

Rather, the discernment of spiritual things is ultimately a spiritual act that transcends purely rational ways of knowing (1 Cor. 2.10–15). The actual processes of discerning the Spirit(s) draws from and integrates perceptual feelings, affective impulses and cognitive judgments into spiritual insights. Even when the combination of evaluations at all of these levels in the end results in nothing more than an intuitive judgment that is inevitably imprecise, Pentecostals and charismatics are constrained to ‘hold on to the good [and] avoid every kind of evil’ (1 Thess. 5.21). At the same time, because they are cognizant that no human judgment is infallible, they are free to acknowledge that discerning the spirits in the religions is a profoundly complex and ambiguous affair. (Yong, *Discerning the Spirit(s)*. 2019, 254-55)

However, we do not like “complex” or “ambiguous”. We want precision without the possibility of inaccuracy or failure. We would prefer a formula or recipe that would consistently lead us to the correct decision as though it were mathematics. However, formulas and recipes in the spiritual realm are known as spells and incantations. It is the attempt to find the “right way” to get the desired results consistently from a spiritual world or entity. The scientific method applied to the spiritual realm is very dangerous. As stated above, discerning of spirits is neither a thing nor a result, it is an aspect or by-product of a relationship. It is communication. It is certainly subjective, but with time, a deepening relationship, growing dependence, a strengthening personal holiness and *conformitas* it can become a very effective tool for life and ministry. Perhaps only now are we discovering that the Apostle was actually two millennia ahead in teaching us to capture and utilize the subjective.

Having stated the value of affective information it should also be expressed that the affective realm is notoriously perilous. It is essentially the human interface at which the spiritual and the material dimensions intersect, manifest and overlap. The soul is a router of realms through which Divine, demonic and human spiritual information comes and goes, often with no firewalls or filters, making it potentially dangerous. Affective information is real, but not always reliable. Feeling is not fact. Even the visionaries themselves were often in doubt as to the source of their revelations. (Voaden 1999, 269) Early in her ministry Hildegard expressed her reluctance to obey the command to write down her visions because “although I heard and saw these things, because of doubt and a low opinion (of myself) and because of the diverse sayings of men, I refused for a long time the call to write.” (Flanagan 1990, 3) It was this very suspicion that caused the rise of discernment of spirits as discourse and prompted Jean Gerson and Alfonso of Jaen to attempt a logical means of distinguishing between the origins of emotional traffic. It is precisely this emotional milieu and making use of it that demonstrates the genius of Ignatian Discernment. Ignatius recognized that human beings often make the mistake of assuming that their feelings originate within themselves. They get consumed and sometimes lost in them, unaware that they are being guided and/or manipulated by them. He believed that feelings such as Consolation and Desolation do not always come from within the soul but are imputed, downloaded if you will, from spiritual sources. This does not mean that a person is not actually feeling them, to the contrary, the feelings are very real, but their sources are external, originating from the macrocosm in order to lead towards God or to deceive toward destruction. Feelings can be manipulated and even supplied. We are seeing the dangers of this belief that feeling is fact in contemporary society as there is an attempt to elevate

feelings to protected legal status in what is characterized as the “affective revolution” and is the basis of identity politics and the emergence of “affective rights”. (Plasterer 2022) We should have learned from Ignatius that while feelings can be evidence or markers to be read and deduced, they cannot be trusted without analysis as this will lead to error and ultimately to deception. It is a strategy that worked in the Garden and the same trickery is working today. What then is the antidote for this potential affective deceptiveness, particularly in the function of the *charismata*? The logical litmus test sought by Gerson does not exist. We can choose to abandon the pursuit of the gifts as many have done, convincing themselves that they are not worth the risk or we can press on into the murky waters and try to find some clarity. There is no absolutely safe way to proceed. There will be failure and times when signals are crossed and confused. There will be instances when gifted persons allow their own feelings to speak, allow their hurts and wounds to give voice and occasions when they simply make mistakes; but this is the process, this is the dance.

The process of figuring out these communications from God consists of trial and error, just like learning to ride a bicycle. As a father, I remember helping all four of my kids learn to ride a bike, running alongside them with my hand on their back until they could stay up on their own for a few yards. They were so excited when they could finally do it, and when they fell down, I would help them back up. Likewise, to practice using your senses to discern good and evil will involve some falls. You will not be able to get everything right every time. (Goll 2017, 21)

Learning discerning of spirits and the other gifts is very much like Goll’s example of learning to ride a bike. You must get on, pedal hard, feel the balance, and crash. Then do it again. It is trial and error. As unsatisfying and scary as that is, there is no other way. Eventually we feel the invisible force of balance and though we cannot see it, we learn to depend on it and in time

become expert bicycle riders, using that invisible force to do tricks and acrobatic stunts. Ideally, learning the gift and all other gifts, is best done in the safety and nurture of community where errors are less costly and where gentle, caring correction is available. Revelations from the Spirit can be discerned and discussed and the gifted can hone their gift and learn to hear more precisely. It is not likely that anyone on earth will ever hear perfectly without error as the temptations that would accompany that level of *dunamis* would be unbearable and character is a higher priority than power in the Kingdom.

What is Discerning of Spirits?

In a nutshell, discerning of spirits is the gift of information. This information is given to an individual from the Holy Spirit, revealing to them spiritual forces and/or motivations at work in other people, in their environment or even a geographic region in order for them to do ministry or participate as part of a ministry team. This may include knowledge about what God is doing directly or through angels or people. It may provide information as to where or who He is working in or through. It can reveal whether a person belongs to Christ or the specific gifts at work within them or God's particular call on their lives. A second function of *discretio spirituum* is to reveal specifically or generally demonic spirits at work in people, environments, geographic areas or regions. It may for instance reveal a specific mode of spiritual attack on someone or by what means they are being led astray. Vallotton says, "Discernment is the ability to know the source of the spiritual activity that is working in or through people and/or organizations. The

gift of discernment can also be used to sense the compelling spirits that rule geographic areas. (Vallotton, *Developing a Supernatural Lifestyle: A Practical Guide to a Life of Signs, Wonders and Miracles* 2007, 177) The *charism* may also function to provide information about human desires, attitudes, motives and motivations in an individual or even a group of people as “all human beings are embodied spirits”. (Williams, *Renewal Theology: Salvation, the Holy Spirit, and Christian Living* 1990, 389) Of this gift and its relation to human spirits, Munzinger says, “It is to be presumed that Paul also has the anthropological spirit in view. Paul was realistic about people: he knew about intentional deceit through some apostles and workers and he knew of the twisted motives (Gal. 1.7ff.) and haughty thinking (Rom. 12.3) which were difficult to detect and required discernment. It is important that believers recognise [sic] that such phenomena are related to the macrocosm. (Munzinger 2007, 66)

Quite simply, discerning of spirits is the gift of revealed information. It is not an ability, a skill, nor is it on demand. “‘Ability’ implies some human capacity, whereas the gift is essentially the Spirit’s doing”. (Williams, *Renewal Theology: Salvation, the Holy Spirit, and Christian Living* 1990, 396)⁴ The Spirit of God communicates information as *He* wills. It is a ministry and manifestation of the Spirit of God. “Such distinguishings of spirits are possible only by another spirit, indeed by the Holy Spirit. It is by the illumination of *the* Spirit through the spirit of a particular individual that spirits are perceived. Since this manifestation of the Spirit is for the common good, it serves particularly to discern the Spirit at work an any expression or activity within the Christian community.” (Williams, *Renewal Theology: Salvation, the Holy Spirit, and*

⁴ William here is specifically speaking to the *charism* of Languages or Tongues, yet the meaning applies as it pertains to human ability and the discerning of spirits.

Christian Living 1990, 389) Perhaps this is the idea that Dautzenburg was getting at by emphasizing *spirit* in interpreting διακρίσεις πνευμάτων as “discernings of the Holy Spirit”. (Dautzenberg, Urchristliche Prophetie : ihre Erforschung ihre Voraussetzungen im Judentum und ihre Struktur im ersten Korintherbrief 1975, 135-142) . The emphasis is not on the gifted person or even the information provided. The focal point is the Spirit of God. The gift of discerning of spirits is the Spirit at work to communicate information regarding spiritual activity, Divine, demonic or human in a given time and place as tool to minister to an individual or group to bring revelation, restoration, healing, deliverance, direction and/or evangelism.

How is Discerning of Spirits Obtained?

The answer to this question is also the answer to a broader question, how are any of the gifts of the Holy Spirits received? There are three primary texts that answer this question. The first of these is Luke 11:5-13:

Then, teaching them more about prayer, he used this story: “Suppose you went to a friend’s house at midnight, wanting to borrow three loaves of bread. You say to him, ‘A friend of mine has just arrived for a visit, and I have nothing for him to eat.’ And suppose he calls out from his bedroom, ‘Don’t bother me. The door is locked for the night, and my family and I are all in bed. I can’t help you.’ But I tell you this—though he won’t do it for friendship’s sake, if you keep knocking long enough, he will get up and give you whatever you need because of your shameless persistence. “And so I tell you, keep on asking, and you will receive what you ask for. Keep on seeking, and you will find. Keep on knocking, and the door will be opened to you. For everyone who asks, receives. Everyone who seeks, finds. And to everyone who knocks, the door will be opened. “You fathers—if your children ask for a fish, do you give them a snake instead? Or if they ask for an egg, do you give them a scorpion? Of course not! So if you sinful

people know how to give good gifts to your children, how much more will your heavenly Father give the Holy Spirit to those who ask him.” [NLT]

Ask – Seek – Knock

It is impossible to overemphasize how important relationship is in the granting and operation of the *charismata*. The instructions given by Jesus are straight forward. Asking leads to giving. Seeking leads to finding. Knocking leads to opening. The word asking here is αἰτεῖτε a present active imperative verb in the second person. The imperative indicates command while present active relates the idea of continued action. Hence Jesus’ directive is to ask and keep on asking. The same is true for ζητεῖτε and κρούετε. In order to receive there must be persistent asking, seeking and knocking. In a word, pursuit. However, this is not the casual, curious trailing of a disinterested stranger, this is the passionate pursuit of God who is Father, the One who is Love itself. Jesus’ instruction, His command, is that in order to receive what we are praying for we must aggressively seek His face. We are asking something of our Father, who already wants to grant the request and the promise is, if we persist in asking, seeking and knocking, we will receive. The point is intimacy with God. It is Sons and Daughters who receive, not strangers. Sons and Daughters are those who know Him and have an intimate relationship with Him. This relationship is obtained through years of pursuing Him, finding Him, growing in maturity, passion and intimacy. This is Bernard’s *conformatas*. As we seek His face, He reveals Himself and we get what we are seeking...Him. When we seek Him and ask for the Holy Spirit, Jesus promises that He will be given. This is *locutio-responsio*. The bride chases the bridegroom and

He in turn pursues her and they find one another in blissful, passionate embrace. That which is asked for is given because it is desired by both. One simply has to ask in order to receive. If a passionate pursuer, a loving son or daughter, a love besotted bride asks, they *will* receive. A request without the relationship will be met with “I don’t know you”. Relationship is key.

The second passage comes from 1 Cor. 12:7-11. “To each is given the manifestation of the Spirit for the common good. For to one is given through the Spirit the utterance of wisdom, and to another the utterance of knowledge according to the same Spirit, to another faith by the same Spirit, to another gifts of healing by the one Spirit, to another the working of miracles, to another prophecy, to another the ability to distinguish between spirits, to another various kinds of tongues, to another the interpretation of tongues. All these are empowered by one and the same Spirit, who apportions to each one individually as he wills.” [ESV] To each is given...as He wills. Even in the asking, seeking and knocking there is no manipulation of God. He gives as He decides. He knows what we need and where we fit into His body. Sometimes the answer is “No”, but it may not be “No” forever and the instruction to keep seeking continues.

The final passage is 1 Cor. 12:27-31. “Now you are the body of Christ and individually members of it. And God has appointed in the church first apostles, second prophets, third teachers, then miracles, then gifts of healing, helping, administrating, and various kinds of tongues. Are all apostles? Are all prophets? Are all teachers? Do all work miracles? Do all possess gifts of healing? Do all speak with tongues? Do all interpret? But earnestly desire the higher gifts.” [ESV] ζηλοῦτε means to want something in the extreme so as to burn with jealousy or desire. Thayer has it “to burn with zeal”. (Grimm, et al. 1981) One may at first recoil at this notion until we remember that the gifts *are Him*, not merely something from Him. It is

essentially the burning desire to see God move in and through you. It is again obvious how closely this is related to *conformitas*. If a person wants to obtain discerning of spirits, or indeed any of the gifts, the way is clear. First, pursue Him, surrender oneself and know Him intimately. Walk in His ways, obey His commands and if we truly love Him, of course we will. Passionately seek His face, learn His ways, and *yada* Him. Second, ask and keep on asking and you will receive. Third, ask specifically for the greater gift(s) desired. Then keep asking, keep knocking, keep pursuing, and He will give the one He knows, loves and delights in the desire of their hearts. Yet there is another way.

In many cases the Holy Spirit gives one or more of the *charismata* to a person without their request or knowledge. Awareness of the gift is not necessary for the operation of the gift. Many people are gifted and use their gifts constantly and yet are not aware of them. The operation of the gift is so natural that may think it is just part of their personality or that the information they receive is just part of themselves or though they have the information, may have no idea where it came from or its supernatural source. There are even cessationists that do not believe that the gifts are for today who may say something like “I felt that the Lord led me” or “I got a nudge from the Holy Spirit” to take some particular action. Others may receive similar kinds of messages and chalk it up to intuition or a hunch. The point is that the *charismata* are provided sovereignly by “one and the same Spirit, who apportions to each one individually as he wills”. (1 Cor. 12:11 [ESV]) Every believer has been apportioned at least one gift whether they experience awareness of that or not, and may ask for more.

How Does Discerning of Spirits Work?

This is a question with a complex answer. An eternal being of infinitely more power, intelligence, knowledge and ability is attempting to communicate with human beings. Imagining Einstein explaining his theory of relativity to an Ant may be somewhat analogous, but still falls exceedingly short. How does this immeasurably superior macroorganism communicate with lower beings that are often unaware of His existence, and are limited in lifespan, intellectual, emotional and spiritual intelligence? How can He communicate with beings that are selfish, self-absorbed, easily distracted and often do not understand their own thoughts and feelings? It cannot be easy. Yet as He is the Creator it must be assumed that He has built into His creation ways to communicate. This is where Ignatian Discernment assists our pursuit. God speaks in the affective inner space, physical body impressions, mind, heart, and senses. In many ways it is necessary to discern ourselves in order to discern the spirits. We must learn to see with the eyes of our hearts.

As an older teen God began to communicate with me following a very powerful experience with Him which was far outside of my spiritual and theological paradigm at the time. After this He began to send occasional messages that were clear, but at first, I wasn't sure if they were coming from Him or were coming from myself. This is often the case. In my Church there was no one I felt comfortable with asking about the phenomena because I was afraid that they may think I was losing my sanity. However, the messages kept arriving and I slowly came to understand, through trial and error, that these were from God. One day while standing in line for my college ID I became aware that the young man standing in front of me was a

believer. I simply *knew* it. The information was placed into my spirit and I had knowledge of something that I had no way of knowing through natural means. I had never met this person before and had no way of knowing anything about him. Yet the impression was so strong that I tapped him on the shoulder and said “You’re a believer, aren’t you!” He looked shocked at first and then broke into a huge smile and exclaimed, “Yes, I am! How did you know that?” I believe I shrugged it off by saying something like “I’m not really sure” because at that point I couldn’t explain it. I know now that it was a communication from the Holy Spirit in the form of the gift of discerning of spirits alerting me to the presence of the Holy Spirit in this young man. In many ways this kind of spiritual knowledge is more of a sensing than a knowing. It must be said at this juncture that God speaks in many ways and will sometimes change the way He speaks to keep us reliant on our personal relationship with Him and not come to rely on a specific means. It should also be understood that God communicates with us according to how He knows we individually understand His communications. He will certainly communicate with us all somewhat differently. Therefore, we should avoid demanding that others hear Him in exactly the same manner that we do. He is infinitely creative. God may have chosen to communicate with Hildegard through visions of fiery heat while He gently directed Ignatius to pay attention to his affective states. One is not right and the other wrong. Both are Him.

For many people Divine communication begins in the senses. I sensed God’s presence long before I realized it had anything to do with gifts. I assumed everyone did. This sensing is a large part of communication with God. When Jesus said “If anyone has ears to hear, let him hear” in Mark 4:23 and He wasn’t just employing a figure of speak. He was talking to those who have spiritual hearing. This spiritual sensing, hearing, and feeling arises from within and

provides information in order to act or to understand. This is the crucial point. While we should never abandon logic, reason, analysis or critical thinking, if we rely only on these tools, we will miss out on the most important and vast source of information that exists, the mind of God. It is not an either/or scenario, it is both/and. Many of us have come to rely on our thinking skills which are good, but are woefully inadequate and lacking. In the days before the internet, computers worked just fine. You loaded the software and they did what they were supposed to do. However, they were limited to the software loaded into them and they could not “know” anything more. Until the internet. Once a computer was connected to the internet, almost limitless knowledge and access was possible. Our logical minds are brilliant tools but are limited to our knowledge and experiences, but when our spirits come alive and get connected to the mind of God, infinite knowledge and awareness is possible. “Think about it like this: The mind of Christ gives us access to the Internet of divine wisdom, which is the ultimate spiritual intelligence.” (Valotton, *Spiritual Intelligence: The Art of Thinking Like God* 2020, 23) For Goll, it began this way:

For some time, I had been getting various brief mental snapshots. I would notice something for a millisecond and think, “Where did that come from? What was that?” It was as if my senses were waking up. Occasionally, I seemed to be able to look deep into a person’s being and discern something that would never appear to the naked eye. I remember the first time it occurred. I met a particular church leader, and it was as if I could see diamonds glistening inside his mind, while at the same time I knew what that image meant. I thought about how we all have the mind of Christ (see 1 Corinthians 2:16), and I could tell that this man had God’s spirit of wisdom to an exceptional degree. (Goll 2017, 19)

For myself the difficulty was in learning to trust my senses and the information that was broadcast through them, especially when I preferred information derived through reason,

rationality, analysis and intelligence. It should be understood that the logical and rational are not excluded from divine communication. Once the information comes through the spirit it is certainly then placed into the rational mind, but the information generally does not originate there. For many trained in the world of *academia*, including Pastors, trusting the senses is often counterintuitive. Because the nature of the senses is somewhat esoteric, in order to hear more precisely, we must grow more intimate with Christ and surrender these senses to Him. Goll says it this way:

The first step in beginning to discern God's communications with us entails purposely offering our senses to Him. Unless we do this—on an ongoing basis—we will not be able to grow into the maturity of Christ Jesus. If we do not give ourselves to Him intentionally, it will be very difficult to know what He wants us to know and therefore difficult to follow Him obediently. When we surrender our senses to our Creator, He enhances them. Divine input gets “downloaded” less sluggishly than before. As we practice connecting with Him, He increases our capacity for more. (Goll 2017, 20)

As the believer pursues their relationship with Christ and listens more closely to His communication and acts on that communication He grows us, grows our capacity for more of Him which in turn grows and expands the gift. Jesus said it this way in Mark 4:23 following the ears to hear statement, “Pay attention to what you hear: with the measure you use, it will be measured to you, and still more will be added to you”. [ESV] As we pay closer attention to how He speaks to us and then act on it or use it, He will speak more. In order to receive communication from God, we will need to increase our toolbox to include using our senses to feel Him moving and speaking. This is not *instead* of reason, but in *addition* to it. Reason alone is not enough and is just as capable as leading into error or deception. The serpent did not

tempt Eve with feelings or sensations, he did it with reason. In order to use discerning of spirits the senses must be studied, learned and understood as much as the mind.

How does discerning of spirits work? “This gift is to the spirit realm what a radio is to the natural realm. A radio takes radio waves, which are undetectable to our natural senses, and converts them into sound waves that we can hear and decode. In the same way, the gift of discernment takes the invisible world and converts it into something detectable. This gift of the Spirit, among other spiritual gifts, acts as our divine eyes and ears. (Vallotton, *Spiritual Intelligence: The Art of Thinking Like God* 2020, 96) The *charism* of discerning of spirits works by the Holy Spirit sending information into a regenerated human spirit, essentially downloading that information, then uploading it into the conscious mind. This information may come through the senses, either emotional (internal) or physical (external). The information is given by the will of the Holy Spirit and is not on-demand or at the will of the user. Quite simply, it is knowledge provided about the source of spiritual activity in a person or group of people or in an environment or geographic region. It is the gift of communication and information that comes through many and various means. “The Holy Spirit communicates discernment in many ways to us. Most people who have this gift sense evil spirits by “feeling” or “hearing” them. For example, if a spirit of fear is oppressing a person in a geographic area close to you, you might suddenly feel fearful as well. If a person who walks by you in a supermarket has a spirit of depression on them, you may feel depressed when you encounter them.” (Vallotton, *Developing a Supernatural Lifestyle: A Practical Guide to a Life of Signs, Wonders and Miracles* 2007, 177-78) At other times people become aware of or feel a presence that may be good or evil. I remember being at a house and feeling intensely aware of a hostile, evil presence and

sensing the distinct feeling that I was on enemy turf. Hearing the Holy Spirit is sometimes complex and confusing. It will involve learning to hear His voice as it resonates through the affective space He designed. It will mean learning to pay attention to feelings that we have often tried to downplay. It will mean practicing awareness of spiritual feelings and even one's own body to discern what God is saying. "It seems to me that among Christians who have known a personal work of the Holy Spirit in their lives one finds in every generation testimony to readings, insights, hunches, premonitions, which are probably identical to the kind of Christian awareness that Luke in Acts regularly ascribes to the Spirit..." (Clements 1986) While this is difficult and admittedly somewhat foreign and uncomfortable, the more we use it, the clearer it gets and the more information He will provide. It will mean learning how God specifically speaks to you, your emotions, your senses and your mind...and then to develop it further and sharper.

Ways God Speaks Through the Senses in Discernment of Spirits

And than shall we alle come in to oure lorde, oure selfe clerely knowyng and god fulsomely hauyng, and we endlessly be alle hyd in god, verely seyeng and fulsomly felyng, and hym gostely heryng, and hym delectably smellyng, and hym sweetly swelwyng. (Colledge and Walsh 1978, 481)

In the previous section the focus on discerning of spirits was the internal sensing, feeling and hearing. Yet, it would be a mistake to ignore one of the most basic means of divine communication which is the physical body. Once again, we may have a negative reaction to this subjective means of communication, but as argued above, the subjectivity of the means is in

direct proportion to God's desire for our dependence on Him. His communications are often murky or dark (Psalm 78:2) to keep us reliant on Him and not the means. "It is right and normal that the body should be part of the spiritual adventure to which man is called.... A genuine interior life can grow only through the body." (Louf 1983, 82) "Many see the body as evil in itself, something to be ignored, pushed aside, tolerated but never really used for Kingdom purposes. But God designed the human body to be more than a tent that you dwell in. It is an instrument of God that recognizes His presence and discerns what is happening in the Kingdom realm." (Johnson 2014, 1642) As we are embodied spirits, it follows that our physical bodies are of necessity part of the journey and that the Holy Spirit would use them as a basic mode of communication. "Another way the Lord speaks to us is through a type of word of knowledge we call *body checks*. Most often the Holy Spirit uses body checks to communicate his desire to heal someone else's body. He does this by causing pain or a sensation in a certain part of the prophetic person's body that correlates to the sickness in a person who needs to be healed." (Valotton, *Developing a Supernatural Lifestyle: A Practical Guide to a Life of Signs, Wonders and Miracles* 2007, 174) There was a time I was visiting a man and as we were talking, I experienced a piercing pain in my head that was not normal for me. I asked if he was having a similar pain in his head and told me he had been experiencing migraines for several days with no relief. I prayed for him and the pain disappeared immediately. The Holy Spirit "spoke" by allowing me to feel pain in a specific place and prompting me to act on the information. There were no words or images involved, only a physical pain and then then a perception or a sudden knowing. The pain was a message, the knowing was discerning. Something similar happened in Luke 8 42-46:

As Jesus went with him, he was surrounded by the crowds. A woman in the crowd had suffered for twelve years with constant bleeding, and she could find no cure. Coming up behind Jesus, she touched the fringe of his robe. Immediately, the bleeding stopped. "Who touched me?" Jesus asked. Everyone denied it, and Peter said, "Master, this whole crowd is pressing up against you. But Jesus said, "Someone deliberately touched me, for I felt healing power go out from me. [NLT]

In this instance Jesus was touched physically. The woman touched the fringes of his clothing and not His physical body directly and as a result healing power went out of Him and the flow of blood instantly stopped. Jesus discerned that power had been transferred from within Himself. "I recognised [Sic] power going forth from me; or perceived that power had gone forth from me". (Perowne 1907) In the midst of a great noisy crowd where people were physically pressing up against Him, Jesus experienced awareness that the Holy Spirit had acted. He recognized, perceived or felt that something had happened. He did not cause it, He was not the source of it, though He certainly was the conduit. Jesus discerned, experienced a sudden knowing, that the Holy Spirit had accomplished a work. He did not know where the power had gone or who had received this work, He only knew a spiritual move had been made through Him. He discerned the Spirit. The Holy Spirit gave Jesus the gift of information that He had acted. Jesus received the information and responded by asking who had touched Him, which was a question that judging by Peter's response, made no sense unless he meant something quite different than mere physical contact. Jesus had experienced the gift of discerning of spirits through the physical touch of a desperate person in great need.

Touch, smell, sight, hearing, and taste can be trained to help us in the discernment process. Not only can we recognize the presence of God with our bodies, but those physical signs should help us discern good and evil. On that Sunday morning during worship, my spirit was telling me nothing about the woman in front of me, but the air temperature got the message across. Unfortunately, most Christians don't pay any

attention at all to what happens to them physically when God shows up. They're focused solely on the intellectual or emotional side of things. They ignore one of the systems God gave us to perceive what's happening in the Kingdom realm. (Johnson 2014, 1669)

Johnson is correct in his assertion that often we ignore our physical bodies and physical sensations and as such we miss a very potent mode of communication. This is true not only in discernment of spirits but in other *charismata* as well. While Ignatius had learned to listen to his inner affective space, he was also aware of spiritual effects on and in the physical body. "The type of spiritual consolation Ignatius next mentions manifests the involvement of the whole person in spiritual consolation. It is the enfleshed human person who experiences spiritual consolation, and the movements of the heart, at times, find bodily expression in the tears that accompany and complete the experience." (Gallagher 2005, 78) As the Spirit moves within a human heart, the body is not merely in some state of suspended animation, it is intimately involved. Tears flow, faces contort, hands move, and the body shakes and often bends with weeping. In a similar way the body is intimately involved in other workings of the Holy Spirit. As the Spirit discloses spiritual activity, there may be physical sensations of heat or cold, sensations like electricity or other manifestations often in conjunction with emotional responses. "The gift of discernment operates differently through various people. The most common way this gift manifests in us is that we feel, hear, smell or taste whatever spirit is troubling the person whose metron we are in. (Vallotton, *Spiritual Intelligence: The Art of Thinking Like God* 2020, 100) There was time that during worship I experienced physical sensations that I did not immediately understand and was quite annoyed with. I was the Director of a large Campus Ministry filled with college students. One night I became aware of

being touched on my shoulder as if someone had brushed a finger or hand quickly across it, very lightly. I immediately turned around to see who was trying to get my attention, but no one was there and the closest students had their eyes closed and were deep in worship. I of course assumed someone was playing a trick on me which was a common occurrence. In a moment it happened again and I quickly turned to catch the culprit in the act, but no one was there, no one was laughing or smiling. No one was paying any attention to me at all. The next time my eyes were opened as it happened and it suddenly dawned on me that this was not a human action. It was angelic. I had become aware of the brush of angel's wings. In other cases, I have smelled fragrant wood or incense burning, I have heard instruments being played that no one was playing and been aware of rising and falling temperatures. In the spiritual realm these are normative mystic experiences. They are a physical means of spiritual communication.

Sometimes we have downplayed or even mocked experiences that we have not had or understood. We often see the Middle Ages as a period of superstition and no doubt they were, but perhaps we should not ignore all strange sounding spiritual phenomena too easily or be too quick to dismiss it as mere folklore. "Secondly, by the late Middle Ages, the criteria which constitute *discretio spirituum* have become so fundamental to Christian belief and behaviour [sic] that they form a cultural substratum which informs and pervades spiritual experience. The multifaceted nature of the concept assists in this absorption, with some of its aspects overlapping with folklore: identifying a demon by its stench, knowing that the devil can quote scripture. (Voaden 1999, 100) It would be a mistake to dismiss the sense of smell as a means of communication to distinguish the source of spiritual activity. The great St. Augustine "defined his mother's ability as a 'certain smell,' and many saints' lives portray their subjects as able to

identify evildoers by their smell.” (W. L. Anderson, *Free Spirits, Presumptuous Women, and False Prophets: The Discernment of Spirits in the Late Middle Ages* 2002, 264) Augustine’s mother Monica experienced a physical phenomenon through which she was able to distinguish the spiritual source of her dreams. She apparently “discerned...by a certain smell, which she could not explain in words...” (Voaden 1999, 49) The ability to distinguish was given her within, so that she recognized whether it was just an ordinary dream and should be disregarded, or whether it was a vision using images and was to be taken seriously.” (Voaden 1999, 268) Even Gerson states that in discerning of spirits “A person senses a difference between true revelations and deceptive illusions through a certain intimate taste and experimental illumination.” (Ibid) We should not be too quick to dismiss occurrences and attribute them to people living in an earlier age that we may prejudicially consider less intelligent or ignorant. Perhaps they were aware of something that we have grown ignorant of or blind to in our age of materialism. As C.S. Lewis said so poignantly, “There are two equal and opposite errors into which our race can fall about the devils. One is to disbelieve in their existence. The other is to believe, and to feel an excessive and unhealthy interest in them. They themselves are equally pleased by both errors and hail a materialist or a magician with the same delight.” (Lewis 2021, ix)

Discerning of Spirits: A Practical Tool for Ministry

For this project there is a question that must be answered. Even if all these things regarding *distinctio spirituum* are true, how can they be used in an actual ministry setting? How

can discerning of spirits be used as a practical tool for ministry? I have found that there are several ways that discerning of spirits is a practical tool of ministry if not a *primary* tool of ministry. The most important way I have used discernment of spirits in ministry is in the choosing of leaders. As a young campus minister, I made the rookie mistake of trying to do everything myself and learned that by doing so I was unintentionally limiting the growth potential of the ministry. My effective capacity for ministry was about 25 people and that is where we had plateaued. It wasn't until I learned to "give away the keys to the car" and allow others to have leadership in and ownership of the ministry that we began to grow. However, that raised the issue of *who* gets the keys. Leadership in the wrong hands can be disastrous. Several methods were tried and abandoned before we arrived at a workable model of leadership. At first, because we were a fairly small group, we went with almost anyone that volunteered for leadership, which did not always work well, but even the turnover rate in campus ministry is constant and new leaders were needed yearly if not every semester. Searching for quality leaders in a growing ministry became a major emphasis. Leaders are the engine that make a ministry go and getting quality leaders is critical, but how is that accomplished? It is at this point that I began to rely on discerning of spirits.

I imagine at this juncture that questions such as, "How do you turn it on when you need it?" or "How do you make it work?" could be raised. The answer is that *you* don't. *He* provides it when you need it. This is the scary part. We are not in control, though we desperately want to be. We have to simply trust that He will provide what is needed and then wait. Through experience I learned that He communicates consistently if we are listening. We want our ministry tools to be in our hands, in our control, at our disposal. However, this is not the model

of ministry demonstrated in Acts. If we trust God for salvation, for finances, for everything we need, why is it so difficult to imagine trusting Him for information? Perhaps the finer point is that the reason we often do not rely on hearing God's voice for direction is because we have come to rely on other means instead. Vallotton explains the situation further:

The reason we don't tap into the wisdom of the age to come is because we settle for the wisdom of the age we live in. So all our brain "freeways" are being forged to embody natural conclusions. But to tap into spiritual intelligence, we will have to exit the freeway of IQ/EQ thinking, metaphorically speaking, and get on the SQ High-way of divine wisdom. In other words, as long as we allow ourselves to come to good conclusions, we will feel no need to ask the Spirit for God-conclusions. (Vallotton, *Spiritual Intelligence: The Art of Thinking Like God* 2020, 38)

In some quarters there is suspicion over even suggesting that one *can* hear God or receive communication from Him. However, most Pastors and ministers claim they were "called by God" into ministry and in my faith tradition, one must even provide a "call story" that details how that call was heard. If the leader responded to God's call, then it follows that there was a voice calling or communication transmitted that was heard and responded to. Clearly then, hearing God's direction should be a normative function in ministry since it is a tool that has already been used and not a new thing. Particularly when it is a tool that He has established. The whole of the Christian life is based on faith, yet we seem to constantly seek to remove faith from the equation and trade it for control. Trust Him and He will show you what you need to know.

Discerning of Spirits and Choosing Leaders

Our original model of leadership was very simple and was essentially a council of ministry leaders. If you were in charge of a ministry area, you were part of what we called the Student Interns. This group grew as the number of areas of ministry grew and changed as leaders graduated or needed to move on for other reasons. This meant that as the number of ministries increased there was the need for more leaders more often. Early on a young lady wanted to begin a Worship Dance Ministry. After prayer and feeling that this was where God was leading, she began it and developed it and then graduated a couple of years later. Then a member of the team stepped up to lead it until she graduated, then another member stepped up and so on until we had about four different dance teams and it evolved into the Creative Arts Ministry incorporating drama and graphic arts. However, just because someone was a willing volunteer did not mean that they should lead. In fact, as the campus ministry grew in numbers and influence, we began to attract increasing numbers of people that wanted to be a leader in a rising ministry. Often people want a platform or a position for themselves, but this has no place in ministry. On one occasion I recall a young man who approached me and exuberantly declared that he wanted lead in our ministry and right now! I told him come get involved, build relationships, take time to get to know our culture of ministry and our people and then, maybe next semester we could discuss leadership. His face fell, he made some excuse and left and I never saw him again. As he approached and began to speak, I became aware in my spirit that he had his own agenda. He did not have a servant's heart and was full of selfish ambition. He was not interested in service, he wanted a position, popularity and a platform. He wanted to use the ministry to further his own interests. His motivation was self. To give him a

position of authority and responsibility would have been disastrous and caused heartaches and headaches. Had he remained and taken the time to construct relationships and to be disciplined and learn who we were, he may have grown and developed into a great leader, but as he was at that moment, he was not ready. In other situations, there were students with wonderful hearts and motives but without the necessary gifts or skills for leadership. Sometimes at a later time, they acquired them and were incorporated into leadership. I found that one of the most crucial characteristics for leaders was humility. Those who have this quality are often reluctant to accept a position of leadership. Frequently, it was these people that were invited into leadership, though at times I had to push and pull to get them there because of their reticence. Yet I learned that reluctance was a good indicator that they were the right choice for leadership. Often the Holy Spirit would let me see gifts and callings inside of people. This information arrived in the form of a download of information, words, a picture or simply a sudden knowing. It may have been a feeling or perception about an aspect of their personality, gifting, calling or other spiritual information. Sometimes these communications were undeveloped and raw, but they were *there* and that is the point.

The Importance of Team

And he gave the apostles, the prophets, the evangelists, the shepherds and teachers, to equip the saints for the work of ministry, for building up the body of Christ, until we all

attain to the unity of the faith and of the knowledge of the Son of God, to mature manhood, to the measure of the stature of the fullness of Christ. Eph. 4:11-13 [ESV]

Even the most gifted and experienced make mistakes. There will be times when in attempting to hear God we too will make blunders. No one hears perfectly every single time. In fact, this is by design. “Even in their maturity, people who are spiritual giants and who move in a high level of anointing for healing make mistakes. They miss it, and that is OK because it keeps them humble.” (Goll 2017, 21) Mistakes need to happen in order to avoid pride which will kill reputations and ministries. One antidote for pride is team. We have focused primarily on 1 Cor. 12:10 and discerning of spirits, but contextually the point being made by Paul is that the church is a body, we all have place, responsibility, accountability as well as function. The *charismata* are to work in the church as senses operate in the physical body. In the scripture above the *domata* are given by Jesus to His body to equip, supply and oversee it to accomplish the work of ministry. Overseeing does imply control or hierarchical position, but should be understood more as a regulator, catalyst or helper. The point is that ministry is best accomplished as a team and was prescribed to us this way in scripture. Discerning of spirits should not be an entirely individual pursuit. This is true of all the *charismata* and indeed for ministry in general. The gifts cannot operate fully or accurately in isolation. The gifts were designed to work in tandem with the gifts of others. One revelation leads to another which leads to another received by a different person. In discerning an elephant, one may see a tail, another a trunk, yet another a huge body, someone else ridiculous ears, while yet another the ivory tusks. Any one individually may be correct such as it is, but it takes the team to see the whole picture. The gifted person

must understand that they may be receiving from God *one piece* of a puzzle, to assume that the single piece is the whole picture can only lead to mistakes.

When choosing leaders, we found it necessary to pray together, to spend copious amounts of time waiting on God *together*. Sadly, many would see this as time wasted when we could be *doing* something, but this *is* doing the very best thing that can be done. We must recover the concept of waiting on God, spending time in His presence together, soaking in the atmosphere of Heaven, and allowing His spirit to penetrate our all too busy, over-taxed and unavailable minds. After spending this time, we would share what we felt God was saying. It was not unusual that unsolvable problems were given solutions, disagreements disappeared and harmony restored. As potential new leaders were discussed there was often disagreement which occasionally got heated and team members grew frustrated with each other. After prayer, it was amazing how God worked to calm, heal and to foster cooperation. Please understand, this was not a quickie token pastoral prayer, it was a significant amount of time, generally thirty minutes to an hour or maybe more. God does not move according to our time table and He has little regard for our schedules. In using discerning of spirits within practical ministry we must give up the fast-food model. Hearing Him will require significant amounts of time with Him, alone *and* together with the team, in order to discern His voice and direction. The puzzle pieces may not all arrive at the same time and the picture may be slow in coming together. Unless the team is dedicated to pursuing God in this way, there is little point in embarking on this enterprise. Team keeps us humble, provides accountability, empowers responsibility and enables clarity. It allows for a bigger picture and in the working out of

individual revelations discloses details, pitfalls and builds unity. The team is absolutely necessary for discerning of spirits in practical ministry.

For team to work well it must be chosen well. As stated above this will require time together with potential leaders. As the ministry grew, we needed more and more leaders and a new problem began to develop. When we had fifty to a hundred students attending our meetings, I could get to know most of them to some degree, but as we grew larger, we had to change our organizational style of leadership. When we grew to be 350-400 students, I could no longer know everyone, or even meet all of them. Our structure had changed to accommodate this. We had three full-time staff members that had been former students, each overseeing different areas of ministry. They spent time each week with the leaders of those areas to pray, help them, get resources for them and to disciple them. The leaders directly responsible for ministry areas were still called Student Interns and many of these had other leaders working under them. For instance, we had a leader in charge of small groups who may be working with ten other small group leaders. In all we had about seventy students on leadership in various capacities. There was simply no way I could know all of those people. I spent the majority of my time building relationships with and discipling the staff and Student Interns and of course looking for new leaders. In order to accomplish this, I began a new leadership development tool I called Wesley Outfitters. This was essentially a way to meet and identify potential leaders for the ministry. This group would meet for about six weeks and would discuss the history, development, culture and core values of the campus ministry and explain the time commitment and expectations of leadership. Most importantly it provided space to discern the spirits of these potential leaders and identify gifts, callings as well as problems and concerns. Later we

could meet with the team and work to discern new leaders for ministry. Discerning for leadership can be accomplished in numerous ways. Whatever the model is for leadership, adapt it and build discerning of spirits into it. Be willing to wait and to take time. Work with the team and learn to discern together to choose new leaders for ministry.

Discerning Problems

I stated above that in using and developing the gifts of the Spirit that relationship is key. This is especially true in the operation of discerning of spirits for leadership. I found that there was never only one discerning, but instead there were multiple discernings. As I was around people and got to know them, I would receive more information about their character, gifts and motives. Sometimes the Holy Spirit would alert me to problems which often led to counseling, prayer and sometimes correction. The point is that even with established leaders, things change, events happen, temptations are faced and failures occur. People emotionally and spiritually change with time, life and circumstances. Discerning is not a one-time experience but is often a perpetual and progressive revelation. These changes, good and bad, need to be discerned and worked with. At one point a leader had fallen into a sexual relationship. He was consumed with guilt and regret but said nothing about it. One day in the ministry house I received a download of information that this had happened and when I asked the young man what was going on, he wept and confessed his sin, repented and was restored. Interestingly the young lady involved became angry and would not accept that the information was given

supernaturally. She immediately ended her relationship with the young man and left the ministry. She was using sexuality to control the him in order to cause harm to the ministry and when this spirit was exposed, she became furious and rebellious instead of repenting. Discerning of spirits worked to restore the young man, who is in full-time ministry presently, and to protect the ministry from great harm, conflict and scandal.

There were other times when discerning of spirits exposed problems before they were able to take root. On one occasion I was alerted that a student was waiting for me in my office. I had never met this young man but as soon as I walked in, it was obvious that he was demonized to some degree. Some of the student leaders felt the same and were pensive and fearful. Knowing what was happening was good, but knowing what to do was even better. The plan of the enemy was intimidation. We were supposed to feel afraid and disoriented. Yet I understood that I was to act normally and almost aggressively nice. I sat very close to the young man, looked him in the eye and had nice conversation. At first his eyes were dark and foreboding, brimming with a demonic confidence, but as the conversation went forward, I saw flashes of doubt and a loss of power. For no apparent reason he jumped up and said he had to leave and took off as though he were being pursued and we never saw him again. Discerning of Spirits was extremely valuable as a practical tool as it revealed what was happening and what to do. As a result, the student leaders witnessed a power encounter and learned a valuable real-life lesson in ministry. There were many other occasions in which controlling or tormenting entities were revealed. The point was always restoration and healing. We found that it was a common strategy of the enemy to send people to do nothing but waste time. We called them psychic vampires as it seemed their purpose was to drain us of time and energy. We never

forced any of them to leave and some were even delivered and healed and became valuable members of the community, but discerning of spirits revealed the motives of the enemy and we learned to set boundaries to thwart them. In most cases these people had no idea they were influenced or how they were being used. They were victims in need of help, not enemies to be defeated. Discerning of Spirits was an invaluable ministry tool, saving us time, energy and providing knowledge of what was really going on and how to help people. It remains my most practical ministry tool.

Conclusion

What exactly is discerning of spirits? What insight can be gleaned from the lives of believers in history? What does the Bible say of this gift? What does it have to do with the gift of prophecy or the testing of spirits? How can it be recovered and employed as a practical tool for ministry today? These questions began the search for answers. We began by seeking insight into this gift through the teachings and examples of St. Bernard of Clairvaux, St. Hildegard von Bingen and St. Ignatius of Loyola. Having examined and analyzed these historic saints, what can be gleaned from their lives and teaching regarding Discerning of Spirits? Can they inform our

understanding of how we might rediscover it for use in our time? Can the history and evolution of the concept of discerning of spirits inform our search? The answer is an obvious and emphatic “yes”. Lienhard showed how both the meaning of the phrase Discerning of Spirits and the concept of the Charism changed and developed over the centuries. Discernment came to mean wisdom, while spirits came to be understood as passions or emotions. Even interest in the *charism* itself waxed and waned over the years depending largely on the emergence of prophetic movements and the rise of visionaries. Yet there always remained the need to discern. Whether the voices originate from without or within, it was necessary to know which are Divine, which are demonic and which are something else.

From St. Bernard came profound and original ideas on *discretio spirituum*. Within Bernardine Discernment, discerning of spirits is a means of distinguishing not only the voices of evil and the divine, but also of the world, the flesh and even the angelic. Whereas before and following, the focus of discerning of spirits was almost exclusively on determining whether a vision or visionary was Divine or Devilish, Bernard added new layers. Discerning of spirits may apprise the gifted person of the specific source of inner voices, motivations, information and affectations in oneself and others. Bernard elevates discerning of spirits from mere demon detector to a much wider and specific resource. He understands the gift as a gateway, a router or meta-charism to distinguish differing spiritual movements. This includes information as to whether divine messages received are intended solely for the internal use of the hearer or are messages that should be shared with others. It can be used in tandem with other gifts such as Word of Wisdom, Word of Knowledge or Prophecy informing the receiver of the target and the timing to share the information.

Bernard believed that *conformitas*, the process of deep spiritual growth by which one is conformed to the image of Christ, can enhance, expand and further develop the gift. As the Christian dies to self and grows more deeply in Christ, they may gain greater ability to hear God's voice and communication with greater clarity and less distortion from world, flesh and devil. The idea that a *charism* may grow more powerful is original indeed. We tend to think of a *charism* as having one strength, one "power setting" that is stationary and unchanging. Bernardine Discernment carries the idea that the power of a *charism* and the *charism* itself may increase as the believer becomes more submitted and conformed to Christ. Bernard was far ahead of his time with regard to discerning of spirits.

In Hildegard we find the life of a woman visionary who succeeded and thrived in a time when it was difficult to do so. Her life and ministry played out against the backdrop of the discourse of *discretio spirituum*. Though it limited her in some ways, she was able to use it effectively to empower her ministry, disseminate and popularize her own revelations to the highest levels and to exercise influence within both the sacred and secular worlds. The Process, the discourse of Discerning of Spirits, served to provide a framework, a language and a method for Hildegard to succeed. While the actual implementation of the discourse was not extremely fruitful and rife with problems, at the very least it was an honest, legitimate attempt to discern the spiritual source of visionary voices. Some such as Gerson attempted to codify a procedure or a diagnostic tool that would be able to discern the spirits, and while *discretio spirituum* was hopefully and preferably part of that, it was not necessary. Yet Gerson's project ended without any meaningful conclusion and in the end self-destructed. After several hundred years of truly working to find a substitute or perhaps a systematic enhancement for the *charism*, it became

clear that there was none. The process was flawed and things ended approximately where they began. Yet even in all of this God worked and moved and spoke and revealed Himself. Even within this very flawed discourse, He spoke and moved the hearts of people and allowed that a sickly, small, “poor little female”, largely tucked away from the world, to influence saints, popes and kings. Although the story of Hildegard is rich and inspiring, we are still left with the question, how does one determine which visions or prophetic utterances are from God and which are not?

With Ignatius we found a mystic who via revelation found a unique path of discernment. Ignatian discernment is different in that it does not attempt to distinguish spiritual sources in others or in the environment; this form of discernment is exclusively individual. It is more a pedagogical approach to individual discernment than it is diagnostic tool. God opened his eyes to the internal movements of his own inner space and through that to recognize that affective states are markers or indicators of spiritual workings. In Consolation he recognized the hand of God while in Desolation he saw the work of the evil spirit. It was determined the Ignatian Discernment, while perhaps making use of EQ and SQ were not attributable to those abilities. It was also concluded that while Ignatian Discernment is not the *charism of discretio spirituum*, it is a valuable and ingenious revelatory tool, given through another *charism*, working hand in glove with the gift.

In the Hermeneutic section we found that Paul believed in a dualistic spiritual realm populated by spiritual entities that directly impact the daily life of human beings. He carried this dualistic framework believing in forces of evil working to thwart the plans and actions of God in and through His people while the forces of God including Himself and His angels were working

to save humanity and destroy the works of the enemy. In 1 Cor 12:10 διακρίσεις is the subject while πνευμάτων is the object. Spirits are being distinguished or discerned. Yet discerning of spirits is not a human skill or an ability. It is the gift of information. The Holy Spirit is doing the discerning and then transmitting the information to the human being who is a receiver. It may be more accurate to refer to this gift as discernings of the Holy Spirit as He may provide many different pieces of information at different times. The spirits discerned may be Divine, demonic or even human as humans are embodied spirits. While there have been attempts to link discerning of spirits with prophecy and false prophecy due to the gift of prophecy and distinguishing of spirits being next to each other in 12:10 and because of the imperative to judge prophetic utterances in 14:29, but there is no necessary link between the two, leaving discerning of spirits as a *charism* unto itself. Its primary function is not in interpreting or evaluating prophetic utterances, though there may be some overlap at times. Similarly, there is no overt connection between discerning of spirits and testing the spirits in 1 John 4:1. Except for the ambiguous πνευμάτων, there is no similarity. It appears that John had in mind a testing of spirits related more to the prophet's behavior than to a *charism*. They are not the same. The gift of discerning of spirits then is a stand-alone gift of information, a direct work of the Holy Spirit who provides, perhaps downloads information about the spirits that are at work in another person, the environment or church. This information may reveal what God is doing in and through angels or people, demonic plans, strategies and activities or human motives, attitudes, problems and inclinations. Simply stated, it is the gift of information from the Holy Spirit.

Discerning of spirits is a necessary and powerful ministry tool but is not without risk or effort. Built into of all the charismata including discerning of spirits is an element of subjectivity that is not only unavoidable, it is included intentionally, put there to drive believers and ministers to purposely develop deeper connections with God and each other in order to foster humility. It is this element of relationship that is the key to success in all the gifts of the Holy Spirit. As we seek Him further and as the relationship grows and expands, the scope and capabilities of the gifts grow proportionately. *Conformitas* expands *charismata*. Relationship is vital and deep relationship crucial as the nature of charismatic communication is most often via highly subjective means. Emotions, sensing, impressions, physical sensations and spiritual downloads are all standard means of charismatic communication though they are sometimes unclear. God sends messages and signals that we receive in a vast variety of ways in order to inform us of the sources of Divine, demonic and human spiritual activity in other people, places, churches and even regions. Patience, humility, and mistakes are all part of the unavoidable learning process. Trial and error, as uncomfortable as that can be, is the single, albeit murky way forward. The gifts may be granted by God at any time in the life of a believer but they may also be obtained by asking. The need for community and team in discerning the gifts are vital. Due to the subjective nature of the charismata, the learning process is best done in a safe, caring, nurturing environment with mature gifted people to foster the healthy spiritual growth and maturity of both the gifted and the gifts within them. Despite its inherent subjectivity, discerning of spirits is a valuable and practical ministry tool. As it helps identify God's gifts, callings and empowerments in other people, as well as spiritual and emotional issues they may have, it is absolutely necessary in the selection of leadership for church and ministry. It is also a

valuable tool in working with those who are already leaders in order to develop them and to avoid problems and potential pitfalls in other areas of ministry. When it is combined with the gifts of others within a ministry team, discerning of spirits can provide critical information that contributes to a larger picture that helps the team see individual pieces of revelation and how they work and fit together to find direction. For both the ministry team as individuals and the whole, discerning of spirits is an invaluable gift that should be promoted, encouraged and nurtured. Our questions are answered. Discerning of spirits is a powerful and helpful gift that can be employed as a practical tool for ministry. It will take work, humility, trust, intimacy with God, willingness to fail, to receive correction and to work as part of team. It is available for the asking if one is willing to keep asking, seeking and knocking and then to take a leap of faith. There is risk, but there is also great reward. Discerning of Spirits is an exceptional gift, weapon and tool.

The faint echoes of childhood have become the voice of a trusted, faithful companion and the relationship is that of a beloved friend that has shared life in wearying battles, hot, dry grueling, gritty travel, and a loyal foreman in constructing ministries and lives. The mystical has become normative and the spiritual realm home. My physical senses did not alert me to all there was, but they have become powerful instruments in discerning sources of spiritual activity...and there is more, much more. The exploration continues and will likely never end.

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In this article Turner is primarily concerned with a Pauline understanding of spiritual gifts in spiritual formation. He argues that while gifts of the Holy Spirit have been understood mainly as an individual event, that Paul would have understood them more as a corporate expression. Turner offers his view of spiritual gifts based on the works of Samra and Rabens, arguing that Pauline spiritual formation has as its goal transformation of the individual into the image of Christ, and though it has an individual component, it is centered on the community, and understands maturity as process rather than an event. While he speaks to spiritual maturity and to its connection with spiritual gifts, he does not refer to a specific connection between spiritual gifts and leadership.

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Wenrich argues that for churches to be vital that they must understand the Holy Spirit as a person, intentionally hear what he is saying, discern how he is moving among them, repent where he shows and make a place among themselves. He posits that the Holy Spirit is the primary manifestation of God for the Church and to be what God intends his church to be, it must focus on him. To accomplish this, the church must develop an intentional dependence on him. He includes a three-part application, part two of which is an encouragement of churches to find a way to regularly help people discover their gifts and callings and then deploy them for ministry. This certainly correlates with my project, though there is no specific reference to Discerning of Spirits. Still, it could be a useful reference.

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In Chapter 15 Williams makes a distinction between Domata, Charimata or functional gifts also called motivational gifts and what he calls "Pneumatic charismata". The gift of Discerning of Spirits lies in the last category and it is this category that is his primary concern. In the Chapter on the Holy Spirit and the Early Church, Williams provides documents from the periods of the Apostolic Fathers including The First Letter of Clement, The Letter of Barnabas, The Shepherd of Hermas, The Didache, and The Letters of Ignatius and Polycarp. He proceeds to the Post-Apostolic Fathers including Irenaeus, Cyprian, Tertullian and others and ends with "Church Councils of Fourth and Fifth Centuries". This is a valuable early church survey concerning historical accounts of charismata.

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