

THEOLOGY AND PRACTICE OF DISCERNMENT

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COURSE DESCRIPTION:

How do we know that God is speaking to us and that we are not hearing what we want to hear? How do we discern God's direction for our lives? Discernment is both a gift of the Spirit and a spiritual practice engaged in for the purpose of listening to the Word of God addressed to us, distinguishing its authenticity, and responding more fully to God. This course will examine first the biblical witness and patristic developments in Christian discernment. Then we explore the contributions of Ignatius of Loyola, Jonathan Edwards and several contemporary theorists and practitioners of personal and congregational Christian Discernment.

COURSE OBJECTIVES:

At the end of the course students will be able to:

- (1) articulate some of the biblical, historical and theological developments in the practice of Christian discernment;
- (2) understand its crucial role in spiritual direction and pastoral care;
- (3) learn how discernment guides congregational leadership; and
- (4) continue their practice of discernment.

REQUIRED READING:

Edwards, *Religious Affections* **OR** McDermott, *Seeing God: Jonathan Edwards and Spiritual Discernment*
 Johnson, *Scripture and Discernment: Decision Making in the Church*
 Larkin, *Silent Presence: Discernment as Process and Problem*
 Morris & Olsen, *Discerning God's Will Together*
 Nemeck & Coombs, *The Way of Spiritual Direction*
 Stairs, *Listening for the Soul: Pastoral Care and Spiritual Direction*
 Articles as assigned. All are on desk reserve.

COURSE REQUIREMENTS:

- Daily prayer and Examine of Consciousness; Keep a Journal
- Spiritual Companionship - Meeting minimum of 6 times during term.
- Do reading required prior to class session and write notes/outlines to reflection questions.
- Paper reflecting on your growth and growing edges in spiritual discernment. (5 pg)
- Final Exam

THEOLOGY AND PRACTICE OF DISCERNMENT

MAR 7 INTRODUCTION: What is discernment?

Reflect: What is your heart's deepest desire? What is God's Will for you? Are these the same or different? Why?

Spiritual Companions; Soul Companions Group

MAR 14 LISTENING FOR GOD, LISTENING FOR THE SOUL

Read: Stairs, *Listening for the Soul*, Intro, Chs. 1,3,5,7

Reflect: What is Soulful Pastoral Care? What is one Listening for in listening for the soul? How does one listen for the Soul in pastoral care? In spiritual direction? How different? What frightens & draws you most about listening for the soul?

Weekly Practice: Prayer, Examen, Journal, Spiritual Companions

MAR 21 THE WAY OF SPIRITUAL DIRECTION

Read: Nemeck and Coombs, Chs. 1-8
Morris & Olsen, pp. 36-38 Basic Assumptions
"Reclaiming the Guidance of the Holy Spirit" in *Reformed Spirituality Network* (desk reserve)

Reflect: What are Nemeck & Coombs theological foundations for Spiritual Direction? How do Nemeck and Coombs understand "direction" and the role of the Spiritual Director?

What are your preliminary theological foundations for Sp. Dir.?

MAR 28 SCRIPTURE AND DISCERNMENT

Read: Johnson, Chs. 1, 6, 7, 8, Nemeck & Coombs, Ch. 7
Morris & Olsen, pp. 1-26

Reflect: Based upon your incorporation of the readings this week, What is your Biblical basis for discernment?

APR 4 PATRISTIC DEVELOPMENTS & YOUR TRADITION

Read: Morris & Olsen, pp. 26-36

“The Historical Development of the Concept of Discernment of Spirits” From *Christian Discernment and Jungian Psychology*

Choose One of the Following from Duprey & Saliers, *World Spirituality Vols, 17 (all on desk reserve)*

Ch. 12 Luther & the Beginning of the Reformation

Ch. 13 Spirituality of Swingli & Bullinger in the Reformation
Of Zurich

Ch. 14 Spirituality of John Calvin

Vol. 18, Ch. 11 Spiritual Vision and Discipline in Early Wesleyan
Movement

Ch. Spirituality of Afro-American Traditions

Reflect: What from the Biblical & Patristic developments of the concept of Discernment of Spirits can you see in your own traditions’ spirituality.

See also Morris & Olsen, Appendix on “The Charisms” of the Traditions

APR 11 IGNATIUS OF LOYOLA

Read: Larkin, *Silent Presence*

“Inclusive Language ... Ignatian Rules for Discernment”

Tad Dunne “Realism/Extremism/Spiritual Integration in Ignatius
of Loyola”

Doug Giles “Ignatius Exercises in a Lutheran Context”

Vol. 17, Ch. 20 Jill Raitt, “Saints and Sinners: Roman Catholic
and Protestant Spirituality in 16th Century”

Reflect: What is consolation and desolation? How do you understand
The working of consolation & desolation in discernment.

APR 18 JONATHAN EDWARDS

Read: McDermott, *Seeing God*, Chr. 2-5 (pp27-77) **OR**

Edwards, *Religious Affections*, Intro, Part I, Part II (pp23-69)

Reflect: How do you understand Edwards/McDermott’s use of Religious
Affections? Does Edwards add anything to the tradition of
discernment of spirits? Discuss.

APR 25 JONATHAN EDWARDS AND IGNATIUS OF LOYOLA CON'T

Read: McDermott, Chs. 6-20, pp. 79- 225 or
Edwards, Part III, pp. 73-188

John Smith, "Testing the Spirits: Jonathan Edwards and the Religious Affections," *Union Quarterly Review*, Vol. XXXVII, Nos. 1 & 2. Fall/Winter, 1981-1982.

Mary Coelho "Understanding Consolation and Desolation"
Review for Religious, Vol. 44, No.1.

Kathleen Fischer, "Spiritual Direction with Women" in Ed., Robert Wicks, *Handbook of Spirituality for Ministers*, 1995

Reflect: Compare and contrast Ignatius and Edwards use of affections for discernment of spirits. What do we need to be aware of in listening for the guidance of the Spirit in women and people of color.

MAY 2 CONGREGATIONAL DISCERNMENT

Read: Morris & Olsen, Chs., 2, 3,4 5

Reflect: On using and/or adapting Morris & Olsen's model for use in your congregation? Devise that model for congregational discernment over a present issue in your congregation – in groups

MAY 9 CONGREGATIONAL DISCERNMENT AND CONCLUSIONS

Group Presentation on model of discernment of congregational issue.

Final Exam: Will draw upon the reflection questions posed in the syllabus.