

# WHAT IS DISCERNMENT?

How do we accompany Mystery

1. as spiritual directors in  
a life giving manner,

2. what is the Spirit calling us to as spiritual directors  
in the world we find ourselves,

3. how does that inform our practise and as spiritual directors

4. what does it mean to be people of discernment.

DISCERNMENT IS A FORM OF READING

THE PERSONAL

THE INSTITUTIONAL

THE CULTURAL

THE ECOLOGICAL

ALL OF CREATION

WITHIN THOSE CONTEXTS

FROM A LIVED INTIMATE RELATIONSHIP WITH GOD

HOW DOES MYSTERY  
INTER-PENETRATE THE KNOWN  
AND  
GOES BEYOND IT  
IN WAYS THAT ARE ACCESSIBLE  
TO US?

Buddhist insight:  
the pointing finger is not the moon

in fact it is the moon which illuminates the finger pointing

WE LIVED IN IMAGINED WORLDS  
AS IF THEY ARE REAL

THESE WORLDS ARE CONSTRUCTED  
THROUGH  
NARRATIVES  
OBTAINED FROM PERSONAL AND FAMILY  
HISTORIES,  
SOCIAL AND CULTURAL IMPRINTING  
AND  
THE MULTIDIMENSIONAL DETERMINATIONS  
OF THE MILIEU IN WHICH WE LIVE

SOME OF THESE NARRATIVES  
CARRY US TO GOD  
OTHERS  
CARRY US AWAY FROM GOD

WE ARE CAUGHT IN THE TENSION.  
AND WE DISCERN IN AND THROUGH  
THAT TENSION

NARCISSISM.....>.<.....TRINITY

ATTENTION  
>.<  
FELT AS FEELINGS

GOD GETS OUR ATTENTION  
THROUGH  
OUR FEELINGS  
OF CONSOLATION/DESOLATION

THOSE FEELINGS REVEAL TO US  
WHAT WE VALUE

THOSE FEELINGS ARE THE EMOTIONAL/IMMEDIATE  
EQUIVALENT OF THE STORIES WE LIVE OUT OF

THOSE FEELINGS = STORIES

note:

we are more than our feelings

but they are important in discernment

they are our felt (incarnate) engagement  
with the stories we live out of



# THE DOMINANT NARRATIVES OF OUR TIMES

SECURITY

MEANING

RELATIONSHIPS

LIBERTY

what grounds our life determines its meaning and we live out of that meaning in relationships which witness to our liberty

**WHAT HAPPENS WHEN THOSE DOMINANT  
NARRATIVES  
MEET MYSTERY  
IN THE ACTS OF DISCERNMENT?**

# THE TENSIONS WE ARE ATTENTIVE TO

SECURITY.....>.<.....ROOTEDNESS  
MEANING.....>.<.....MYSTERY  
LIBERTY.....>.<.....FREEDOM  
INSTITUTION.....>.<.....COMMUNITY

Rooted in God's love we experience life as an open  
myth which invites us to live passionately our path to  
the fullness of life in creating community

and/or

When we identify fully with the world we live in, we find ourselves  
understanding life only in its terms, and living it according to its  
norms, and we are complacent in doing that.

HOW DO WE EXPERIENCE THOSE TENSIONS?

SECURITY <------(FEAR)/(AWE)-----> ROOTEDNESS

CLARITY <---(CERTAINTY)/ (WONDER-----> MYSTERY

INSTITUTION <(POWER)/EMPTINESS----> COMMUNITY  
STRENGTH/VULNERABILITY

LIBERTY <------(CONFORMITY)/(CREATIVITY)-----> FREEDOM  
INATTENTION/ LIFE

# HOW FEAR WORKS

-traps us in closed worlds.

-we are socialised through fear

what are the sources of fear?

how does it shape identity?

think how institutions: law, school, politics, religion use fear

consider how helpless fear makes one,  
how disempowering it is.

consider what it does to

self-image

self-esteem

trust

responsibility

what happens when the constructs of our fear encounter the love that comes from  
God?

in the liberation we feel we have to ask ourselves how to live that liberation

what are we to do?

how to live meaningful lives?

I. when we walk past our fears, we still carry with us the world that has created and maintained those fears-- as a prisoners leaving prison brings with them the habit and attitudes learnt in the prison

2. moving beyond our fears we can see clearly the systems out of which the world operates. we are now like lawyers who, though within the system, can use the system to create perceptions, attitudes, judgements.

we are trapped by clarity



3. Knowing the system shows us the gaps in the way it constructs the world. This gives us power to deconstruct and reconstruct the world to suit our needs

we can live and accept those systems as complete  
--thus, to discern is to know the law, the rules of conduct,  
the ethical systems,

or

we can also accept the anxiety of living in the gaps which  
also reveals the Mystery that grounds all systems

to discern is to be open not to either/or  
but to  
both/and

how do we live that openness?

the next step:

we can live Mystery constrained by doctrines and dogmas as closed myths  
or as open myths [ see Newman's development of doctrine]

are the traditions of community we inhabit closed, or open and ongoing?

if closed we end up in religious ghettos; if open we see incarnation as  
extending to all

we can live in our traditions as conformists or as creative.

as conformists we experience the liberty of belonging;

as creative we experience the call to inclusivity

i.e. we are sometimes called to give up our liberty to live freely.

liberty is a social construct; freedom is a spiritual relationship

**BUT  
WHAT HAPPENS  
ON THE OTHER SIDE  
OF THE DIALECTIC?**

I. WHEN WE OPEN OURSELVES TO GOD WE FIND THAT WE ARE ROOTED IN GOD'S LOVE. POVERTY OF SPIRIT IS THE DOOR TO THE KINGDOM OF GOD WHICH IS OUR HOME. WE EXPERIENCE THIS AS **AWE**

2. LIVING OUT OF THE “AWE-FILLED-NESS” OF THE HUMAN IN THE PRESENCE OF GOD, WE ARE SMITTEN WITH **WONDER** AT WHAT MANIFESTS ITSELF AND TO US WITHIN BUT BEYOND SYSTEM AND MEANING

3. THE PATH THROUGH WONDER CARRIES US TO THE BORDERS OF OUR  
CONSTRUCTED REALITIES --INTO AN **EMPTINESS**.



4. OUT OF THAT EMPTINESS **CREATIVITY** FLOWS.  
THE HIGHEST FORM OF CREATIVITY IS COMMUNITY

# WE ARE CREATED AS THE DESIRE FOR GOD AND GOD DESIRES US

## THE PATH OF DESIRE

SECURITY  
v  
ROOTEDNESS  
v  
MEANING  
v  
MYSTERY  
v  
LIBERTY  
v  
FREEDOM  
v  
INSTITUTION  
v  
COMMUNITY

DESOLATION ON ONE LEVEL LEADS TO CONSOLATION ON THAT LEVEL AND CARRIES US TO DESOLATION AT THE  
NEXT LEVEL

# WHAT IS DISCERNMENT?

How do we accompany Mystery

I. as spiritual directors in  
a life giving manner,

a. by becoming aware of the tensions in  
personal, insitutional, social and cultural worlds  
we live in

b. by understanding those tensions and the  
stories they emerge from

c. by seeing how they affect the lives of those we  
help to discern

d. to offer in the witness of our own lives the  
dynamics of transcendence

what is the Spirit calling  
us to in the world in  
which we find ourselves?

- a. a prophetic knowledge and witness of the tradition presented in the Scriptures and our own faith community.
- b. the teaching of spiritual literacy and of the paths to spiritual maturity.
- c. to incarnate creativity by celebrating community where otherness is seen as invitation.

# RECAP

SECURITY <------(FEAR)/(AWE)----->ROOTEDNESS

MEANING<------(CLARITY)/ (WONDER-----> MYSTERY

INSTITUTION<------(POWER)/EMPTINESS----->COMMUNITY

LIBERTY<------(CONFORMITY)/(CREATIVITY)----->FREEDOM

we ask:

What are the stories of your fear.. what happens when you bring them to God?

What are the gaps in your understanding..what happens when you go through them?

Where are you vulnerable... is this a place of intimacy with God?

How are you creative... does it contribute to the community Christ invites all to?