

STUDIES

in the Spirituality of Jesuits



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Communal Discernment: Reflections on Experience

John Carroll Futrell, S.J.

**Published by the American Assistancy Seminar on Jesuit Spirituality,
especially for American Jesuits working out their aggiornamento
in the spirit of Vatican Council II**

THE AMERICAN ASSISTANCY SEMINAR ON JESUIT SPIRITUALITY

consists of a group of Jesuits from various provinces who are listed below. The members were appointed by the Fathers Provincial of the United States. The purpose of the Seminar is to study topics pertaining to the spiritual doctrine and practice of Jesuits, especially American Jesuits, and to communicate the results to the members of the Assistancy. The hope is that this will lead to further discussion among all American Jesuits -- in private, or in small groups, or in community meetings. All this is done in the spirit of Vatican Council II's recommendation to religious institutes to recapture the original charismatic inspiration of their founders and to adapt it to the changed circumstances of modern times. The members of the Seminar welcome reactions or comments in regard to the topics they publish.

To achieve these purposes, especially amid today's pluralistic cultures, the Seminar must focus its direct attention sharply, frankly, and specifically on the problems, interests, and opportunities of the Jesuits of the United States. However, many of these interests are common also to Jesuits of other regions, or to other priests, religious men or women, or lay men or women. Hence the studies of the Seminar, while meant especially for American Jesuits, are not exclusively for them. Others who may find them helpful are cordially welcome to read them.

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COMMUNAL DISCERNMENT: REFLECTIONS ON EXPERIENCE

by

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Introduction

The Society of Jesus is intensively preparing for a general congregation, a follow-up to the Thirty-first Congregation which was called during Vatican Council II and responded to it. Most other religious institutes are also engaging in chapters to implement their "renewal" chapters. Many of these communities are attracted to the process of communal discernment as the most effective means in our times to make decisions which are truly responses to the actual word of God to them here and now. This study is offered, therefore, in the hope that it may provide some needed clarification concerning the practice of authentic communal discernment--true spiritual discernment--by emphasizing those elements of true spiritual discernment that need to be stressed and by clarifying what communal discernment will do and will not do. Although two previous studies in this series have treated discernment, it seems that a new overview of the topic is now needed, especially an overview of authentic communal discernment drawing upon new insights gained from practical observation.¹ This present study is the result of my experience with many religious communities through "workshops in discernment" during the last two years, and also of observation of the follow-up which some of these communities have carried out.²

The current widespread popularity of discernment has inevitably led to misunderstandings and even to aberrations. The word discernment has become an "in" word--the sort of word that tends to "turn on" people (while it turns off their powers of analysis). Unfortunately, it is impossible to jettison a word that has been traditional in Christian spirituality for nearly two thousand years. Perhaps it would be better always to modify it with the adjective: "spiritual discernment." Individual

persons at times claim to have "discerned the Spirit," when they have in no way fulfilled the sine qua non conditions of true spiritual freedom and of continual, deep, personal prayer without which such discernment is simply impossible.³ This abuse has caused other persons to be suspicious or even fearful of authentic spiritual discernment. Furthermore, some persons have had expectations that a "workshop in communal discernment" would provide a magic wand to bring about instant renewal automatically through mere techniques, while others have tended to believe that it would only be an exercise in shallow gimmickry. Both attitudes reveal a lack of understanding of the pre-requisites for authentic communal spiritual discernment, which demand true and profound personal and community spiritual renewal before true communal discernment of the Spirit is possible. Indeed, a successful workshop leaves people frustrated because of the recognition of how much effort is called for individually and communally in order eventually to be able to do authentic spiritual discernment. This is a good frustration, however, because it moves persons and communities to undertake the labor of true spiritual renewal in order one day to be able to do communal discernment.

This study will first offer some reflections upon the dynamics of authentic, communal spiritual discernment; then, an explanation of the Ignatian method of deliberation and the conditions required if this is to be true discernment and not simply a human technique for arriving at consensus; and, finally, a description of methods of bringing even a large group, such as a general chapter or congregation, to unanimous choices through communal spiritual discernment.⁴

I. The Dynamics of Communal Spiritual Discernment

Spiritual discernment is possible only for persons who have a faith-view of all reality, the view of biblical man. This biblical world view has been reflected upon and expressed theologically in many different ways over the centuries, ways determined by the metaphysical presuppositions and the conceptual structures employed in doing this reflection at different historical moments and within different cultures. Underlying all these various interpretations, however, there is the factual faith-view

of all of reality. Biblical man believed that he encountered God in life and in history, that God spoke his word to man through the situations and events of individual and community life. He believed that he could prophetically discern the oracle of Yahweh mediated to him through the event by the experience of feeling within himself a transcendent personal reality judging his choices. It is the presence of the Holy Spirit within men that enables them to prophesy, to discern the actual word of God to them in the events of their lives.

For example, when Moses went to pray to the Lord, because the people were begging for food, the Lord took some of the Spirit that was upon Moses and put it upon the seventy elders, who then prophesied, although they never again did so. Later on, the Spirit of the Lord rested upon two other men in the camp, and they prophesied. When a boy came running to Moses to tell him to stop these men from prophesying, Moses told the boy not to be jealous on his account and exclaimed, "If only the whole people of Yahweh were prophets, and Yahweh gave his Spirit to them all!" (Num. 11:24-29). It is having the Holy Spirit upon us, having his presence within us, that enlightens our own spirits to discern the oracle of Yahweh, to recognize his actual call to us and to respond to it obediently. In a marvellous passage in Deuteronomy, the Lord assures his people that his word is not hidden in the heavens nor beyond the sea: "No, the Word is very near to you, it is in your mouth and in your heart for your observance" (Deut. 30:11-14).

The New Testament is even more explicit about the Holy Spirit living within us so that we can recognize the word of God to us. Above all, the first letter of St. John proclaims this presence of the Spirit within us as the source of our discernment: "But you have been anointed by the Holy One, and have all received the knowledge" (2:20); "The anointing he gave teaches you everything" (2:27); "with the Spirit as another witness, since the Spirit is the truth" (5:6); "This is God's testimony given as evidence for his Son. Everybody who believes in the Son of God has this testimony inside him" (5:9-10).⁵

The goal of spiritual discernment, then, is to become conscious of

the Holy Spirit bearing witness within us that we have recognized the actual word of God spoken to us here and now in the event. It is to have the testimony of God himself that our choice is an authentic response to his existential call to us. The goal of spiritual discernment is to find God and, therefore, to find his will--and not the other way around. It is not as if we somehow find a "divine decree" and extrapolate from that to God himself. Rather, what is discovered is the actual word of God here and now in the event, recognized because in this choice rather than in some other possible one we experience the confirmation of the interior experience of that unique peace, joy, "coming home," presence, which tells us, "It is the Lord." Because we find God, we know that we have found his actual word to us here and now.⁶ It is evident, then, that unless one has the faith-view of all reality, spiritual discernment is simply nonsense.

Communal spiritual discernment is the effort of an entire faith-community to find God and, therefore, to find his actual word here and now to the whole community, to which the whole community as one is called to say "Yes, Father" with one voice. Communal spiritual discernment is a moving through the same process of prayer, gathering the evidence, and confirmation as is individual discernment, but now by many persons together for a corporate decision.⁷ If a community is to engage in communal discernment, then, its members must be individually praying and discerning. Communal discernment unites and brings together the individual spiritual experiences of the persons discerning as a community. All available evidence involved in the decision must be gathered, clarified, and given to all the "discerners." This data-gathering may be a complicated task requiring the help of outside experts and even of computers. These aids cannot do the discernment for the community, but their techniques are often invaluable for clarifying the actual events which bring the word of God to the community. What must be discerned individually and communally in reflecting upon the evidence is the movements within our own spirits, at "the bottom of our hearts," which result from prayerful consideration of this evidence.

The discerning community is seeking God together: to experience as

a community the witness of the Holy Spirit. It is necessary to compare the community experience of deep peace and gifted strength in choosing a specific option with the ongoing core or primordial community experience of God. In order to engage in communal discernment, then, the members of a community must arrive as a whole at a conscious, shared experience of their deep mutual communion grounded in their sharing the specific charism originated in their founder or founders by the Holy Spirit and given to each of them. This profound communion in the Spirit of the Risen Jesus is the core, touchstone community experience needed for communal discernment of the actual word of God to the community spoken through concrete events here and now.⁸

It is clear, then, that it is necessary to be very well prepared in order to engage in the actual election of a corporate choice through communal discernment. All the members of the community must be praying individually and as a community. The necessary evidence must have been gathered and clarified and already individually discerned by the members. In communal discernment, the new evidence introduced into the process is the evidence of the movements of the Holy Spirit within each individual. Now, this evidence can be provided only by sharing with one another the results of each individual's discernment of the corporate choice all face together. To gather this evidence requires really listening to one another openly and without prejudice: simply listening to each person as he simply shares with his companions the movements of the Holy Spirit he perceived within himself as he reflected upon the evidence. During this time there is no effort to discuss or to argue or, even, immediately to discern the decision. Each and all simply try to listen to this new evidence--to listen with the same openness as in prayer, but now trying to listen to the Holy Spirit speaking through the words of one another. From the quality of this sharing and this listening will come the new movements of the Holy Spirit, which will bring about a new illumination of the choice in each person and in the whole group. After listening to the results of the individual discernment of each person, the effort is made to bring together what each one has heard from the Holy Spirit and, finally, communally to discern what is the actual word of God here and now to the

whole community.

The goal of all spiritual discernment is the coinciding of one's own will with the universal will of God, as it is manifested and lived in the person of Jesus Christ. Now, although the Holy Spirit is one, he is received differently by different individuals. The labor (and it is labor) of communal discernment is precisely to free the Holy Spirit from the subjectivity within which we tend individually to close him, in order to discover his universal word here and now to us together, whether in a local community, an apostolic area, a province, or in a general congregation. If we are to employ communal discernment, we must accept the fact that the Holy Spirit acts differently in each unique person, and that the bringing together of the results of individual discernment shared in the dialogue of the community results in a new spiritual insight, a new discernment of the Spirit, which can be realized only through communal discernment. The goal is to discover a new presence of the Holy Spirit through the different manifestations of his action in each individual member of the community. Thus, the very process of communal discernment brings about a new conversion of the individual members and of the whole community, a new purification of motives, a new openness to even the unexpected and disconcerting word of the Father, a new gifted strength to say "Yes," which come through the process of listening to the Holy Spirit speaking through one another.

Confirmation of the community election made through the communal discernment will be experienced in the deep peace, joy, gifted strength experienced by all the companions together: "todos contentos," as Ignatius put it. This shared experience of profound contentment in the Lord bears witness that the members of the community have found God together, and therefore have found his actual word to them as a community here and now. Confirmation is a unanimous experience of the witness of the Holy Spirit.

A. The Meaning of Confirmation by Unanimity

Now, it is important to note that the unanimity of profound peace which is the confirmation of the result of communal spiritual discernment

is not the same thing as a unanimous opinion that the decision in itself is the best possible choice. Indeed, an individual may be quite convinced that the community choice is not humanly the wisest or apostolically the most effective, and this will cause repugnance and, sometimes, even great frustration and pain "at the top of the head." Nevertheless, at the end of the communal discernment, he can share the confirmation of deep peace and contentment in the Spirit "at the bottom of the heart," even though the choice is not the one that he arrived at through his own individual discernment. He can do this, because he can recognize that the community as a whole has authentically communally discerned the actual word of God to the whole community here and now, no matter what word God may speak to it in the future, or what the individual has discerned as the word of God to him as an individual here and now. He can do this, because he realizes that his own personal vocation is a community vocation. He is no longer only an "I," but a "we"; and in conflict, the priority must be given to the "we." His own deepest personal identity is identification with all the companions who share the same charismatic call to this community. Therefore, doing his "own thing" in the most authentic way is doing the "community thing," as it has been authentically discerned in communal response to the actual word of God to the whole community here and now.⁹

It is helpful here to recall the fact (clear in the Old Testament and in the two thousand year history of the Church) that the Holy Spirit does not necessarily move individual persons within a community and the community as a whole to the same election at the same time on the same issue. Indeed, he precisely at times moves them to different choices. Theological reflection on this fact provides, it seems to me, at least three clarifying insights.¹⁰

First of all, the Holy Spirit sometimes does this to prepare the way for an individual eventually to emerge as an authentic prophetic voice within the community. This never happens overnight; it requires a process in time during which two discernment processes must take place. The individual himself needs time to discern that he truly is called to be a prophet, no matter what the cost, which often is very great. Indeed, most

authentic prophets have not desired the role and, like Jeremiah, have had to be compelled by the Spirit. The process of discernment of this call can be initiated in the individual prophet only by his becoming aware that the Spirit is moving him to a specific election different from that to which the community is presently moved. Furthermore, the community itself must discern the authenticity of the prophet, a process which normally requires even more time and which, also, can be initiated only by the fact that different elections are being reached by an individual than by the whole community. Throughout the history of the people of God, the community has had to face the need to discern the true from the false prophet.¹¹

One of the signs of the true prophet is that he does not feel called to withdraw from the community because it is not yet moved by the Holy Spirit in the way that he is. Indeed, he recognizes on the level of immediate execution that the actual word of God to him here and now is the election to which the Holy Spirit has moved the community as a whole, since his own ultimate personal identity in Christ is found in communion with this community. At the same time, he will be aware that if the Holy Spirit continues to move him to a different election in his own individual discernment, that he is called to make representations, to point out results of the community decision, to seek further clarification, until if and when the Holy Spirit will use him in the future as an authentic prophet to speak the actual word of God to the whole community here and now.

Secondly, sometimes the Holy Spirit moves an individual to a different election than that to which he moves the community, not to prepare a prophetic voice (he does not really prepare that many of them), but simply as a spiritual pedagogy for the individual, who may need this experience in order to come to a greater humility or to a greater realization that his vocation is to serve Christ in community and not as an isolated individual, which often will require self-sacrifice.

Thirdly, sometimes the Holy Spirit does this on a much deeper level of spiritual pedagogy as an experience of the dark night of the soul, leading the individual through what may be agonizing suffering, when,

for instance, the community election is to withdraw from an apostolic work to which this individual has given his life and which he still discerns to be vital, but which the community discerns authentically as no longer a work to which God calls it. Here, the Holy Spirit is leading this person into a true and profound experience of the Paschal Mystery. Gradually, he will show him how the Father brings new life even out of this absurdity and dying.

In a religious institute such as the Society of Jesus, which consists of more than one house, confirmation of communal discernment at less than the level of a general chapter also requires approval of the decision by the superior. This is so, because the superior represents the larger, total community of the entire institute, and his approval shows that the election reached by the discerning community is confirmed by the total community of which it is a part.¹² The final confirmation of communal discernment, as of individual discernment, is that of time and of experience. Ultimate confirmation is given by God's active love in history, which requires total openness to the Father and readiness to enter into discernment again, when the constant newness of God calls us to it. Spiritual discernment deals with the actual call of God here and now, which in the future may seem humanly to have been a mistake, but which, nevertheless, was a Paschal call of the Father beyond the wisdom of this world.¹³

B. The Prerequisites for Communal Spiritual Discernment

Now, a community can engage in a process of authentic communal spiritual discernment only if certain prerequisites are fulfilled on the community level, even if the individual members of the community (or at least a significant majority of them) have already fulfilled the sine qua non condition that they are praying and truly discerning individually. It is vital, then, that a community honestly identify where it actually is with respect to fulfilling these prerequisites. It is possible at any given time that a community will find that the point it has actually reached in its shared operational experience (whatever may be its verbal assertions of common ideals) is simply a corporate awareness of shared

pain and frustration--the only experience really shared by all the members of the community. Starting from where it is, however, the community, by identifying both the positive and negative dynamics at work in the causes of the pain and frustration, can begin to move consciously towards growth in fulfilling the prerequisites of communal spiritual discernment. Here, the help of the techniques of contemporary group dynamics can be a valuable aid.

(1) The first prerequisite is communion. That is to say, the members of the community must truly have a consciously shared experience of profound union in a common vocation from the Holy Spirit, which underlies all the differences of opinions and of expressions that make communication so difficult. It is impossible to do communal spiritual discernment unless all members share the common touchstone core experience of their common charism. Ways must be found, therefore, to bring all the members of the community to this experience through a true mutual sharing of faith experiences. Because of the breakdown of shared non-verbal symbols of union in faith and in commitment which communicated this communion in the past, it is necessary today to communicate faith-experiences verbally. This is difficult for older religious acculturated not to speak of their experiences of God to other persons; but without this the achievement of the communion necessary for communal discernment (and quite possibly for survival as a religious community) cannot happen.¹⁴

(2) The second prerequisite is common agreement on the basic expression of this communion in words here and now. If we are communally to discern how to realize our profound charismatic communion in community life and apostolic action today, we must use human dialogue as the vehicle of our discernment. In order not to be talking at cross purposes, therefore, it is essential that all are agreed on the basic verbal expression of the communal charism which is the communion of the community, since this is the norm of discernment for all corporate choices. Without this commonly agreed upon verbal expression of the norm, the discerners will not be seeking means to the same end. They will simply not be talking about the same thing, as many communities have painfully discovered in

community meetings and general chapters. The verbal expression used to express the communion will vary at different moments in history, as the meaning of all expression does. An individual person may feel that he could compose a more beautiful expression than the one agreed upon. The important thing, however, is that all the members of the community together can recognize in the words used a basic expression of their underlying communion, so that they can use it together as the norm of all their communal discernment.

(3) The third prerequisite is common commitment to carrying out the decisions reached through communal discernment. Each individual member and all together as a community must be truly committed beforehand to living out the election to which the Holy Spirit moves them through their communal discernment: to execute it no matter what the cost, individually or corporately. If this essential "Ignatian indifference" is lacking, there is no point in beginning to discern together. The community is seeking to discern the actual word of God to it as a community here and now, and all together must be totally open to the Spirit, so that they can say "Yes, Father" together, even to a disconcerting and unexpected word. A community must have achieved the fruit of the First Week of the Spiritual Exercises as a community in order to begin true communal spiritual discernment.

If a community fulfills the three prerequisites and begins to live an ongoing community life of communal spiritual discernment, it should gradually develop a community "sentir," which will enable its members more and more to find God together in the routine choices of community life and action through "love-knowledge," rather than having consciously to enter into the steps of the process of discernment except when the active love of God in history confronts the community with an event so complex as to require this. Then, the community will truly realize its charismatic communion in the Holy Spirit, and as a community it will find God in all things.¹⁵

II. The Ignatian Method of Deliberation

Communal discernment should become the ongoing life pattern of a

religious community, with all the members finding God together in all things all the time. At certain moments in the life of a community, the active love of God in history will confront it with events which call for a very conscious corporate decision. It is in making such choices that the Ignatian method of deliberation is a remarkably effective instrument for communal discernment. Indeed, experts in the field of organizational psychology and of group dynamics have testified that the human dynamic of the deliberation is the most effective method they have found for helping a group come to unanimous consensus. It can be used by a business corporation whose common goal is making money. It becomes communal spiritual discernment when it is the human instrument employed by a faith-community seeking to find God together. The dialectic of the human process becomes the instrument used by the Holy Spirit gradually to bring the whole group to recognize the actual word of God to the entire community.

The deliberation, then, is not identical with communal discernment. It is, rather, a moment of election within an ongoing life of discernment. Nor is it the only means to make decisions through communal discernment; other means can be more effective according to the circumstances. The deliberation, however, has been experienced by many communities as the best means to discern a corporate decision which involves a choice, whether concerning community life style and organization or concerning corporate apostolates. It must be a choice that can be reduced to a "Yes"/"No" proposition or to selection among various alternatives.

The method consists of seven steps discovered through an analysis of the Deliberation of 1539, wherein Ignatius and his first companions communally discerned that God called them to found the Company of Jesus.¹⁶ It is clear that much preparation is required before it is possible to begin the actual deliberation to discern the corporate election. Unless this preparation has been completed, the method of deliberation not only cannot be successful, it may, as a matter of fact, be disastrous.

First of all, the proposal for deliberation must be real and important. You do not use the deliberation for making minor decisions nor for exhortation or affirmation of lofty ideals. The proposal, then, must

involve a truly binding corporate commitment to communal being and/or action. The corporate commitment must be precise and executable. It must be truly a commitment. You do not use the deliberation to invite or advise, but to enter into corporate election to respond to the actual word of God to the whole community here and now.

Before beginning the actual deliberation, all possible evidence must have been gathered and made available to all those who will engage in the deliberation. This may be a lengthy and complicated process, but it must be done. The actual call of God is conveyed to us through events. We could be perfectly well disposed to hear his call and respond to it, yet mistake it because we do not have adequate evidence of the concrete situation through which God is speaking his word to us. Therefore, the deliberation must not be attempted if evidence is inadequate or requires further clarification.

During preparatory discussions for the deliberation, all the evidence must be clarified in such a way that all the "discerners" understand the issues in the same way.

The deliberation cannot begin until three prerequisites have been achieved:

(a) There is a clear GOAL which all understand and which all unanimously recognize as a goal which they are called to achieve;

(b) The actual matter for deliberation is made up of possible specific means to achieve the stated goal. These specific means (how to's) are generated by consideration of the real evidence in the actual situation and the hope these possible means inspire of being able to achieve the goal. The composition of these "how to's" can be committed to a task force in order to avoid endless discussions about them by a large group. These simply provide the concrete matter for deliberation and may be radically changed during the actual communal discernment of the actual word of God to the community. The specific means should be analyzed into its parts, (for example, who, what, how, how long, how often, and the like)--that is, into several parts which in turn will generate their own specific negative or positive reactions;

(c) The proposal for deliberation is expressed in the structure:

Goal

Specific How To's:

(1)

(2)

(3)

(4) or more, indefinitely¹⁷

Simply because of the human dynamics of the deliberation, it is impossible to handle too many specific "how to's" in one deliberation session. If many are envisioned, these should be divided into manageable numbers and distributed in a series of deliberation sessions. Before beginning the deliberation, you must be certain that all necessary clarification is finished, and that all the discerners understand every word of the proposal in the same way.

Finally, the deliberation cannot begin until all the persons who will communally discern the election together already have individually and prayerfully discerned the movements of the Holy Spirit within themselves as they reflected upon the evidence for and against the specific "how to's" proposed. The evidence in the communal discernment is precisely the results of the individual discernment of each person. The deliberation itself begins, therefore, only when all possible evidence has been gathered, clarified through discussion, and individually discerned, and when the active love of God in history has indicated through events that there is no more time for preparation, but a decision must be made now.

A. The Steps in the Ignatian Method of Deliberation

1. Begin with prayer for light from the Holy Spirit, perhaps including an invitation to shared spontaneous prayer for a few moments. It might be well to "situate" the prayer by reading from the Scriptures, the writings of the founder, or other documents expressing the spirit of the community.

Prayer

2. Each person reports from his own individual discernment

Sharing
Cons

the reasons he has seen which militate against the proposed choice. These are recorded.

Prayer

3. At least a brief break. This must be long enough for each one prayerfully to reflect upon the results of step 2.

Sharing
Pros

4. Each person reports from his own individual discernment the reasons he has seen which favor the proposed choice. These are recorded. At the end of this step, find out whether it is already immediately clear to everyone from the recorded con and pro reasons what the election should be.¹⁸ If so, go immediately to step 7. If not, proceed to step 5.

Checking
Consensus

5. A break period for each one prayerfully to reflect upon the results of step 4 in the light of those of step 2.
6. The effort is made now to evaluate the weight of the reasons con and pro recorded and then, in the light of this evidence, communally to discern the choice to which the community is called by God. If the Holy Spirit is working through the second time of election, and if the conditions of authentic communal discernment have been fulfilled, the decision finally should be clear, and confirmation should be experienced unanimously through shared deep peace--finding God together.¹⁹

Evaluation
and
Discovery

7. The deliberation session should end with a prayer of thanksgiving and of offering the election to the Father with a reaffirmation of corporate commitment to carry out the decision. Perhaps this could include an invitation to spontaneous shared prayer.

PrayerB. Commentary on the Method

On Step 1, Prayer. The entire process of spiritual discernment is prayer. Consequently, it is vital to establish an atmosphere of prayer, of openness to the Holy Spirit and to one another, and of shared awareness

of the charismatic communion which the persons are seeking "how to" realize here and now through their communally discerned decision. Should this prayerful atmosphere of conscious openness and communion wane during the deliberation, the group should stop and enter into prayer again.

On Step 2, Sharing Cons. Here, each person simply expresses to the others the results of his own individual discernment of the communal decision: the movements of the Holy Spirit within him that he experienced in recognizing the drawbacks in the proposed choice. Without any effort to persuade, he shares with all his brothers the experience of lack of deep peace in prayerfully reflecting upon specific "how to's," and the reasons he discovered for this. A person, of course, will speak in the style of his own temperament, perhaps with great feeling, but not as a debater. Each person must speak, since the new evidence in the deliberation which is needed for the communal discernment is precisely the evidence of the movements of the Holy Spirit within each person. On the other hand, a person might report that he experienced no con at all on a given issue, or that he experienced the same one already expressed by another. These reasons should be recorded on newsprint or on a blackboard. The cons reported must be to the proposed "how to's" exactly as they are stated, and there must be no attempt to rewrite them in order to eliminate an individual's con. This will be done during step 6, after all the necessary evidence of the motions of the Holy Spirit within each person is recorded.

All should listen openly to one another. Although questions may be asked for necessary clarification, no debate or discussion can be allowed. The time for "creative confrontation" is during the preliminary discussions for clarifying goals and evidence, not during the deliberation itself. The evidence needed here is each one's experience of the Holy Spirit's movements within him, and only the person who experienced these knows what they were. If all have truly done the necessary individual discernment beforehand, this step should not take much time. It is not yet deliberation, which occurs only in step 6. It is, rather, gathering of evidence to be recorded for deliberation. Experience has shown that

it is more economical of time and productive of clarity if each person states at once his cons to all the issues in the analyzed proposal, rather than going around the group on each separate issue. When all have been heard, a moment should be taken for all to reflect upon the entire list of cons to see whether the Holy Spirit, who is active during the very process of sharing, has moved anyone to see a new con which neither he nor anyone else had previously felt. If so, this new con should also be recorded.

On Step 3, Prayer. At the end of the sharing of cons, a break should be taken long enough for each one individually and prayerfully to reflect upon this new evidence he has heard of the action of the Holy Spirit in his brothers. During this time (even if it includes a meal or is overnight) there must be no discussion of the issues. Each man must discern the new movements of the Holy Spirit within him resulting from the new evidence, and to discuss with others would bring about distractions and also the risk of lobbying and debating.

It has been found, too, that it is very helpful to make an examination of conscience during this prayer period, asking oneself two questions:

- (1) Where do I not feel free with respect to the issues being discussed?
- (2) Where do I not feel free to listen really openly to one of my brothers when he speaks? One should pray to the Holy Spirit to gift him with true freedom and openness with respect to the specific issue or person where he finds himself not yet free. Indeed, during the deliberation, if a person is aware of lack of freedom on an issue, he is really obliged to state to the others that he is not yet free, and that they should listen to him with caution here. What is at stake is discovery of the actual word of God to the whole community, and this can be discerned only if all are truly open to even the unexpected and disconcerting call of the Lord.

On Step 4, Sharing Pros and Checking Consensus. The dynamics of this step are identical to those of step 2, each person now expressing the movements of the Holy Spirit he experienced in recognizing the advantages of the proposed "how to's," that is, where he felt deep peace and the reasons for it. Some persons initially are astonished to find that they experience

cons and pros with respect to the same issue, but this only shows that human issues are not black and white, and that the Spirit blows where he will. It is perhaps good to recall once again that what one must report is his own actual experience of movements of the Holy Spirit, and that he must not try to imagine possible cons or pros.

The checking for consensus at the end of step 4 is simply to see whether or not the group has enjoyed the "first time of election." It is possible that in the light of the recorded cons and pros, all unanimously and immediately see the election to which God calls them. The decision simply falls like a ripe fruit. However, if even one member of the group does not experience this confirmation, the group must go on to step 5. Checking consensus is simply finding out a fact. It should only require a moment, and there must be no giving in to the temptation to enter into discussion here. Deliberation will begin only in step 6.

On Step 5, Prayer. The dynamics of this step are identical with those of step 3.

On Step 6, Evaluation and Discovery. Now, the deliberation properly so called begins. All the evidence of the movements of the Holy Spirit in each person who has individually discerned the proposal is now recorded, and thus all possible drawbacks that anyone has recognized in his prayer as well as all possible advantages are clear to the discerners. First of all, the cons and pros should be evaluated. In this way all see which ones are already unanimously agreed on and need no further discussion or they see which ones have already been cancelled out as opposites in the minds of all. This enables the discerners to see which of the cons are really weighty, in order to try to eliminate these or at least to minimize them, and which of the pros are really important, in order to try to strengthen these. The atmosphere in this deliberation is one of communal seeking, not of debate. The purpose is not that one "party" prevail, but that all discover the actual word of God to the whole community. One is not a representative of a faction, but a member of the community seeking with his brothers to find God together in a specific corporate decision. There are no "winners" or "losers" and, so, no disaffected minority at

the end of a successful deliberation of true communal discernment. There is, rather, the unanimously shared peace of finding God together here and now in a specific corporate decision.

The deliberation proceeds now in the manner of open discussion as each man shares the insights and movements of the Holy Spirit who is active in the very process. Suggested revisions should be recorded on the newsprint or blackboard. It is important to continue consciously to try to listen very openly to one another, especially if a person is aware that the reflections of another are shifting his own perspective. Carl Rogers somewhere said that the reason it is so hard for people really to listen to one another is that when they do listen, there is always a possibility of having to change; and we tend to fear and to resist change.

The deliberation can lead to one of several possible results. Finally, it may simply become clear that it is not possible to reach a communal decision through deliberation at this time. The actual word of God to the community in this event is seen to be: "You are not ready to make this election by this method." If at the same time, it is clear that it is necessary to make a decision and act upon it here and now, the decision can be handed over to the discernment of a smaller group (as Ignatius prescribes in such a situation in the general congregation), or to one person, such as the superior, or even to a majority vote accepted beforehand as the will of God for the entire discerning community.²⁰ As time goes on, of course, and the active love of God works in history, this decision is always open to change; and the moment may come when it will again be the subject of deliberation.

Sometimes at the end of the deliberation it will become clear that, in spite of the drawbacks evident in the recorded cons, the proposal as originally stated should be accepted at present, at least provisionally, while awaiting the final confirmation of time and experience. This simply reveals that human situations often contain risks and drawbacks, even though at a given time the choice made within the situation is discerned to be the best response of love to God here and now.

Perhaps what occurs most often during the deliberation is the gradual

rewriting of the proposal (sometimes even radically changing it) in the light of the cons and pros. In the light of the new evidence of the movements of the Holy Spirit during the individual discernment of the original proposal, ways are discovered by the persons now communally discerning the election to minimize or even to eliminate the cons, while strengthening the pros. Through this mutual discovery the deliberation often will terminate in the confirmation of unanimously finding God together in a specific choice: "It is the Lord."

On Step 7, Prayer. The final prayerful offering of the election to the Father is an expression of thanksgiving and of seeking an even deeper shared experience of profound peace and joy in the Holy Spirit and of the gifted strength to carry out the election no matter what the cost.

C. The Dynamics of the Method of Deliberation

It has been found that the separation of cons and pros into separate sharing periods is a remarkably effective dynamic for using time economically, for securing clarity, and for enabling a community to engage in the discussions in Step 6 in an atmosphere of true common search rather than of debate. This separation eliminates debate during the gathering of the evidence of the opinions of each person. It also eliminates inflated rhetoric and long-winded efforts to convince others of one's own position, since it is simply a sharing of the substantial reasons which were seen to underlie movements of peace, or of lack of it, during the prayerful discernment of the proposal by each one. It affords great clarification of the real issues, since at the end of these steps all drawbacks and all advantages are clearly recorded and visible to everyone. It controls the "take over" person who tends to dominate ordinary community meetings with needless rhetoric because he is a powerful personality or a skilled debater. Furthermore, it brings to the group the contribution of the person who never speaks in an ordinary community meeting because he is shy or inarticulate or is simply overwhelmed by the powerful personalities.

This separation into cons and pros in sessions interrupted by prayer also is an extremely effective asceticism for deepening true interior

freedom--Ignatian indifference--in each person. The great risk for each of us is that we shall want either a "yes" or "no," or one alternative so much that we unconsciously fix our minds in an a priori black or white position with respect to the decision before us. But no human situation is black or white; it is grey. Thus, the separation into cons and pros forces me to pray to the Holy Spirit to free me and to enlighten me to see the real evidence contrary to what I myself initially want the final decision to be, and furthermore, to report the results of this prayerful discernment to my brothers. Thus, it is a powerful aid to bring me to the attitude of the third kind of men in the Spiritual Exercises, [155]: "They seek only to will and not will as God our Lord inspires them, and as seems better for the service and praise of the Divine Majesty. Meanwhile, they will strive to conduct themselves as if every attachment to it had been broken."

By eliminating debate and by bringing one to greater interior freedom, this method brings about a much greater openness in listening to one another--to the Holy Spirit speaking through each person. Experience has shown that as a result of this separation of cons and pros there is a true evolution, individually and in the whole group, in appreciation of the evidence and in recognition of the actual word of God to the whole community. Those who have used the deliberation method report that they experience a unique kind of listening and of being listened to and a growing sense of bondedness to one another--of real interior communion--which enables them during step 6 really to search for God together. They also report the experience of gradually changing their original positions and of becoming aware of the difference between the word of God to an individual and to a whole community: the concrete relation of the "I" to the "We."

Experts in group dynamics have pointed out the wisdom of Ignatius in placing the cons before the pros. Negative reasons always generate negative emotions which, in turn, cause aggressive feelings. Stating the cons first enables one to release these feelings and to be truly open to the pros. It does not put the pros into a privileged position, but

simply makes it possible really to hear them.

Finally, a word should be said about the group leader of the small groups engaged in deliberation. Certainly, it will be helpful if he knows or even has training in the facilitating techniques of group dynamics. Over and above this, however, he should have a true sense for the spiritual atmosphere of a group. At times, it may be necessary for him to halt the deliberation and call the group to prayer in order to restore or strengthen the prayerful openness and communion that is essential for communal spiritual discernment. It would be a great aid if he is a man who can feel and discern movements of community desolation and consolation. On the level of the human dynamics, he must help the group avoid the distractions of unrelated questions or the temptations to argue rather than to dialogue; and he should call breaks simply for rest and relaxation when indicated by the atmosphere. If a community with a superior is doing a deliberation, the ideal would be that the superior himself would be the leader, who, of course, enters just as fully into the deliberation as do the other persons. The reason that this would be good is that if the superior is truly functioning as an authentic Ignatian superior, he is the one person in the group who, in principle, intimately knows each of its members on the deepest spiritual level.²¹ He is able, therefore, to speak privately to any member of the group whom he knows not to be personally praying and discerning or not to be truly open and free with respect to the proposal for deliberation, so that this man will not cripple the discernment process.

Even if a community has not fulfilled the three prerequisites for true communal spiritual discernment, it must face corporate decisions. It has been found that using the method of deliberation, even though true communal spiritual discernment is not yet possible, greatly facilitates arriving at unanimous consensus in making these decisions, and that at the same time it is a remarkably effective way to help a community grow toward the prerequisites. The deliberation method helps the experience of communion to grow, requires the community to agree upon common formulation of goals, and enables it to experience corporate commitment

through corporate execution of the decisions made. Communities have found that through the use of the method of deliberation, they have finally come to realize that they have indeed fulfilled the prerequisites and that their deliberations now are authentic spiritual discernment.

III. Methods of Bringing Together the Results of the Small Groups' Deliberations in order to Come to Unanimity in the Total Group

Because of the time required and the energy necessary for truly listening to one another in the deliberation, it has been found that ordinarily a group should not consist of more than eight or nine persons. In a larger community or in a general congregation, then, it is necessary to bring together the results of the deliberations of the small groups in order to complete the communal discernment of the whole community. Through experience with large groups the following methods have been found effective for this purpose.

First, post the results of each of the small groups to each of the analyzed parts of the specific "how to's," so that identity or difference of conclusions to each part is clearly visible. There are only three possible results to each one: (1) Yes to the proposal as originally stated; (2) No to the very purpose of the proposal; (3) Revision of the proposal as originally stated. What each small group reports back to the large group, then, is simply these results. These should be posted on newspaper or on a blackboard. There is no need to post the working papers of each group nor to explain the reasons for the conclusion unless this becomes necessary to clarify differences among groups. If a revision has been made, however, it is necessary to give the text of the revisions so that these may be compared. If one or a few of the members of a small group did not agree with the conclusion of the majority, this should be noted.

Second, put the final results of the small groups into four categories: (a) unanimous acceptance by all groups of the substantive intent of the original proposal or of a revision, even when they differ verbally; (b) unanimous rejection of the substantive intent of the

proposal; (c) different reactions to substantive intent of the original proposal: Some accept it, some reject it; (d) different options suggested in the revisions offered: for example, in amount, in intensity, in time, or the like. Only categories (c) and (d) create problems for arriving at unanimity in the whole group. These must not be treated one by one.²²

(1) Open Forum

If the differences are seen to be not really very great, it is often possible to resolve them and to come to unanimity even in a very large group through open forum discussion. Members of the various groups are asked to explain to the whole group their reasons for arriving at their conclusion. Experience has shown that through this discussion final unanimous consensus is often reached now, even by individuals who had not originally agreed with the decision of their own small groups. This discussion is still communal spiritual discernment and the Holy Spirit is still active within the process. Furthermore, the dynamic of the deliberation has helped the persons to have a spirit of searching together for God's actual word to them, rather than to seek to represent a faction or to argue their own positions, as is the acculturated habit of persons accustomed to parliamentary methods.

(2) Recycling Deliberations

If the different conclusions appear too far apart to allow consensus to be reached through open forum discussion, then, it is necessary to recycle deliberations. The variety of options should be brought together, and then the effort should be made to reduce them to unanimity through progressive deliberations. For example, should there be four options, the first should be deliberated on with the second as alternative, then, the survivor with the third as alternative, then, the survivor with the fourth as alternative.

To accelerate the progressive deliberations when the number of small groups is very great, a delegation process should be instituted. For example, if there are thirty-six small groups, divide them into four clusters of nine groups. Have each of the nine groups select one person to represent

each group. Thus, the thirty-six groups are reduced to only four groups of nine persons each representing all of them. These four groups now seek to resolve differences of options through the deliberation method. When results are reached in each group, the nine representatives should return to their original groups to explain how the conclusions were reached, in order to "test the sense of peace" of all with these results. If the sense of peace is not achieved, the representative should take this new evidence back to the delegated group in order to continue step 6 until unanimity is reached.

When all four groups have completed deliberation, their results should be brought back to the large group and put into the four categories: (a), (b), (c), (d). If it is seen that it is still necessary to seek total unanimity through progressive deliberations, then each of the four groups of nine persons should select two individuals to a representative group to complete deliberation. Finally, one group of eight persons represents all thirty-six original groups. During the deliberation, the other members of the community may listen to their representatives, praying for light for them. This entire procedure, of course, is a process of delegation. It presupposes a high degree of mutual trust already achieved. Should this trust be lacking, this method should not be attempted.

(3) "Fish bowl"

Another method which experience has shown to be effective in bringing the total group to unanimous consensus is the "fish bowl" or concentric circle method. It is a classical method described in any manual of group dynamics. In it, an inner circle of a few persons discusses the question while all the others seated in an outer circle listen. Those in the inner circle gradually move to the outer circle and are replaced by persons from it. This process continues until everyone has filtered through the inner circle.

(4) Representatives Discussing Differences before the Whole Group

Still another method is that of selecting one person to represent

each opposed position. These two or slightly more persons discuss the question with one another but before the whole group, which may be very large. Such discussion sometimes requires one or more hours. But often it has been found that if these persons finally achieve consensus, the whole group has also achieved it simply by listening to them work it through.

(5) Delegation or Voting

If unanimity is not reached by any of these methods but a corporate decision must be made, this can then be done by delegation of the decision to a committee or to one person, or by submitting it to a majority vote. But in every case the commitment should be made beforehand to accept the conclusion as the will of God for the whole community.

IV. Conclusion

Our God is Yahweh, the Lord of history, who has entered into our world in Jesus Christ. He calls all men to community through community. He wills that all men enter into an inter-personal communion of love with one another in communion with the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit. We to whom this Good News has been revealed are called to call all men to this community of love until it is achieved and God becomes "all in all." Our most effective response to our call to this mission is our own success in making human communities of love that embody our charismatic communion in a shared call to the religious life: communities that truly are epiphanies to the world of the life to which all men are called by the Father through Jesus Christ in the Holy Spirit. "Father, may they be one in us, as you are in me and I am in you, so that the world may believe it was you who sent me. I have given them the glory you gave to me, that they may be one as we are one. With me in them and you in me, may they be so completely one that the world will realize that it was you who sent me and that I have loved them as much as you love me" (John 17:21-23).

To make communities of love and to carry out our mission to the world, we must discern together the actual word of God to us here and now to which we must respond "Yes, Father" together through our corporate decisions and actions. It is the prayer of the writer that this study will be of help

to religious communities in enabling them to carry out authentic communal spiritual discernment.

Appendix I. A Method of Generating Proposals for Deliberation

The corporate commitments which a religious community is called to make in response to the actual word of God communicated to it through the human signs of the situations that confront it at any given time in its history are always commitments to the concrete corporate being and doing necessary to realize the community charism in life and action here and now. The final norm for all communal discernment of a community is its specific charism originated by the Holy Spirit in its founder or founders which gives a particular community its own religious identity. This identity cannot be split into "community" and "task." The being and the doing of the community are not related as "either-or," but as "both-and." The persons who are brought together by the Holy Spirit in the communion of a shared charism are always called together to a mission within the mission given to Christ by the Father and continuing as the mission of the Church. However, in order to carry out this mission, these persons must embody their profound interior communion in a human community. If they are to exercise the charism given to them for the good of all the people, they must exist. They must be in order to do; but the reason for their being called into being is to do. Community and mission are reciprocal realities, mutually interdependent. This is why they must always be seen as "both-and" and must always be pursued together in a creative tension, rather than in competition.

In practice, nevertheless, it is necessary to consider analytically the multi-dimensional demands made upon a community from the aspect of its community life (being) and of its apostolic action (doing). The community must consider the concrete corporate commitments it is called to make here and now with respect to community life style and also with respect to the choice and the performance of apostolic works to carry out its charismatic mission. Thus, until a community has clearly settled upon its own religious identity--the charism which is its own, the profound intention of the founder underlying the culturally conditioned

expression of this intention by the founder in his ordering of community life-style and in his selection of apostolic works during his own historical time--it is impossible for the community to discern communally through deliberation how to embody this religious identity in its being and doing here and now. Some religious communities today have found that the first corporate commitment they must make is to search together to identify the charism of the founder and to overcome equating culturally determined ways of community living and historically relative apostolic works with the underlying dynamic movement from the Holy Spirit which is its authentic call to mission and, consequently, to being.²³

During this effort to identify and express the community charism, it is vitally important that individuals recognize "concealed how to's"; for these can keep the members from discovering the underlying dynamic movement of the Holy Spirit. It is precisely the "how to's" here and now which must be communally discerned. Successful deliberations of communal discernment begins from the charism itself (or whatever goal is already truly unanimously agreed upon by all the members); and it generates a process through which goals become more and more specific. For example, if in a group of Jesuits today, the members find themselves all in agreement that apostolic mobility and the magis are the governing norms for all choice of ministries, but also found that they have no agreement about the apostolic works demanded by these norms at present, they might deliberate upon whether or not education is still valid as a Jesuit apostolate. If the result of this first deliberation is, "Yes, education is valid," then they have a new more specific goal for the following deliberation. This might concern alternatives: higher education, secondary education, and the like. If secondary education is discerned as still being an instrument of the magis, a more specific goal is generated. The process may continue through corporate decisions becoming more and more specific concerning faculty make-up, curriculum, or any such topic. Nevertheless, in initiating this process it is essential that a community begin from the beginning and not affirm goals as unanimous which are not yet so.

If the charism of a community has been identified and clearly

expressed in words, then, it is necessary to discover the concrete goals of the community here and now for community living and for corporate apostolic action. To discover these goals requires reflection on the concrete situation of the community: What challenges confront it? What problems does it face? What obstacles must be overcome? In listing these goals it is important to consider desirability rather than feasibility; otherwise creativity and broad vision will be killed. What is truly not feasible will appear during the deliberation on "how to's" to accomplish these goals. These goals should then be organized according to the categories: (a) impossible now; (b) long range; (c) middle range; (d) short range--according to whatever time scale is employed (for example, ten years, five years, one year).

Ordinarily, it is better to begin with short range goals, which should be approached according to priorities of urgency, importance, and the like. Some examples of goals which contemporary religious communities have identified in the area of mission are: (1) to bring all members to a real knowledge of the social needs of men today; (2) to select new apostolic works in the light of current needs, resources available, and so forth; (3) to retain or abandon existing apostolic works in the light of this evidence; (4) radically to revise the methods of current institutional apostolates to make them truly effective today. Some examples in the area of community life are: (1) to move towards fulfilling the prerequisites to become a truly discerning community; (2) to make the Eucharist the center of our community life and the source of our effectiveness as apostles; (3) to come together as an entire community in common prayer in order to be truly effective apostolically; (4) to achieve true human communication, trust, and support among the members of our local communities.

Once goals have been identified, clarified, and unanimously agreed upon by the entire community, a task force should be formed to complete the proposal for deliberation by suggesting specific "how to's" as means to achieve a particular goal. The meaning of this can be made clear by the following two examples of proposals ready for deliberation:

Example A

A religious congregation of men during its renewal chapter affirmed the following principle for choice of apostolic works: WORKS WHICH WILL BRING ABOUT SOCIAL CHANGE TO MOVE MEN TOWARDS PEACE AND JUSTICE IN HUMAN SOCIETY. Implementation of this principle implies hard practical choices in the areas of: (1) choice of new apostolic works; (2) reshaping of existing works; (3) new dimensions that this thrust should introduce into the formation program. During the last two years very little has been accomplished in implementation. Some of the members of the congregation have very detailed and radical plans for choices in all three areas; some insist that all that is necessary is already being accomplished and that the implementation should be simply "business as usual"; but the majority of the members, while being convinced that neither of the other two groups are correct, feel puzzled and confused about what should be done, although they are sure that something must be done. The result of all this at present is that the members are polarized, pained, and frustrated. A task force has studied the situation and has come to realize that the basic problem is that very few members of the congregation have any real knowledge of the social changes called for in contemporary society or of effective ways to try to bring these about. Those with specific, radical plans are mostly working from unreal and utopian notions, while those in favor of business as usual are simply ignorant or blind. Given where the community actually is, the most urgent need seems to be to gather and to clarify the evidence of needs for social change. The following proposal is prepared for deliberation:

Goal: To Enable Ourselves to Discern Communally Concrete Ways to Implement Our Present Norm for Choice of Apostolic Works.

(N.B. All members unanimously agree with this goal.)

Specific How To's:

- (1) All men in each geographic area will commit themselves (Who?)
- (2) to come together once a month (How Often?)
- (3) for one day (How Long?)

- (4) to learn about and to reflect together upon the actual needs for social change. (To Do What?)

The task force has suggested (but not included as matter in the deliberation) some ways in which the evidence could be gathered and clarified, for example, by presentation of it by outside experts or by members of the congregation who actually do have experience and real evidence; by assigned readings as preparation for discussions, and the like.

Example B

A very "task oriented" congregation of religious women has become painfully aware that its only conscious communion at present is shared professional work in hospitals. After prayerful reflection on their common charism and their mission with Christ to suffering persons, they have realized that at present they need to place more emphasis on being than on doing. They prepared, deliberated upon, and, finally, committed themselves to the following proposal:

Goal: In order to Be a True Community of Shared Faith Ourselves for Sharing This Community of Faith with Other Persons through Our Apostolic Works, We Commit Ourselves:

Specific How To's:

- (1) That all Sisters in all our local communities (Who?)
- (2) shall come together once a month (How Often?)
- (3) for one full day (How Long?)
- (4) for sessions of: (a) faith-sharing; (b) shared prayer; (c) communal deliberation on decisions that require it.
(To Do What?)

Appendix II. Reporting Results Back to the Total Group

The results of the small groups should be tabulated as follows:

Group	I	II	III	IV	V	VI	Category [see pages 181 - 183]
Issue 1	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	a
" 2	No	Yes	No	Yes	Yes	No	c
" 3	Yes	R	R	No	Yes	Yes	d
" 4	R	R	R	R	R	R	d
" 5	No	No	No	No	No	No	b

Symbols: a unanimous acceptance
 b unanimous rejection
 c reactions differ
 d different options suggested
 R revise the proposal

Texts of revisions should be given, and it should be noted whether these merely revise the verbal style or really change the substantive intent of the original "how to."

FOOTNOTES

- 1 Materials already published on communal discernment include sections of my book, Making An Apostolic Community of Love: The Role of the Superior according to St. Ignatius of Loyola (The Institute of Jesuit Sources: St. Louis, 1970), namely pp. 122-123; 187-194 (hereafter referred to as MAppComLov); my study "Ignatian Discernment" in Studies in the Spirituality of Jesuits, Vol. II, No. 2 (April, 1970), 47-88 (Hereafter referred to as IgnDisc); and the study by Jules J. Toner, S.J., "A Method for Communal Discernment of God's Will," *ibid.*, Vol. III, No. 4 (September, 1971), 121-154.
- 2 The writer is particularly grateful to Fr. Michael J. Sheeran, S.J., for insights gained from his experience and reflection.
- 3 IgnDisc, pp. 59-61. See also my article, "The Still, Small Voice," The Way, Vol. 11, No. 4 (October, 1971), 275-282.
- 4 The writer is very grateful to Dr. Nick J. Colarelli of the Department of Psychology, St. Louis University, for aid in finding these methods.
- 5 For a very illuminating scriptural study of discernment in the New Testament, see Ignace de la Potterie, S.J., and Stanislaus Lyonnet, S.J., The Christian Lives by the Spirit (Staten Island, New York: Alba House, 1971), especially Ch. 4, Anointing of the Christian by Faith, pp. 79-143. It is pointed out that interior anointing means "an activity of the Holy Spirit that enlightens the soul, informs and guides it in the various circumstances of life" (p. 79). For a rich and profound development of the doctrine of spiritual discernment in the first letter of John, see the commentary of St. Augustine and the brilliant introduction in the edition published in the series Sources Chrétiennes #75, Saint Augustin, Commentaire de la Première Épître de S. Jean, Texte Latin. Introduction, Traduction et Notes par Paul Agaësse, S.J. (Paris: Éditions du Cerf, 1961). The citations from Scripture in the text are from the Jerusalem Bible.
- 6 The actual word of God here and now is not some miraculous intervention or gratuitous divine revelation. Rather, it is already there in the event, in this event at this unique moment in history through the convergence of all the persons and circumstances involved. See IgnDisc, pp. 48-49 and fn. 2 on p. 86; also p. 79.
- 7 IgnDisc, pp. 58-65.
- 8 IgnDisc, pp. 70-73. See also my article, "Discovering the Founder's Charism," The Way, Supplement 14 (Autumn, 1971), 62-70.
- 9 IgnDisc, pp. 72-73.
- 10 St. Ignatius himself clearly expressed this fact in a letter to Francis Borgia on June 5, 1552. Ignatius knew that the emperor wanted Borgia named a cardinal, and that the pope agreed; but he himself felt moved to resist this in every way possible (tuue este assenso ó spiritu,

de storuar en lo que pudiese). He saw that it was the will of God moving him to his position and also moving the emperor and the pope to the contrary, without there being the least contradiction (que no había contradition alguna), since the same Divine Spirit could move him to his judgment for certain reasons, and the others to the contrary for other reasons. Sti. Ignatii Epistolae et Instructiones, (Madrid, 1903-1911), IV, 283-285; Letters of St. Ignatius . . . Translated by W.J. Young, S.J. (Chicago, 1959), pp. 257-258.

- 11 A striking example is the whole First Epistle of St. John.
- 12 Thus, in the Deliberation of 1539, Ignatius and the first fathers explicitly noted that the results of their own communal discernment would be fully confirmed only when approved by the pope as representing the whole Church. (MApComLov, p. 190).
- 13 IgnDisc, p. 65.
- 14 That the reticence verbally to share faith-experiences is a recent culturally conditioned taboo within the Church is clear from the Acts of the Apostles itself. That it was not felt by Ignatius and his companions is documented by Laynez and by Ignatius himself in speaking of their conversations with one another from the beginning in Paris (MApComLov, p. 24). See also the remarks in IgnDisc, pp. 70-71.
- 15 On sentir, see MApComLov, pp. 111-116; IgnDisc, pp. 56-57.
- 16 MApComLov, pp. 14, 15, 21; 187-194; IgnDisc, pp. 67-70, 80-82.
- 17 See Appendix I, pp. 185-187, above.
- 18 This immediate experience of the confirmation of unanimous deep peace in the Holy Spirit simply in seeing the evidence is the analogue in communal discernment of the "First Time of Election" in Spiritual Exercises, [175].
- 19 This process differs from the "First Time of Election" in duration, but the terminus is the same finding of God in unanimity. This is the "Second Time of Election" in the Exercises, [176].
- 20 Here, the "Third Time of Election" Exercises, [177] is employed, since the Holy Spirit has not given the confirmation of interior "motions." The discerners reason that in such a situation God will make his will known to all of them through these means.
- 21 MApComLov, pp. 72, 94, 117, 131-135, 142, 177-178.
- 22 See Appendix II, p. 190, above.
- 23 See MApComLov, passim; also, IgnDisc, pp. 66-68.

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