



## Discernment on the Carmelite Way

*Use discernment, however, the guide of the virtues.*

*Discernment is relational, it is dialogue.*

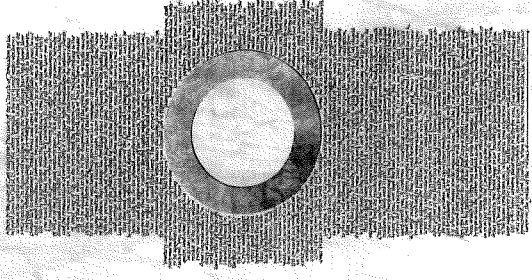
**Matthew Tonini, O.Carm.**

Carmelite Centre Melbourne

7 August 2024

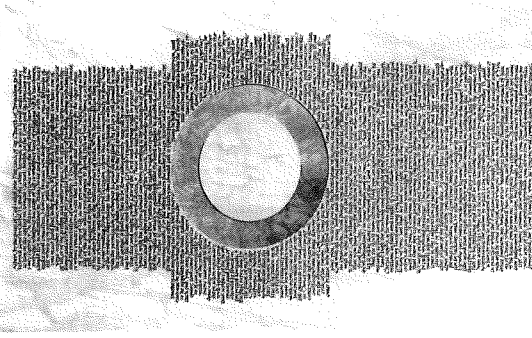
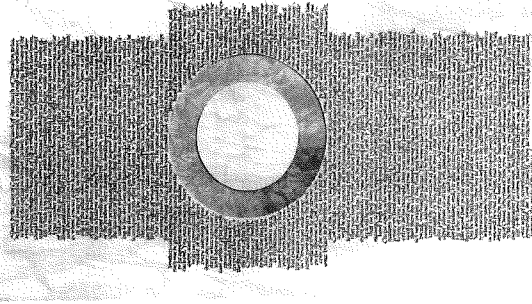
## Discernment in the Carmelite Rule

*The final admonition of St. Albert to the community of Mount Carmel*



*Utatur tamen discretione, que uirtutum est moderatrix.*

*Use discernment, however, the guide of the virtues.*



## A note on translation...

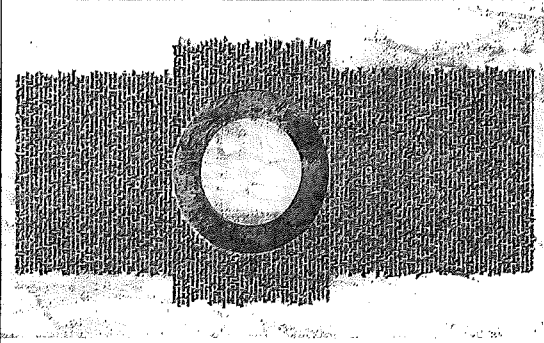
Translating 'discretione'

Instead of 'discernment' some translations of the rule use the term 'common sense'.

Common sense here is too narrow a translation that does not reflect the comprehensive meaning of "discernere" or "discretio"

(Plattig, *The rule and spiritual growth* p.529)

5



## Why discern?

"I have set before you life and death, blessings and curses. Choose life so that you and your descendants may live, loving the LORD your God, obeying him, and holding fast to him; for that means life to you."

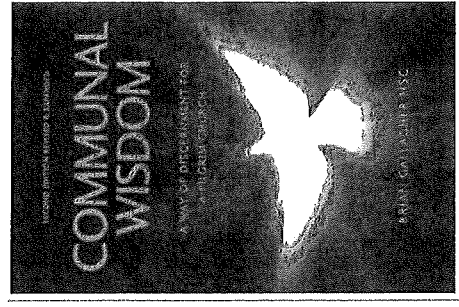
(Moses to the people, Deuteronomy 30:19-20)

6



**Silent Presence:**  
*Discernment as Process and Problem*  
Ernest Larkin, O.Carm.

7



**Communal Wisdom:**  
*A Way of Discernment for a Pilgrim Church*  
Brian Gallagher, MSC.

8

## Discernment on the Carmelite Way

1. What is Discernment?
  - o Three ways of discernment
2. Discernment 'How to'
  - o A personal process
  - o A communal process
  - o Some tools and strategies

9



10

**What is Discernment?**  
*How would you define discernment in a sentence?*

**What is discernment?**  
**Cassian: The finding of a balance**

*'Discretion, which passing by excess on either side, teaches a monk to walk along the royal road: and does not suffer him to be puffed up on the right hand of virtue, i.e., from excess of zeal to transgress the bound of due moderation in foolish presumption,*

*nor allows him to be enamoured of slackness and turn aside to the vices on the left hand, i.e. under the pretext of controlling the body to grow slack with the opposite spirit of lukewarmness.'*

*(Plattig, The rule and spiritual growth p.530)*

11



**What is discernment?**  
**Cassian: The finding of a balance**  
*Enter through the narrow gate; for the gate is wide and the road is easy that leads to destruction, and there are many who take it. For the gate is narrow and the road is hard that leads to life, and there are few who find it.*

*(Matthew 7:13-14)*

12



### What is discernment?

#### Nouwen: Listening & Responding

'Christian discernment is not the same as decision making...

Discernment... is about listening and responding to that place within us where our deepest desires align with God's desire. As discerning people, we sift through our impulses, motives, and options to discover which ones lead us closer to divine love and compassion for ourselves and other people and which ones lead us further away.'

(Nouwen, *Discernment: reading the signs of daily life*, p.17)

13



### What is discernment?

#### Nouwen: Listening & Responding

*His mother said to the servants,  
"Do whatever he tells you."*

(John 2:5)

14



### What is discernment?

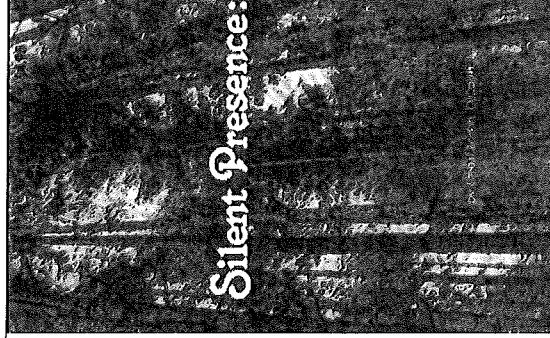
#### Larkin: The spiritual endeavour

'Discernment is not one discrete act in the spiritual life, but rather the whole spiritual endeavour...'

It is *experiencing* with understanding and *commitment* the presence of God in one's whole life.'

(Larkin, *Silent Presence*, p. 9)

15



### Silent Presence:

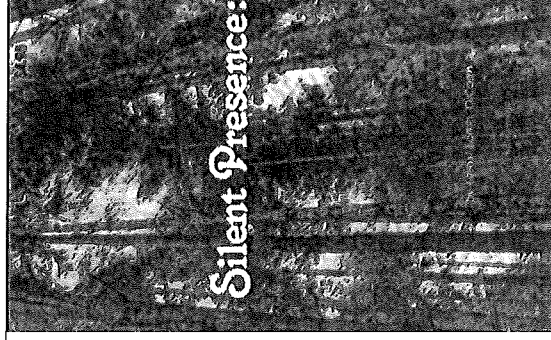
### What is discernment?

#### Larkin: The spiritual endeavour

*Do not be conformed to this world but be transformed by the renewal of your mind, that you may experience what is the will of God, what is good and acceptable and perfect.*

(Romans 12:2)

16



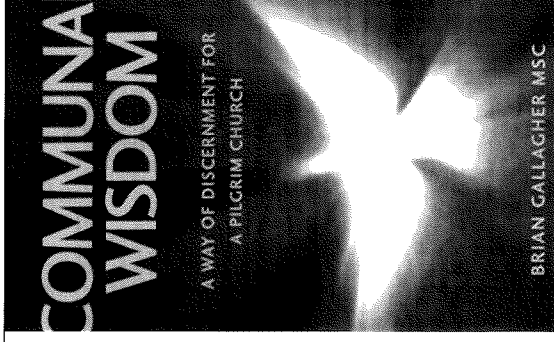
## What is discernment?

Gallagher: The contemplative way

*Contemplative listening makes possible a deeper truer noticing of the ways of the spirits in experience. It has been called 'seeing with the eyes of God' ... a contemplative approach is basic to the practice of discernment and to the process of becoming discerning.*

(Gallagher, *Communal Wisdom*, p. 22-25)

17



## What is discernment?

Summary of responses

1. Finding a balance (Cassian)
2. Listening & Responding (Nouwen)
3. The spiritual endeavour/experience (Larkin)
4. Contemplative approach: Gaze on God's revealing rather than decision to be made. (Gallagher)

18



## Ways of Discernment

1. Application of Spiritual Doctrine
2. Recognising Feelings
3. Interpreting Feelings

19

20



## Ways of discernment

### 1. Application of Spiritual Doctrine

<sup>2</sup>In many and various ways the holy fathers have laid down how everyone, whatever his state of life or whatever kind of religious life he has chosen, should live in allegiance to Jesus Christ and serve him faithfully with a pure heart and a good conscience.

<sup>3</sup>However, because you desire us to give you a **formula of life** which is in accordance with the commitments you have made and to which you must hold fast in the future:

*(The Rule of St. Albert, Carmelite Rule)*

21



## Ways of discernment

### 1. Application of Spiritual Doctrine

#### God - Self - Other

“At the same time community or dialogue is the normal environment for relationship with God.”

*(Larkin, p. 14)*

22



## Ways of discernment

### 1. Application of Spiritual Doctrine

A maxim of religious training/formation:

*‘Pay no attention to feelings. Keep the rule and the rule will keep you.’  
...to a point!*

23



## Ways of discernment

### 1. Application of Spiritual Doctrine

“The Rule of Albert of Jerusalem is an integral part of this monastic-ascetic tradition and is meant to teach its followers to strike the right balance in their action in all aspects of their lives, from devotional practices to human relationships... this does not mean that life should have no peaks and valleys, no joy, from this earthly life. Having experiences is an important part of life, as is having feelings and allowing inner stirrings and passion to exist. These things are crucial for the excitement and dynamism of spiritual life.”

*(Plattig, The Rule and Spiritual Growth, p. 530)*

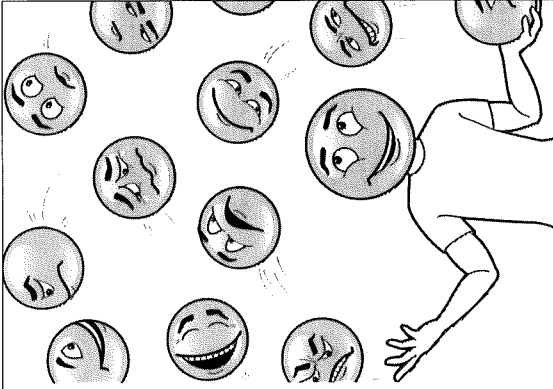
24



**Ways of discernment**  
**2. Recognising Feelings**

The First Week of the Ignatian Exercises - Movements of the heart  
 'attempts to utilise affective resonances to find one's way, not as direct indicators of God's particular will, but as experiences to be reckoned with at the beginning of the journey.'

(Larkin, p. 15)



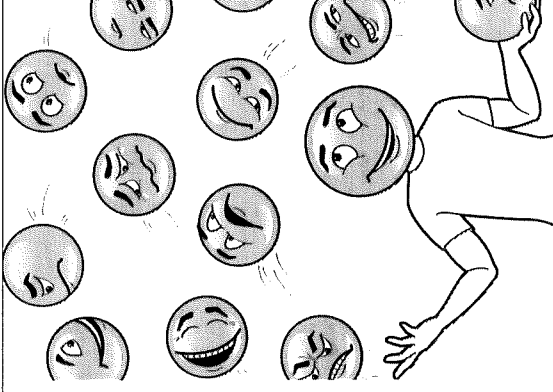
**Ways of discernment**  
**2. Recognising Feelings**

"Emotions are messages from yourself to yourself."

(Six Seconds)

Recognising feelings and emotions without judgement is a contemplative practice.

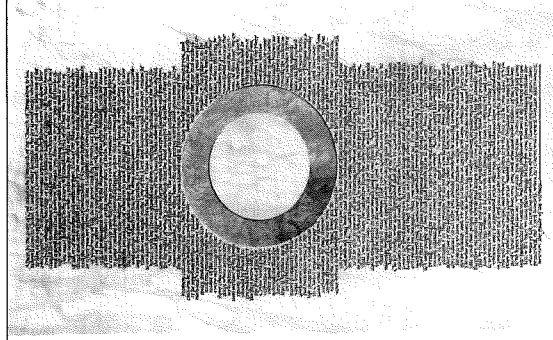
Rather than: "I shouldn't feel angry."  
 "What is this anger telling me?"



**Ways of discernment**  
**3. Interpreting Feelings**

"the question of where something has come from and where it is guiding us to and whether this goal corresponds with what I want and with what God wants for me."

(Plattig, The Rule and Spiritual Growth, p.531)

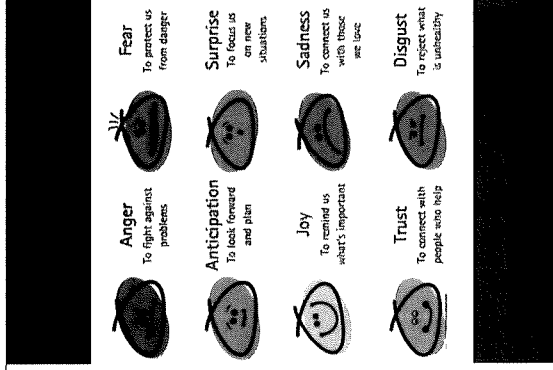


**Ways of discernment**  
**3. Interpreting Feelings**

The Second Week of the Ignatian Exercises

"God's language is not words or sound waves but **'the effect he produces in our souls'**"

[John of the Cross]



# Ways of discernment

## 3. Interpreting Feelings

# The Six Seconds™ EmotoScope

(www.6seconds.org)



Category: Glad

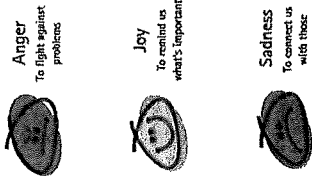
Word	Sensation	Thought	Behavior	Expression
Peaceful	I feel peaceful because the world is as it should be.	Realizes your sense of connection.	Relaxes the value of your efforts.	Eyes relaxed, head tilted left, relaxed smile.
Content	I feel content because I have accomplished my goal.	Strengthens your resolve and commitment.	Reminds you of what you like.	Eyes relaxed, head tilted left, relaxed smile.
Confident	I feel confident because I have accomplished my goal.	Reminds you of what you like.	Helps you pay attention to what's good in life.	Eyes relaxed, head tilted left, relaxed smile.
Pleased	I feel pleased because I have accomplished my goal.	Reminds you of what you like.	Helps you pay attention to what's good in life.	Eyes relaxed, head tilted left, relaxed smile.
Happy	I feel happy because I am satisfied with myself.	Reminds you of what you like.	Helps you pay attention to what's good in life.	Eyes relaxed, head tilted left, relaxed smile.
Joyful	I feel joyful because I am satisfied with myself.	Reminds you of what you like.	Helps you pay attention to what's good in life.	Eyes relaxed, head tilted left, relaxed smile.
Hopeful	I feel hopeful because I have accomplished my goal.	Reminds you of what you like.	Helps you pay attention to what's good in life.	Eyes relaxed, head tilted left, relaxed smile.
Delighted	I feel delighted because I have accomplished my goal.	Reminds you of what you like.	Helps you pay attention to what's good in life.	Eyes relaxed, head tilted left, relaxed smile.
Cheerful	I feel cheerful because I have accomplished my goal.	Reminds you of what you like.	Helps you pay attention to what's good in life.	Eyes relaxed, head tilted left, relaxed smile.
Joyful	I feel joyful because I have accomplished my goal.	Reminds you of what you like.	Helps you pay attention to what's good in life.	Eyes relaxed, head tilted left, relaxed smile.
Thrilled	I feel thrilled because I have accomplished my goal.	Reminds you of what you like.	Helps you pay attention to what's good in life.	Eyes relaxed, head tilted left, relaxed smile.
Excited	I feel excited because I have accomplished my goal.	Reminds you of what you like.	Helps you pay attention to what's good in life.	Eyes relaxed, head tilted left, relaxed smile.
Substant	I feel substantial because I have accomplished my goal.	Reminds you of what you like.	Helps you pay attention to what's good in life.	Eyes relaxed, head tilted left, relaxed smile.
Windy	I feel windy because I have accomplished my goal.	Reminds you of what you like.	Helps you pay attention to what's good in life.	Eyes relaxed, head tilted left, relaxed smile.
Goody	I feel goody because I have accomplished my goal.	Reminds you of what you like.	Helps you pay attention to what's good in life.	Eyes relaxed, head tilted left, relaxed smile.
Victorious	I feel victorious because I have accomplished my goal.	Reminds you of what you like.	Helps you pay attention to what's good in life.	Eyes relaxed, head tilted left, relaxed smile.

# Ways of discernment

## 3. Interpreting Feelings

# The Six Seconds™ EmotoScope

(www.6seconds.org)



**Anger**  
To fight against problems

**Joy**  
To remind us what's important

**Sadness**  
To connect us with those we love

Word	Sentence	Purpose	Sensations
Angry (Mad)	I feel angry because I can't do what I want.	Focus attention on something you want to change	Warm hands, fast pulse, narrow eyes, tense shoulders
Sad (Sad)	I feel sad because something is being taken away from me.	Help you recognise what you care about	Moist eyes, head down, body turning inward.
Joyful (Glad)	I feel joyful because I am getting what I really want.	Remind you of what matters most to you	Eyes open, smiling, tall/proud posture

# Ways of discernment

## 3. Interpreting Feelings

*"How can it be wrong when it feels so right."*

(Barbara Mandrell & David Houston)

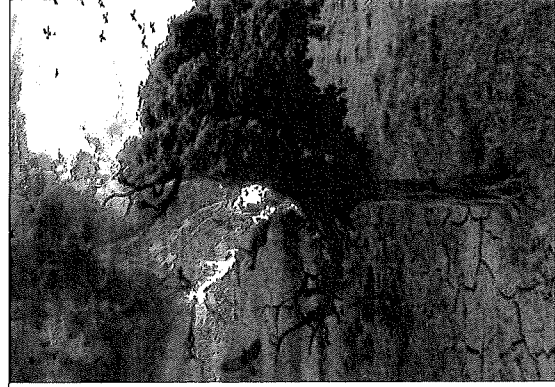


# Ways of discernment

## 3. Interpreting Feelings

*Beware of false prophets, who come to you in sheep's clothing but inwardly are ravenous wolves. You will know them by their fruits. Are grapes gathered from thorns, or figs from thistles? In the same way, every good tree bears good fruit, but the bad tree bears bad fruit. A good tree cannot bear bad fruit, nor can a bad tree bear good fruit. Thus you will know them by their fruits.*

(Matthew 7:15-18, 20)



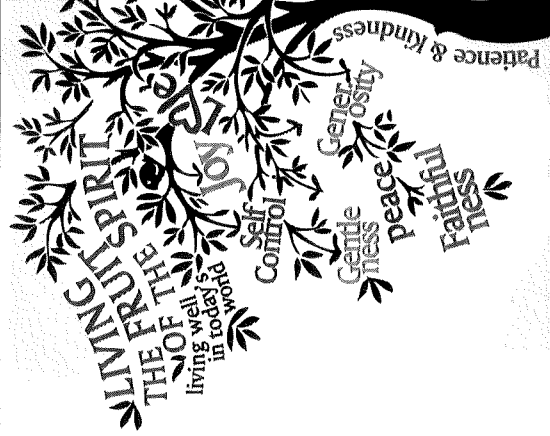


Ways of discernment  
3. Interpreting Feelings

*The fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, generosity, faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control.*

(Galatians 5:22-23, [5:16-25])

34



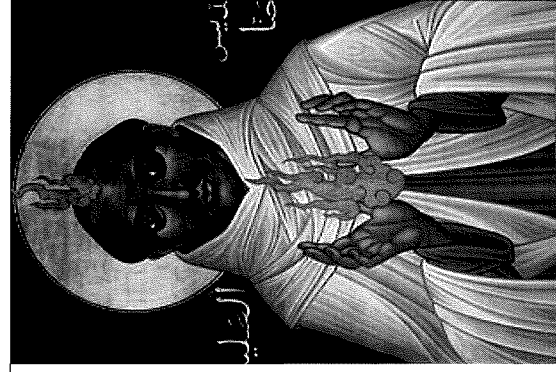
**What is Discernment?**  
*How would you define discernment in a sentence?*

35



**Discernment 'How-to'**  
*Processes & Skills*

36



**Discernment How-to**  
**John of the Cross**  
*Little explicit doctrine on discernment. It is sufficient for him to get beyond limited ways of perceiving and judging toward a level of spirit, pure faith and the embrace of divine love to divine union.*  
(Larkin, p. 32)

36

## Discernment How-to

Ignatius of Loyola

*A view that mystical union is found above all in apostolic action. "Discernment is key to his thinking, because his goal is union with the "working God" with whom he collaborates in building up the Kingdom."*

(Larkin, p.32)

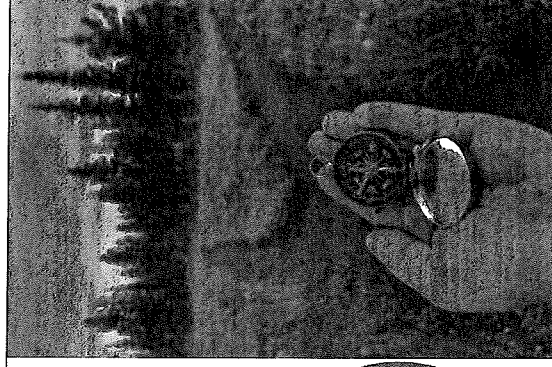
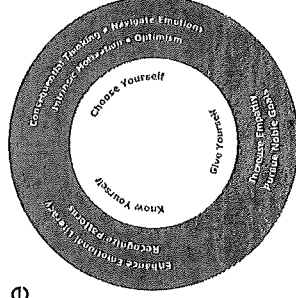
37



## Discernment How-to

Process of Discernment

1. Self-knowledge
2. Self-acceptance
3. Integration
4. Validation



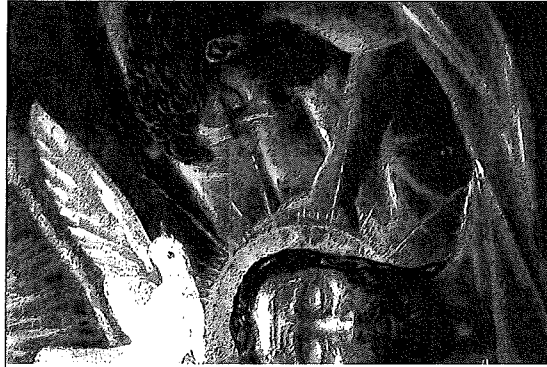
## Discernment How-to

*"You are my beloved one!"*

The basis of discernment is the experience of divine love... Without the original experience of pure love, discernment could not take place.

(Larkin, p. 35)

38



Process of Discernment

1. Self-knowledge

*It is to experience yourself, to be in touch with your thinking, your feeling and your behaviour, all three together.*

(Larkin, p.42)



40

**Process of Discernment**  
**2. Self-acceptance**

*Self-acceptance means to recognise yourself in your thoughts, feelings and behaviour. To accept all things without judgement. To see them without distortion or enslavement. This journey takes time, discipline and experience.*

(Larkin, p.45)

41



**Process of Discernment**  
**2. Self-acceptance**

*I can accept myself completely when I am convinced of God's absolute and total love.*

(Larkin, p.46)

42

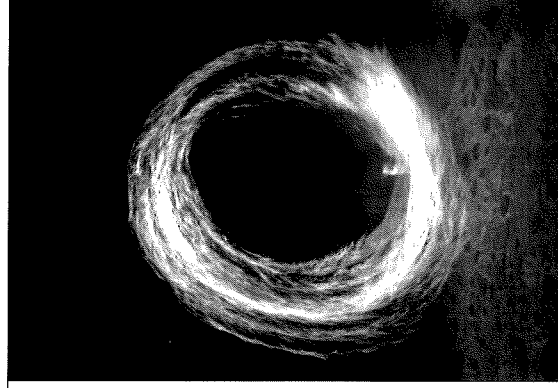


**Process of Discernment**  
**3. Integration**

*Integration is wholeness... it is self-possession, consolation, openness, freedom, detachment, indifference, a trusting spirit, and all the other fruits of the Spirit. Once you get to know who you really are in your deepest self, the direction of your life emerges.*

(Larkin, p. 46)

43



**Process of Discernment**  
**4. Validation**

Christian discernment is dialogical and interactional.

Validation comes from my tradition, especially the normative statement of Christian life which is Sacred Scripture, or one of its derivatives, such as the writings of the people of God from the apostolic age to the present.

(Larkin, p. 48-49)

44



## Process of Discernment

### 4. Validation

The living representatives of this tradition - teachers, counsellors, spiritual directors - all of whom will help me observe, objectify, and evaluate my experience are also important witnesses. They represent the living community, which is the real *locus* of all discernment.

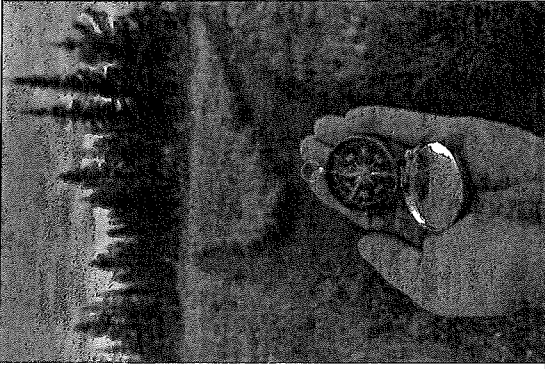
*(Larkin, p. 48-49)*

45



## Discernment toolkit Practice, Skills & Experiences

46



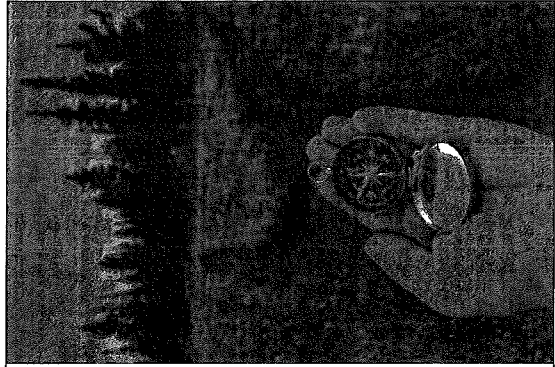
## Discernment Toolkit

Process & skills of Discernment

1. Prayer
2. Consciousness-examen
3. Journal
4. Counselling/Spiritual Direction
5. Healing/Reconciliation
6. Dreams

*(Larkin)*

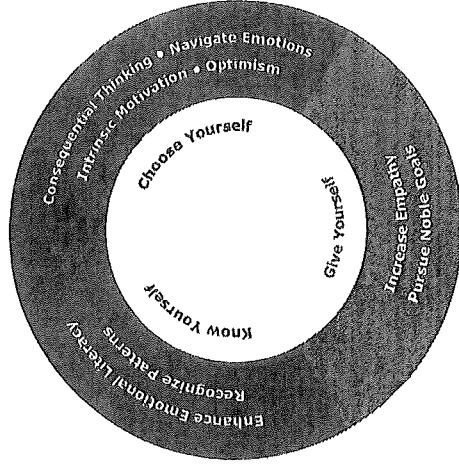
47



## Discernment Toolkit Process & skills of Discernment

Six Seconds  
<https://www.6seconds.org>

48

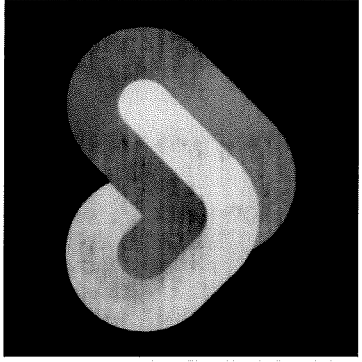


## Discernment Toolkit

Process & skills of Discernment

How we feel

<https://howwefeel.org/>



49

## References

[Carmelite Library Catalogue No.]

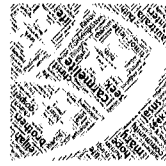
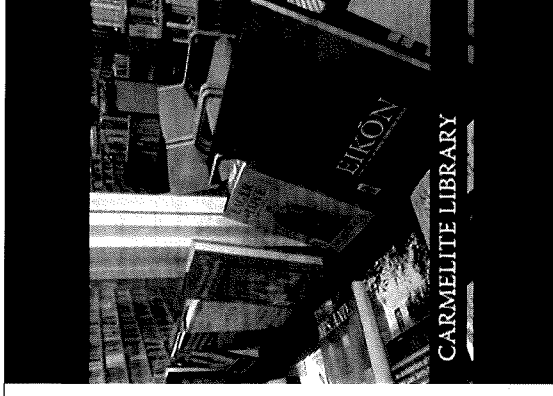
Ernest Larkin (1981), *Silent Presence: Discernment as Process and Problem*. Denville, New Jersey: Dimension Books. [C 248.48 L324 S]

Michael Plattig (2008), "The Rule and Spiritual Growth" in *The Carmelite Rule (1207-2007): Proceedings of the Lisieux Conference*. Edizioni Carmelite: Rome, Italy. Pp 513-532 [C 271.42 G633]

Henry Nouwen and others (2013), *Discernment: reading the signs of daily life*. New York: HarperOne. [247.98 NOU D]

Brian Gallagher (2018), *Communal Wisdom: A way of Discernment for a pilgrim Church*. Bayswater: Coventry Press. [248.48 G162 CW]

<https://www.6seconds.org>, <https://howwefeel.org/>



## Discernment on the Carmelite Way

Use discernment, however, the guide of the virtues.

*Discernment is relational, it is dialogue.*

**Matthew Tonini, O.Carm.**

Carmelite Centre Melbourne

7 August 2024



51