

Vocational Discernment: Questions Traditionally Used in Testing a Call from God to a Particular Kind of Work

The church has traditionally used a number of criteria for discerning a calling from God to a certain style of life and a certain type of work. The way these criteria are understood and used is a bit complex and can't be reduced to a simple presentation, but the following basic questions are often asked to solicit some basic information and get the discussion started:

- (1) What is being done?
 - a. What degree of acquaintance/experience does one have with this work?
 - b. Does it tend to the honor of God, the glory of his people, the benefit of the neighbor, etc.
 - i. Why is this thought to be the case?
 - ii. What limitations are observed and what is the nature of these?
- (2) For whom is it being done?
 - a. What is the goal and intention of the one doing this work?
 - i. Why is this thought to be the case?
- (3) In what spirit is it being done?
 - a. Is there evidence of being called to this work or does it just seem like a choice one made?
 - b. Is it being done out of love of God or of the neighbor?
 - i. What fruit is observed in this respect and why is it thought to be relevant?
 - ii. What is the nature of one's desire for this work?
 - c. Is it being done from some good that the mind sees and approves or from false pictures of God, oneself or the world?
 - d. Is it being done from some holy affection which is moving the will?
 - e. Is it being done out of the fear of God? The fear of a slave or the reverence of a son or a daughter?
 - f. Does the thought of doing this work or the decision to do this work bring
 - i. disturbance
 - ii. anxiety which
 1. lasts or is recurrent (goes away and comes back);
 2. is disorienting;
 3. creates consumes a great deal of energy, so that it takes attention and focus away from other things or encourage choices that are hasty or seem one-sided;
 4. evokes excessive reactions of antagonistic irritability, aggressive anger or defensive rigidity),
 - iii. rapid movement between different opinions and/or states?
 - g. Is the inclination to this work connected with the approval (or virtual presence) of another person? In other words, to what extent is it one's own desire and to what extent is it an effect or by-product of someone else's desire?
 - h. Does it arise from a moving toward something or a moving away from something?
 - i. Does it arise from a desire to right some past wrong?

- j. Does the desire for (sense of obligation to) this work seem like something that rests outside the person and exerts force on them from without (duty which is poorly internalized, fear)?
- k. Does the desire for this work arise from a sense of freedom and joy in a good beyond oneself? Or is it associated with resignation and a sense that other options are not available?
- l. Does one return to this work again and again in spite of the significant difficulties associated with it?
 - i. Does the return to this work arise from a healthy motive, i.e. that one could not not do this work, even after taking account of the difficulties and repeatedly experiencing their effects?
 - ii. Is the return to this work evidence of an undivided love for God that is not compromised by other considerations?
- m. Does one's desire for this work outstrip and get ahead of one's present (regularly-exercised) capacities?
 - i. Does one's proposal for completing this work rest upon the assumption of extraordinary efforts?
 - ii. Does this work require a kind of maturity and capacities for understanding and handling people that one may not yet possess?
 - 1. "Those whom God chooses for something, he likewise prepares and disposes, so that they are found to be fit for that for which they are chosen, in accordance with that passage (2 Cor. 3:6), 'He [sc. God] made us fit to be ministers of a new covenant'" (Thomas Aquinas *Summa theol.* 3, q. 27, a. 4)