

UNIVERSITY OF WINCHESTER

ABSTRACT

Spiritual Discernment in Pioneer Ministry:

To What Extent Do Spiritual Practices of Discernment Feature
in the Practice of Four Anglican Ordained Pioneer Ministers?

The Revd Mark Neil Rodel

MA in Theology for Christian Ministry and Mission

STETS

July 2011

This independent study has been completed as a requirement
for a higher degree of The University of Winchester.

Ordained Pioneer Ministry pits the wits of quirky, mission-minded priests against the world. Our wits are not enough. It is not evaluation that is required, but inspiration, if the Church is to make any real breakthroughs into contemporary culture.

What OPMs need is to be trained, formed and equipped to personally practice discernment and lead the new churches they found to become discerning communities.

They do that by becoming attentive to the deepest movements of their inner life; those movements that persist despite resistance or pressure; those impulses that just will not be stilled. They also need to learn to sift those impulses in the light of self-examination; to expose their deepest, hidden motivations. That is not in order to condemn themselves but to reach mature and compassionate accommodations with those parts of themselves that abide in shadow. That way, they can release their creative energies and bring together their unique gifting with that which the Holy Spirit appears to be doing in their immediate world

These affective, reflexive and communal dimensions of discernment are explored through the teaching of the Christian tradition and the experience of four Ordained Pioneer Ministers, one of whom is the author.

He concludes that the experience of trying to integrate charismatic and contemplative spiritualities, common to all their stories provides a rich seam for OPMs in general to mine. He tentatively concludes that the implications of this may be far reaching for the selection, training and deployment, not just of OPMs but of all clergy.

UNIVERSITY OF WINCHESTER

Spiritual Discernment in Pioneer Ministry:

To What Extent Do Spiritual Practices of Discernment Feature
in the Practice of Four Anglican Ordained Pioneer Ministers?

The Revd Mark Neil Rodel

MA in Theology for Christian Ministry and Mission

STETS

July 2011

This independent study has been completed as a requirement
for a higher degree of The University of Winchester.

Declaration

No portion of the work referred to in the Independent Study has been submitted in support of an application for another degree or qualification of this or any other university or other institute of learning.

Copyright

Copyright in text of this Independent Study rests with the author. Copies (by any process) either in full, or of extracts, may be made only in accordance with instructions given by the author. Details may be obtained from STETS. This page must form part of any such copies made. Further copies (by any process) of copies made in accordance with such instructions may not be made without the permission (in writing) of the author.

Table of Contents

Introduction	1
Chapter one: Dimensions of Discernment	4
1.1 The affective dimension	4
1.2 The reflexive dimension	7
1.3 The collective dimension	11
Chapter two: Investigating pioneer discernment	15
2.1 Model of theological reflection	15
2.2 Research methodology	16
2.3 Research method	17
Chapter three: Discernment in practice	20
3.1 The affective dimension	20
3.2 The reflexive dimension	24
3.3 The collective dimension	28
Conclusion	32
Bibliography	35

13,079 words

Introduction

Where is freedom found if we live in the foreknowing and will of God?

Our tradition largely asserts that while God's broader purposes are irresistible, God's creatures have a measure of freedom in the particularities of their existence. Many Christians see that freedom purely in terms of cooperation or resistance: one can either obey or rebel against 'what God wants'. Faced with choices where neither Scripture, nor tradition, nor even common sense reduce the options to one, Christians have sought to work out 'what God wants' through *discernment*.

Thus faithful people have been reduced to seeing freedom simply as whether or not to do as one is asked. How could such limited freedom allow creatures to truly embody their Creator's creativity? It could not. God's delight is in response to our creative participation in the detailed outworking of God's broader purposes. Faithfulness allows room for creative freedom not merely obedience.

How much room is currently disputed in mission and ecclesiology. The extent to which the Church's form and its mission is a 'given' is of particular concern to the Church of England. If the parochial form of Anglican mission is a dominical gift, then we cannot change it. If, however, it is the result of faithful and creative human collaboration with God, then in changing circumstances there is room for creative renewal.

It is a working assumption that the second option pertains in my role as an Ordained Pioneer Minister (OPM). I am charged with fostering fresh expressions of church in a city centre on England's south coast. Moving beyond established patterns of working, worshipping and engaging in mission requires creative responses to a larger degree than in parochial ministry.

Very early in this new role, I saw a great diversity of challenges and opportunities. I had to choose where to begin and what to do. The pragmatic Anglican response of reason bounded by law was insufficient. It was beyond my capacity to reason my way. I was in need of *inspiration*.

Returning to the gospels, and Christ's own ministry, led me to conclude it was discernment that was needed. Jesus exercised just the sort of faithful creative freedom that I described above. He exercises discernment not by working out in every moment 'what God wants' but by responding to what God is already doing (John 5:19).

His ability to bring that work to fruition, wherever he goes, whomever he meets, is because he is the Incarnate Son of God. None of us can hope to develop such a capacity. But if we say his response flows from his unique character, is it a semantic twist to say that ours should come too from our own unique character? As flawed as we are, our unique personhood is the only place from which our creative participation in God's work can come.

Discernment is the capacity to recognise the Holy Spirit's prevenient work and to respond out of our unique personality and giftedness. It is the means by which we recognise God at work and more fully recognise and know ourselves.

In order to discover how we exercise and develop this capacity, particularly in ordained pioneer ministry I looked in two directions. I mined the Christian tradition to determine what are the dimensions of discernment through which this double recognition is achieved. I simultaneously interviewed a small number of OPMs both to see what insights they might offer, and also to test out my emerging notions of what discernment involves. Alongside that I interrogated and developed my own practice over eighteen months.

What follows is the fruit of that double looking.

In the first chapter, I set out three dimensions of discernment – affective, reflexive and collective, drawing early monastic, medieval, Pentecostal and Quaker traditions. In the first section, I argue that despite some limitations, charismatic spirituality is helpful in engaging this affective dimension. In the second, I argue that contemplative spirituality provides the context in which reflexivity is developed. The third section explores the relationship between individual leadership and the different networks within which OPMs operate. I argue that this collective dimension is necessary in pioneer ministry if it is to be both catholic and geared towards creating self-sustaining communities.

The third chapter explores these three dimensions in my practice and my colleagues'. In the first section, I discuss how much feeling can be a helpful guide in our decision making. In the second, I evaluate the different ways we are developing reflexivity and how the tradition might help us deepen that practice. The third section examines the extent to which discernment is shared.

The second chapter begins with the model of theological reflection I use to bridge the tradition and research, as well as the methodology and methods I employed in the research. It sets out the limitations of this study and the tentative nature of its conclusions and suggestions.

I conclude that the way we are integrating charismatic and contemplative spiritual experience is fertile ground for developing a discerning capacity appropriate for our ministries. I contend that a greater focus on deepening self-understanding and exercising collective discernment is vital. I suggest that encouraging these capacities in ministerial selection, formation and deployment is essential for pioneer ministry and potentially for other forms too.

Chapter one: Dimensions of Discernment

1.1 The affective dimension

If it feels good, do it.

That maxim has got people into all kinds of trouble. The fact that 'self control' is listed among the fruit of the Spirit (Galatians 5:22-23) suggests that, far from feelings helping us to discern the Spirit's work, being subject to our passions reveals an unregenerate condition.

This is what the Desert Fathers say in their writings on discernment. Evagrius Ponticus says that far from helping us find direction, our passions lead us into what he calls 'wandering'.

For the [nous] subject to passion wanders about and becomes hard to restrain when it is concerned about matters producing pleasures. But it stops wandering when it has become impassive

(St Evagrius quoted in Rich 2007:45-46)

Feelings, then, are something to be mistrusted and constrained. And it is evidence of the Holy Spirit within that we exercise such restraint. We identify the restraint of emotion with reason. Which suggests we are closest to the Spirit when we calmly and rationally reason things out. The word 'nous' is often rendered in English as reason. But we need to be careful what we mean. Reason encompassed more ways of knowing for the ancients than it does for us who live under the Enlightenment's long shadow. Deductive reasoning on the basis of empirical evidence is not what the fathers understood by *nous*. Rowan Williams, discussing Evagrius's predecessor Origen says:

It is axiomatic for Origen that the nous (spirit, soul, subject, intellect) is 'akin' to God, and so by nature tends Godward... The nous is the image of God, created before the body... and it alone can know God... Thus the knowledge of God is very sharply distinguished from sense-experience of any kind...

(Williams 1996:42)

Discernment, then, is closer to intuition than to emotion. It is developed, according to Evagrius, by attaining virtue, itself acquired by overcoming passion.

As the monk advances in [virtue] he has counselled and guided by his perfected and *passionless* [nous] more and more intuitively as a direct result of its perfected condition.
(Rich 2007:73 italics mine)

Discernment is 'intuitive knowledge, a knowing that no longer requires impressions, empirical evidence or deductive reasoning' (Rich 2007:73). This model of discernment excludes both emotion and reason. But how do we apprehend what we intuit? Is it a wholly unconscious activity?

These desert reflections carry the weight of experience of prayer over many generations. Their conclusions cannot be lightly dismissed. However, I would suggest that intuition *is a felt* experience. While this *immediate* level of feeling is to be excluded from decision-making, deeper and more sustained feeling is precisely the means by which we apprehend what we intuit.

That is evident in more recent notions of discernment. For Quakers, a sense or feeling of being clear of an inner burden – 'clearness' – is fundamental to discernment (Loring 1992:9). That is often experienced through the initial disturbance and subsequent restoration of peace (Loring 1992:10).

It is not an immediate emotional response that Quakers seek, but something more persistent. Indeed a 'leading' that persists in spite of the subject's enduring self-control is considered more authentic than 'promptings' whose emotional force is spent by being acted upon immediately (Loring 1992:6). An emotionally perceived sense of direction mediated *through its restraint* is closer to what the early desert monastics were describing.

This affective dimension is found too in the Ignatian tradition. The principle of what Jules Toner (1991:81) calls 'elective indifference' has become a key aspect of discernment after the pattern of Ignatius of Loyola. It is a choice to seek nothing except God's will in making decisions. It is analogous to the gradual liberation from passion that the Desert Fathers sought. However, as Toner (1991:81-87) makes clear, this intentional indifference is not the same as 'affective apathy'. It is not about the eradication of feeling.

Indeed *consolation* and *desolation* are central to Ignatian discernment. These words describe the feelings of joy, peace and encouragement or conversely sadness, distress and despondency that arise when we contemplate particular options for action. These are subtle and nuanced terms and should be clearly distinguished from just doing what makes us feel good and not doing what make us feel bad. Indeed they can be experienced in quite paradoxical ways. As one Jesuit writer says: 'Spiritual desolation

does not always mean sadness. Sometimes an experience of sadness is a moment of conversion and intimacy with God' (anon undated). The *Spiritual Exercises* are designed to cultivate attentiveness to these affective movements, particularly where they transcend momentary impulse and reveal something our life's inner direction in relation to God's broader purposes. Once again, therefore, emotions are an important guide where they are sustained under persistent scrutiny.

Ignatius's achievement, as Mark A McIntosh (2004:97) says, is that he 'harness[es] this discerning awareness of spiritual consolation to a sense of mission: in other words, the new clarity about what animates one is not simply a good but ought to do some work in the arena of practical judgement and concrete availability for service.' Attention to the affective through Ignatian meditation is particularly apposite for those whose distinctive form of ministry requires them ask precisely these questions.

This attentiveness is not about simply going with what we feel. It is about deep-seated emotion that survives in the crucible of its restraint and probing. How is it then that I can claim that charismatic spirituality is helpful when it is so often accused of trashy emotionalism?

The answer is that it holds the potential for self-transcendence. The ecstatic phenomena central to charismatic spirituality hold out the possibility of direct engagement with the movement of the Holy Spirit that is sought in discernment.

But are such phenomena genuine? Can they not be explained in purely psychological terms? I would argue that that does not necessarily mean they are bogus. In fact, while there is certainly a charismatic tendency to focus on the purely supernatural, I would not want to restrict the work of God's Spirit to that which can be defined as miraculous. It may well be that those very psychological mechanisms are the means by which divine grace transports the subject. Their effect on the practitioner opens up the possibility of the sort of liberation that Evagrius imagined; both liberation from being subject to emotional impulses and liberation from the limits on imagination imposed by strict adherence to empiricism and deductive reasoning.

Regarding liberation from impulses, I would point to the overwhelming experiences of joy and peace that people have in charismatic worship. People frequently report that they can transcend their current emotional state and experience transformative joy and peace through sharing in expressive worship. This accords with what Mark Cartledge (2003) found too in his researches into charismatic experience. He asked 'Philip' what he felt when speaking in tongues. Though it had become 'a natural expression' for him,

he also experienced a sense of 'peace and nearness to God' as well as a feeling 'like a well absolutely flowing over' (Cartledge 2003:142).

Stephen Parker (1996), conducting a similar study, reflects on Paul Tillich's 'ecstatic reason'. In 'standing outside of one's self' (Tillich quoted in Parker 1996:150) the subject directly apprehends the ground of its being. It is arguable that receiving and giving words of wisdom and knowledge, and prophetic utterance, whatever the reality of their origin, open us to the possibility of insight that transcends our innate reasoning capacity. Glossolalia similarly transports the speaker beyond the limitations of the language world. This charisma could be said to be liberative of the imagination.

The immediacy of these self-transcendent experiences that could be the training ground of the more disciplined work involved in Ignatian discernment, for instance. Knowing joy and peace that transcend our immediate emotional condition will help us to recognise those deeper movements of consolation. Experiencing 'knowing' that transcends sheer rationality will encourage us to imagine greater possibilities than our instrumental reason can discover. It can be the training ground for that deeper intuition the Desert Fathers saw as the ultimate medium of discernment.

1.2 The reflexive dimension

What should be clear by now, is that as well as an affective dimension to discernment, there is a reflexive dimension too. It is integral to discernment that we sift the emotional impulses we discussed above.

This is because unlike Christ, whom we identified as the model of discernment in the introduction, we are not motivated purely and wholeheartedly to serve God and the coming of God's kingdom. We are gripped by selfish impulses, that if unchecked hinder the development of virtue and lead to 'evil' thoughts including gluttony, fornication, avarice, anger, grief, spiritual sloth, vainglory and pride. So say Evagrius and John Cassian (Rich 2007:94).

Similarly the anonymous author of *a Tretis of Discrecyon of Spirites* some 900 years later envisages discernment as a struggle against flesh, the world and the 'Fiend of Hell' (anon 1985:43). He identifies those 'spirits' with our desires for 'creature comforts', 'possessions and pomp' and our tendency to resort to bitterness and envy when our other desires are frustrated.

Discernment is cast in both these understandings as the ‘discernment of spirits’ – the capacity to distinguish good from evil. This task is not straightforward. According to these writers it is not obvious when these temptations are manifest in our desires. ‘Demons’ can take on the appearance of ‘angels’. Whether we understand that to mean the activity of real spirits (as most of these writers appear to) or whether we understand that in metaphorical terms, the point is the same, our self-serving desires can manifest themselves as something more noble.

Part of the task of discernment then is to uncover our hidden motivations. Thus in another tract, *a Pistle of Discrecioun of Stirings*, the same author says that through this charism ‘one comes to a clear and honest understanding of oneself and all one’s inner motives’ (anon 1985:28). To speak of a *reflexive* dimension of discernment, then, involves holding up a mirror to ourselves in order that we see ourselves as we truly are.

I suggested above that discernment involves a response to Spirit’s prevenient work emerging from our unique personality and giftedness. That involves a deepening of self-knowledge. What is envisaged in what we have seen so far is indeed a deepening of self-knowledge, but of a much less positive kind.

Yet it is in confronting our darker motivations that we create space for more positive self-understanding. For John Cassian both dimensions – positive and negative – are essential in discernment. Discernment is achieved through ‘disciplined self-examination that results in an accurate self-assessment of *capability* and *vulnerability*’ (Rich 2007:101 emphasis mine).

All the pre-modern writers I have surveyed are uncompromising in their depiction of the interior struggle between ‘good and evil’. Once again, one is loath to take issue with people who were so wholly devoted to the service of Christ. Nevertheless, as Quaker Patricia Loring (1999:68) puts it, in our own time and place ‘with more sophistication in modern psychology, we are less apt than... the early church... to expect totally pure motives from one another’. Indeed, considering this in the light of depth psychology, we might be prepared to reach an accommodation with our ‘impure’ motives, rather than seeking their eradication.

Becoming conscious of what we repress, deny or project in Jungian terms (Stevens 1994:66), could be seen as analogous to that self-same process of uncovering envisaged by those earlier Christian writers. Perhaps the problem is not so much the impurity of our desires, but our fantasies of purity.

Repressing, denying or projecting our 'shadow' does not enable its subjugation, according to Jung. Instead it expresses itself in uncontrolled and destructive ways: the same outcome envisaged by pre-modern commentators. But in contrast to them, Jung suggests we should not seek to contend with our shadow but to 'own' it. As Anthony Stevens (1994:67) puts it: 'To own one's shadow is to become responsible for it, so that one's morality is less blind and compulsive, and ethical choices become possible.'

It is not merely ethical, but creative choices that become possible. It is this making conscious of our shadow and reaching an accommodation with it that sets us free from compulsive and habituated patterns of being and doing. It opens our imagination to new possibilities and enables us to participate in the emergence of newness.

Jung's work is speculative and his psychological claims are not universally accepted. Nonetheless, they offer at least an imaginative way of describing what is more broadly held to be true in the light of evolutionary, genetic and neurological discoveries: human motivations are complex and cannot be reduced to binary polarities.

So, while it is entirely proper to attempt to become increasingly conscious of self-interest, we need to be realistic about the extent to which we can completely constrain it. That is not to deny the possibility of transformation and healing, but that along the way, there are moments when we need to reach an accommodation with ourselves. The insight of depth psychology is that the process of interior negotiation and compromise can itself release creative energy. Giving one's ego a *little* of the 'possessions and pomp' it desires means we simultaneously recognise those impulses for what they are and disempower them.

To expend all one's energies on fighting those drives is perhaps something to which a desert monk can devote himself. But for OPMS, working in a demanding context, and often having families to care for as well, energy is more diffuse. I contend that the more realistic aspirations I have outlined represent an appropriate and compassionate way to perpetuate the discerning spirit of the Desert Fathers and their followers in the context of 21st century life and ministry.

All of this is about creating the capacity and the freedom within ourselves to respond to what we perceive God to be doing out of the creative and integrative aspects of our being and to minimise the potential for our self-serving impulses to do harm, if necessary by accommodating them just a bit.

What sort of spirituality is most likely to help us develop along these lines?

Dualism has not gone away. Indeed it is often associated with the conservative tendency within charismatic Christianity. The belief in literal spirits is not confined to this tradition. But notions of spiritual warfare and deliverance can be damaging, as Roland Howard (1997) so powerfully demonstrates in his account of its worst excesses. Rather than providing resources for a nuanced response to our shadow, charismatic spirituality is more likely to condemn it to the outer darkness and declare 'here be dragons'. Thus, though it offers a helpful grounding from which to develop the affective dimension of discernment, the particular resources it might have to offer directly in its reflexive dimension would need, at the very least, to be very sensitively deployed, if not avoided altogether.

Ignatius's *Spiritual Exercises* are clearly designed to engage participants in deeper self-knowledge as they interrogate the subtleties of the movements of consolation and desolation within. Familiarity with these exercises, if not training in their use, might be especially helpful for OPMs. As we saw above, the self-understanding they offer is not an end in itself. Through meditation on the life, work and person of Christ, they provide a means for exercitants to identify their particular vocation. They enable the discovery of that very participation in the movement of the love of God in the world (McIntosh 2004:68-9) that the pioneer seeks.

What is clear is that for the Desert Fathers and those following, discernment is an integral part of a life of *contemplation*. In fact the persistent implication is that it is the central virtue that makes contemplation possible.

Could it be that contemplative spirituality is particularly appropriate for developing reflexivity? The problem that immediately presents itself is that while reflexivity in the way that I have described it means greater self-knowledge, the ultimate aim of contemplation is unmediated knowledge of God. Employing this form of prayer primarily in order to develop *self*-knowledge undermines the whole exercise.

It looks self-defeating to use contemplative prayer to develop reflexivity. But this I think would be to misunderstand what our commentators intend. Instead of contemplation being a spiritual tool we deploy in developing this reflexivity, discernment and its reflexive dimension are an integral aspect of the greater work of the subject's drawing closer to God.

Therefore those whose spirituality is contemplative will find that this aspect of discernment is a natural development of their prayer. It is an inevitable consequence of drawing closer to the ground of our being that we should know ourselves more fully. That is not to say for a moment that it is an easy process. The testimony of those who

dedicate their lives to contemplation is that it is a path of struggle. But it is in the struggle with those distracting impulses within us, those parts of ourselves that draw us away from God, that we can recognise them.

1.3 The collective dimension

In the absence of the established structures in which parochial clergy work, the things we have identified so far will help us as we make decisions as to what to do from day to day. It can help us shape our work. But we do not work alone, no matter how much we operate beyond the frontier of existing churches. An OPM's priesthood is not exercised in isolation but is an expression of the Church catholic, grounded in relationships with colleagues in deaneries, archdeaconries, dioceses and beyond. The pioneer's ministry is shared with these colleagues and, to varying degrees, with all the baptised. What one chooses to do affects other Christian communities. Indeed the call to such a ministry is discerned by the wider Church and is undertaken on its behalf. The OPM, in short, works in a *network* of ecclesial relationships.

And there is inevitably a *communal* dimension too, both at the work's inception and in its intended outcomes. The goal of pioneer ministry is not to establish just a 'work' but to foster new community. The things one chooses to do or not do are at some point likely to be of direct consequence to a body of people seeking to live as disciples or at the very least exploring faith.

Is it right and proper for the OPM, in the light of all that, to engage in discernment and to take decisions on their own? We are meant to 'pioneer'; to break new ground, but does that mean we necessarily have to go it alone?

The story of how the first Church broke new ground, or at least the version that the writer of Acts tells is helpful here. St Peter, according to Acts 10, was the first to take the gospel to the home of a Gentile. He appears to have taken that step on his own (inspired) initiative. But immediately following the events at the house of Cornelius, he goes back to Jerusalem to share the story. It is not explicit in Acts 11 that this sharing was in order to seek the authentication of Mother Church. Later on, however, we do see a dispute about the implications of the Gentile Mission being settled by the whole Church in Jerusalem (Acts 15). Paul and Barnabas share the story of their adventures in mission with the whole church (Acts 15:4). The apostles and elders engage in a process of communal discernment (Acts 15:6), involving important contributions from

significant leaders (Acts 15:7,12,13-21). The decision reached is authenticated by the whole church (Acts 15:22) as Luke Timothy Johnson (1996:105) says.

In later centuries, as the church becomes more settled and *pastoral*, decision-making is increasingly invested in the clergy, but what we see here in this account is a church in *mission* mode. I would argue therefore that its model is more appropriate to OPMs. In a time of innovation, it is important that pioneer mission leaders engage the wider spheres of Christian community in the process of discernment.

I have called this dimension of discernment *collective* rather than *communal* because OPMs will likely want to engage with a diverse matrix of individuals and communities rather than just one.

This is entirely consistent with the Christian tradition. It is clear in all the reflections on discernment with which I have engaged that it is not practised alone.

There is, first of all, a relational dimension. Participants in the *Spiritual Exercises* make their inner journey, not only with the Holy Spirit but also with a spiritual director. Indeed the *Exercises* themselves are a handbook for spiritual direction, not a manual for the retreatant. The author of *Discrecioun of Stirings* takes it for granted that his correspondent will seek regular counsel alongside prayer (anon 1985:31). Throughout Antony Rich's (2007) account of the teachings of the Desert Fathers on discernment, it is clear that it is exercised in the context of a teacher and disciple relationship.

There is also a communal dimension. Even where John Cassian is considering those who are called to the solitary life of an anchorite, he suggests this can only be entered into after a long period of practising discernment as deepening self-knowledge among brothers in the cœnobium (Rich 2007:100).

Quaker practice is wholly grounded in the 'clearness committee' – a gathering dedicated to the practice of spiritual discernment and in charismatic experience, moments of discernment often come through times of gathered worship according to Parker (1996:73-116). For both these forms of communal discernment, it is important that the participants have an expectation that the Holy Spirit will speak to them *through their gatherings*.

Do the affective and reflexive dimensions of discernment have any bearing on this collective dimension of discernment? Can practices which include a significant focus on one's inner life be deployed in these relational and communal settings?

I would argue that they can.

Firstly, as we have noted, the role of a confessor or spiritual director is actually an essential component of personal discernment.

Secondly, communities and organisations themselves have a 'corporate personality'. The discernment (and perhaps misrepresentation) of this personality was an essential aspect of my previous work as a graphic designer specialising in corporate identity.

That personality is both greater than the sum of its parts and necessarily includes those parts. The affective and reflexive dimensions of discernment apply to the whole community and to the contributions of its individual members to a decision-making process. This is demonstrated in Gerard Hughes' (2008:144-147) fictional account of the deliberations of a parish council. The hidden motivations of its individual members are crucially important. At the same time, the shared histories of whole communities can lead to the unconscious concealment of motives that belong that community as a whole.

Any new community that emerges from, and as the focus of, an OPM's work will rightly expect to play a greater role in discerning its own direction. It is part of its growth to maturity. Thus the OPM will need to be prepared to apply what they have learned in personal discernment in communal settings. There are existing models for community discernment. They differ on the extent to which leadership needs to be directive.

In Benedictine spirituality, discernment appears wholly invested in the Abbot. But Benedict's *Rule* makes clear that the Abbot is only to decide after impartially hearing the views of all the members of the community (St Benedict 2008 Ch.III). The members of the community do not exercise discernment together, but for Jesuits, that has certainly come to be the case. Communal discernment, as a development of the Ignatian tradition has seen a flourishing in relatively recent times (Hawkins 1996:3). It has its roots in the early history of the very first Society of Jesus (Orsy 1976:19), even if in later constitutions, methods of decision-making became a little more mundane (Orsy 1976:23-4).

In the papal bulls of 1540 and 1549, formally recognising the Society of Jesus, the superior general has quite a directive role (Pope Paul II 1540 and 1549). He is able to send members of the community away to join any of the missions currently in operation. On the other hand, changing the constitution of the society requires the consent of a majority of the members. In contemporary practice of communal discernment in the Ignatian tradition, but outside of Jesuit communities, the role of leadership is more enabling than directive (Farnham et al 1991:77-88). In Quaker practice, though there is a recognition of distinct roles within the wider congregation,

the focus is on the whole community discerning together (Loring 1999:122). Leadership is very light.

It is my contention that OPMs should, over time, operate a decreasingly directive form of leadership in communal discernment. Initially, setting out clear values will be important. This is especially so where founding a new enterprise that is introducing people to the gospel for the first time. The OPM will need to operate as a guardian for the nascent community, in order to ensure its orthodoxy and catholicity and to help it form relationships with the wider Church. But in the longer term, it is unlikely that the Church of England will be able to sustain the full-time ministry of a priest for all these new ecclesial communities. That has implications for their sacramental life, of course, but it also has implications for their ongoing discernment. The OPM will need to ensure that the community is so formed and trained through its practice of discernment with him or her that one day it will be able to sustain that practice on its own. It will not be completely on its own, of course. The relationships with the wider Church, that the OPM has helped to foster, will be an important dimension of the community's own discernment, once the OPM has moved on.

Chapter two: Investigating pioneer discernment

2.1 Model of theological reflection

The structure of this essay might give the impression that there is a clear direction in the movement between theory and praxis. It appears that I am starting with the Christian tradition and then evaluating pioneer praxis in its light. That impression is partly correct. This study was motivated by a sense that I was ill prepared to answer the question of where to begin my new work. That led me to the tradition and it led me to seek to evaluate my emerging understanding in the light of my own practice and that of other OPMs.

That implies a methodology that is an inversion of 'Practical theology as applied theory' as described by Paul Ballard and John Pritchard (1996:58-60) in their *Practical Theology in Action*. Instead of the 'theory' of discernment I have gleaned from the tradition being *applied* in action, it might be implied that the theory itself is tested against the higher authority of real praxis.

Though that approach might have something to commend it – it saves the 'theory' from being wholly abstract – it clearly does not allow for my practice or that of my peers to be critiqued in the light of the Christian tradition as I have understood it.

But the poles of this binary scale are not the only methodological options. And they do not reflect the actuality of how 'theory' and action have interrelated in the development of both my ideas about discernment (as described above) and my discernment practice in the context of my ministry as an OPM. In truth, reading, action and interviews have progressed in a more dialectical fashion, with each informing, questioning and reshaping the others. Nevertheless, the 'theory' has had a significant degree of priority in this process.

This could be described as a weighted form of the 'mutually critical correlation' approach adopted by Stephen Parker (1996:42-48) in his study of Pentecostal discernment. In this schema, both the questions and the answers in theological reflection can emerge from the Christian tradition *and* from human experience. I would

wish to modify this scheme further, by reintroducing to a degree the notion of the 'primacy of faith-love' (Tracy quoted in Parker 1996:41). Though this leaves one open to accusations of fideism (Parker 1996:41), it seems to me that the *transcendent* theological subject is actually what one seeks to encounter in this study. Fidelity to that notion of transcendence must allow for the possibility of revelation that is not constrained by human experience and capacity. That is what lends weight to the tradition and my adoption of Jesus as the pattern for pioneer ministry (and discernment) above.

2.2 Research methodology

I will discuss the practical justifications for my research methods in the next section. My preference for qualitative research over quantitative has a wider philosophical and even political grounding than that reasoning alone might suggest.

Science is a hugely important feature of our intellectual landscape. Scientific method is successful at delivering verifiable knowledge through its criteria of repeatability and peer review. That success is evident across a huge range of fields from the subatomic to the cosmic. It is a matter of debate, however, whether its methods can be applied to higher-level human phenomena – particularly in the realm of social interactions.

Some are hugely optimistic about the capacity of science to provide reliable explanations of behaviour in these fields; witness the explosion of 'neuro-' disciplines such as neurosociology, neuroanthropology and so on. Others are concerned that the reductive tendency of this trend does not properly recognise that people are 'conscious, purposive actors who have ideas about their world and attach meaning to what is going on around them' (Robson quoted in Cartledge 2003:78).

Even if that agency is illusory, it is undeniably part of our *experience*. To deny agency arguably does not privilege anyone's perspective, as it denies free agency to all. But in practice it still privileges the researcher's perspective as the one who can determine what is truly going on (even if his or her autonomy in coming to that knowledge is itself believed a delusion!)

It has proven in both political and religious terms extremely dangerous to accord one perspective a high degree of authority over against another's. Totalitarianism is not likely to be the outcome of this study! Nevertheless, it is right to seek to accord the proper respect to the story people tell from their point of view.

Quantitative research, particularly, runs the risk of assuming a privileged perspective for the researcher. That is not to say that the qualitative researcher can pretend to an indifferent point of view. That is why research must be *reflexive*. It needs to keep the researcher's point of view, consciously *in view* – not so that it can be denied but so that its influence on the shaping of a story can be seen.

Any attempt such as what follows to describe a situation is inevitably a story. It is a way of describing an observed situation from a particular point in space and time that could be interpreted differently from another such point. That is not to say that any idea of authenticity is inevitably a pretension. Though such claims must be tentative, it is the exposure of the presuppositions of the researcher and the researcher's willingness to test their ideas with the subjects of their research that offers the best chance to identify 'real' characteristics of the situation being studied.

2.3 Research method

I could have designed a questionnaire to investigate the broad categories of spiritual experience and tradition with which OPMs would identify. It would have been possible to inquire about moments of discernment and what techniques or strategies people employed. But to do so would have been to a large degree to have pre-determined what is the set of those categories, traditions, techniques and strategies. It would have meant that the research would only have been able to test a hypothesis gained through literature review or reflection, rather than, as actually happened, to develop ideas about discernment in dialogue with others.

Though such an approach might have identified broad features of the landscape of discernment, it would have missed the subtleties of how those features actually operate in the spiritual life and mission practice of OPMs. Only a narrative approach can reveal that sort of nuance. It is my conviction, in the light of scripture, tradition and experience, that if we are looking for markers of the Spirit's activity (the *transcendent* theological subject mentioned above), then we need to be attentive to these fine details.

I therefore conducted semi-structured interviews, each roughly an hour long. My starting point was three questions. I allowed about twenty minutes for the discussion of each topic, but asked supplementary questions as the interviews progressed to invite greater development of an idea that was emerging in the discussion.

My questions were as follows:

- 1) I would like to invite you to describe one mission initiative you have founded, are founding or have been involved in founding. Describe too the process of how you identified that particular mission opportunity and how it came to be or is coming to be.
- 2) I would now like to invite you to describe your own spiritual formation, paying particular attention to the spiritual tradition or traditions that have shaped you and the nature of your relationship with them.
- 3) Would you please relate to me your understanding and experience of the practice of discernment in the Christian tradition?

I asked these questions of three Anglican pioneers. All of them, at the time of interview, were actively involved in founding and running at least one new form of Christian community or ministry. With the interviewees' permission the interviews were taped and partly transcribed. I also took notes. The interviewees were given at least a week's notice of the questions. I have changed the names of my interview subjects.

Ben is an OPM in his forties serving his curacy in a city in South Eastern England, attached to its Cathedral. He trained on a regional course specifically for ordained pioneer ministry. He previously worked as a church-based youth worker and teacher. Andrew also trained at an evangelical college, but not specifically for pioneer ministry. After a curacy in regular parish ministry in an urban setting, he is now working as an OPM in the centre of a town on the South Coast. He is in his thirties. Before training for ministry, he worked first as a scientist and subsequently in urban regeneration, working with a local church. At the time the interview, Lauren, also in her thirties, was training for ordination on a regional course. She has since been ordained. Before commencing training, Lauren worked in mental health and ran her own life coaching business.

Given that time has been a constraint on this project, it was easier to select my interviewees from among people with whom I already had a nascent relationship. I had met Lauren and Andrew before. Ben and I have mutual friends. This meant that my request was more readily accepted than it might be if it had come from a stranger out of the blue. It may mean, however, that there is a weakness in my sample.

So, for instance, I will be careful about drawing general conclusions about some of the common features of our stories. My sample is very small. Any similarities could be

attributable to a more general affinity that our existing relationships reveal. In short, it is arguable that I have chosen people who I like and are therefore like me.

Any conclusions I do offer, therefore, are tentative. I recognise that more research is necessary before any proposals for changes in selection, training or deployment were actioned.

All good research is reflexive. That is, that it is explicit about the extent to which one's own perspective is a significant factor in the development of theory. That is not the same thing as saying that I am well placed to research my *own* practice. It is undeniably difficult to create critical distance from one's own story. Thus I bring it into the conversation as exactly that: my story. It is inevitably to some degree an imaginative construction which draws on partial and already interpreted memory.

That does not mean, however, that I have not abandoned the attempt to critique it in the light of the Christian tradition. Indeed, it will become apparent how my practice has been affected by my studies as I have gone on. But again, without subjecting it to the critique of another researcher, any conclusions drawn must be tentative to say the least.

Chapter three: Discernment in practice

3.1 The affective dimension

Reflecting on how he had ended up in youth work, Ben said: 'I felt called into full-time youth ministry, so we moved away to [Westchester] for 4 years and joined a church.' But that is not to say that he and his wife had taken such a course merely on the basis of a momentary impulse. 'Feeling', it became apparent, was shorthand for just the of persistent intuition I described above.

There was undeniably an emotional component to that experience. Emotional unsettlement was a marker for Ben on his journey toward ordination. This was particularly evident in his changing sentiments in his teaching career:

I was happy, I felt I was in exactly the right place with God, in my teaching career, that was, and then in a six month period, I became more and more uncomfortable, no, uncomfortable is not quite right, incomplete is a better word... I sort of felt that I wasn't quite in the right place, anymore.

But more often, 'feeling' was a way of describing a deeper sense of direction. Ben had difficulty naming the precise emotional experiences that led to particular decisions, even when pressed. He immediately reverted to describing external circumstances. Nevertheless, his intuited sense of 'rightness' persisted in the face of superficially contrary circumstantial. This was evident in Ben's persistence in spending every morning in a particular pub to which he had 'felt called'. That is despite enduring six months of being by turns ignored and verbally abused.

Andrew also spoke of a 'deep sense of affirmation that this was the right thing to do' when recalling moments of decision, which had largely occurred on retreats. He spoke of 'feeling' that God had spoken to him. But he too found it difficult to recall the precise emotional experience that accompanied moments of decision, even though he was moved in recalling them. In describing one such occasion he said: 'I can remember exactly where I was... And I remember being in this chapel and just [there follows a long pause] yeah – it's really hard to explain; really hard to describe...'

He describes these ineffable, affective moments coming at the end of a process of intellectual reflection. Where Ben reported that difficult circumstances were often the

test-bed of his sense of particular vocation, Andrew reported that positive circumstantial markers had been a feature of his decision-making.

His idea of founding a community vegetable growing project was borne in part from a set of coincidences that he interpreted theologically. After a substantial amount of time devoted to prayer, he noticed that a sign had been put up next to some unused ground 'asking if anyone wanted to come and get involved in a community garden'.

This event came on the heels of another quiet weekend on his own when he had read a newspaper article about 'guerrilla gardening'. A friend and his wife both independently referred him to the same article.

Those 'happenstance' signs have been indicative, but not decisive. Andrew described the discernment of the way forward as still 'unfolding'. Difficulties along the way had caused him to reflect again on whether this was the right way forward. He still has 'days when you think: is this going to work?'

The apparent differences in Ben and Andrew's stories might reflect the different points that they had reached in the process of discernment, rather than a substantial difference of approach. Ben had come through his circumstantial difficulties. Andrew was still in the midst of them.

In both their accounts, Andrew and Ben reflect the affective discernment I describe above. There is clearly a deeply 'felt' component to their missional decision-making, but it is not passing impulse or whim. These emotional drivers are sustained, deep-seated, and tested and confirmed in both trying and favourable circumstances.

Lauren also frequently referred to 'feeling' as she described establishing *Inspire* – a monthly alternative worship event. On the face of it, her account does reflect a more momentary impulse. There is a sense in her story, that it was more experimental than driven: 'We just felt, I don't know, it wasn't very much more than we'd like to give it a go really.' But again, as with Ben, confronting difficulties along the way after that was a feature of the discernment process: 'We pushed on through. We nearly gave up a couple of times. We were thinking: I'm not sure I've got the energy to keep this going.' But an eventual breakthrough into drawing new people into the life of the Christian community confirmed for Lauren and her husband Steve that this was a good direction for them to be pursuing. Their impulse was sustained in the face of difficulty.

It was generated in the same way. There was a feeling for them both at the outset of being 'drawn' to create something for a particular group of people that the church was

not reaching. 'I guess it was an instinctual thing in terms of deciding who we were aiming for.' But concerned not to allow herself to paint too straightforward a picture of how *Inspire* was established, Lauren paradoxically revealed that there was a deeper logic at work in the mix of her emotions.

This is all through the benefit of hindsight. It was all a lot more chaotic than that really. And I'm thinking it was almost a desperation, I suppose, to find something that would interest and nourish us.

In the context of the wider story Lauren told of her and her husband's search for a more satisfying church experience, the compulsion to create something new appears less impulsive. It had been forged and tested in the midst of years of frustration. Thus in Lauren's experience too, that affective dimension is present.

It was also explicitly remarked upon in her more recent practice of using the Ignatian prayer of examen, both in her daily life and in moments where she is seeking direction with others. That 'technique' then for discernment is not simply a tool that she uses when she feels it might be needed. It is integral to her daily spiritual rhythm.

As I proposed my new role to the Bishop and his staff, I suggested that finding a focus for my work would be a matter of critical *evaluation* of potential mission contexts. In reality, the way I focused my time and energy initially was neither a considered response to research and evaluation, nor prayerful discernment. I was drawn into the immediate and pressing needs of the parish to which I was attached. As the question of renewing the initial funding of my post was raised, I hurriedly arranged a small number of placements. Instead of being able to select from one or two of these locations, I have attempted, not altogether successfully, to sustain a presence in each of them.

I was intuitively drawn to the places I selected for my initial placements. In my previous appointment, my curacy, I was particularly drawn to ministry beyond the worshipping congregation – school and nursery work and a late-night pubgoers drop-in that I helped to establish. My desire to concentrate future ministry in this sort of arena emerged out of theological reflection, but there was an affective component too; of the sort I have described. That sense of vocation grew in the midst of parish ministry that was very focused on the life of the gathered church. It was, at times therefore, a frustrating experience. Discerning the future direction of my ministry was thus forged in trying circumstances as it was for Ben and Lauren.

The positive response to my presence in each of the placements I undertook means that general trajectory was also confirmed in favourable circumstances. The affective

dimension was helpful to some degree therefore in my own, somewhat muddled, practice. It was not enough on its own, however, to help me in making good decisions about the particular focus of my efforts, certainly initially. It has led to a certain amount of overstretch. It might have been helpful to have developed the other dimensions of discernment too more fully in that initial period.

I argued above that charismatic spirituality is an especially good ground for the practice of this dimension of discernment. What evidence is there that this is something my interviewees and I have found or would find helpful?

Charismatic experience was common to all of us. There was also a sense for each of us that we had found that sort of spirituality inadequate to some degree, especially in relation its effectiveness in discipleship. Ben, for instance reflected:

I'm not belittling it, but we didn't really rate this sort of arms in the air, jumping up and down style of worship, has never really been me. If I'm quite honest, I used to find these lives quite shallow.

Lauren, used the doughnuts frequently served in one charismatic church of which she had been a member, as a metaphor for its spiritual diet:

It just came to me one day that it's like: you can't live on a diet of doughnuts. And the spiritual practice, and the worship was about going from one sugar high to the next. And you can't do that. Or I couldn't do it. Maybe some people can. I don't think you can healthily. And it just made me realise how empty, calorifically, the spiritual life was.

For Lauren and I, particularly, coming to what we consider a broader spirituality has involved some sort of crisis in which we have made a significant break with our charismatic past.

Nevertheless, all of us, to varying degrees, are concerned with integrating that spirituality with our more recent positive experience of the more contemplative aspects of the Christian tradition. Thus, even though Lauren clearly considered her former charismatic evangelical background to be narrow and limiting, she still wanted to become 'a charismatic contemplative or a contemplative charismatic'. Ben similarly remarked: 'I wouldn't ever dismiss it because it's been really fundamental as to who I am'.

Andrew seemed to have been the most successful at actually achieving a degree of integration. That may be because although he too experienced a significant crisis of faith, it was in relation to his conservative evangelical beginnings. His personal charismatic renewal followed that spiritual breakdown and he encountered it as a healing experience. That is not to say that he is unquestioning in his positive

appreciation of the more ecstatic phenomena. Instead he is managing to perceive common ground between charismatic and contemplative approaches:

Where there is integration between that [charismatic experience] and the contemplative is in a belief in the work of the Spirit in the day-to-day. And that, in contemplation, you are practising an attentiveness to the Spirit who is present and at work in the world.

I have argued above that a mature and sensitive charismatic spirituality is a helpful way to develop the affective discerning capacity. The stories we have examined suggest that attaining such maturity and sensitivity is quite a challenge. It is a challenge that these four OPMs at least are willing to take on. It appears that even in this small sample there are a range of nuanced responses to both inner impulses and their relationship to circumstances both trying and favourable.

3.2 The reflexive dimension

The experience of 'surprise' was an important marker in what led Andrew to start a weekly meditation session for bank employees.

There's often the element of surprise, I think, in discernment. I mean, not always, you know. But, I think, sometimes when we are committed to a process of listening and, kind of, incarnational presence and listening to the Spirit then the voice of God and the, erm, you know, your sense of what God is doing; what the Spirit is doing in a place can come as a surprise. Not always, but by entering that process, we open ourselves up to the surprise of the kingdom.

It was a feature of Ben's story too:

I felt God strongly saying, about 6 weeks into the work, that you need to go to the pub now, and I remember saying: 'It's 10.20; I can't go to the pub now. I have a dog collar on. What are people going to think?' But I came to the pub...

Andrew's idea surprised him because it came in the midst of his reflecting on how both he and his community might be getting a little over-stretched: it was at odds with his impression of their capacity.

Early on in the Quaker practice of discernment, members of the movement deliberately sought out actions that were at odds with their natural capacities and inclinations, as this sort of surprise was thought to be a marker for the guidance of the Holy Spirit (Loring 1992:6). The results were occasionally extreme, such as Solomon Eccles's public nakedness or James Naylor's triumphal entry into Bristol (Meggitt 2011).

Deliberately seeking out the surprising or shocking will not be helpful. But there is Biblical and psychological warrant for taking seriously the sort of experience that both Ben and Andrew reported. Even where that surprise might well be because the course of action that occurs to us to take at first appears to take us into brand-new conceptual or actual territory.

It is just this sort of experience that I suggest is played out in allegorical form in the account of St Peter's vision and subsequent visit to the house of Cornelius in Acts 10. The idea of visiting a Gentile home is initially irruptive. For the writer that is clearly a sign of direct inspiration: he describes St Peter's experience in miraculous and visionary terms.

Those that our culture regards as truly creative in groundbreaking ways frequently testify to the irruptive nature creative ideas. They cut across their immediate thinking or activity. Margaret Boden (1992) in her study of creativity attributes these sorts of irruptive moments of apparent inspiration to the workings of the unconscious mind. She argues on the basis of artificial intelligence research, psychology and neuroscience that while the conscious mind might leave aside a particularly thorny puzzle, our unconscious continues its experiments, until, when finding a potential solution, that new idea is fed into our consciousness.

New ideas are not wholly novel. They do not arrive from nowhere, but are creative in that their novel combination of concepts represents a paradigmatic shift in the conceptual landscape of the subject.

It is likely, therefore that 'new' ideas are a more natural development of previous thinking than it appears in the subject's cognitive experience. This is what is happening in St Peter's move into Gentile mission. As a Galilean, he is already an outsider in Jerusalem. He has been drafted into God's mission by another Galilean outsider: Jesus himself. The explosive growth of the Jerusalem church also took hold amongst outsiders: not Jerusalemites but Diaspora visitors. And finally, this move into Gentile mission occurs shortly after Peter and his companions have approved the move into mission among Samaritans – itself a substantial step.

So surprise, on its own, is not particularly reliable. But where newness can be seen reflexively as a creative development of an existing personal or ecclesial movement, the initial experience of surprise can be a marker that we are onto something worthwhile.

I would not presume to impose a psychological narrative on Andrew's experience, but it seems that, although his idea of a meditation group was surprising – it cut across his immediate reflections on capacity – it was a natural development of his personal commitment to contemplation and his considered identification of non-religious spirituality as important for the Church's mission. Indeed, he also recognises, in retrospect, a process of rational, strategic thinking that was also part of the process of arriving at the idea.

There was also evidence of the reflexive dimension of discernment in Lauren's account of founding *Inspire*. She recognised the complexity of motivation that I described in chapter one.

I guess a lot of that is a selfish thing to some extent, in that we wanted something that would connect with us. Not really a very altruistic way to start but nonetheless it kind of gave us some motivation and momentum and also recognising that Steve and I were quite different from everyone else in the church...

It is interesting that recognising 'selfish' motives in herself and her husband did not lead her to conclude that the impulse to start an alternative worship event should be disregarded. She adopts precisely the attitude I suggest is appropriate. She reaches an accommodation with her 'shadow'. That the enterprise should satisfy some of her own needs and wants does not render it inauthentic as far as she is concerned. In fact Lauren regards the energy released as a positive outcome.

She resists the dualistic understanding of human nature. Instead she appears to adopt the more compassionate and psychologically nuanced approach for which I argue in chapter one:

Thinking that people are not all broken; that the emphasis is not about people being corrupted – that their experiences can't be trusted because they're corrupted – but their experience can be trusted if they're opening themselves to listen to God's word in it, I guess.

Andrew also expressed a clear conviction that our particular action in mission should arise out of our unique personality and giftedness:

There was a sense in which if I was using something that I enjoy doing and that I have a certain degree of experience of; then with the sort of principle that we were talking about. You know, believing that God has put stuff in us that enables us to minister; ministering out of who we are rather than taking on models or things that have worked elsewhere that perhaps don't chime with who we are; just starting from where we are and just going with that. But also doing a double listening thing, of listening to yourself and listening to the community and seeing where there are connections.

It is precisely this prayerful identification of correlations between one's own interests and aspirations and those of the wider community that I contend constitutes this

reflexive dimension of discernment. I venture to suggest that it is the means by which we uncover for ourselves the prevenient work of the Holy Spirit. This is borne of a conviction that we are drawn to work in a particular place or context because somehow we fit with it.

That approach allowed me to be selective to a degree at the start of my work. I was drawn to concentrate on areas where I could bring together a broad understanding of spirituality, visual art practice, and working with children and young people. These are the core elements of both my schools work and the form of the former parish congregation's current main Sunday activity.

One could call this playing to one's strengths or one could call it playing it safe, but this work has been fruitful in terms of building relationships, helping people experience a measure of spiritual awakening, and growing a nascent Christian community.

In Chapter one, I suggested that contemplative prayer cannot authentically be described as the spiritual means to achieve the reflexivity that is inherent in discernment. Contemplation is an end in itself. Nevertheless, it can be said that this reflexivity is best achieved within the context of a contemplative life of prayer, just as a mature charismatic spirituality might be the proper context for the affective dimension of discernment.

It is reassuring then to discover that contemplative prayer was an essential element of all my interviewees and central to my own developing spirituality. And though I would reiterate that we should not regard contemplation in instrumental terms, it is true to say that the demands of my current role and my sense of being ill prepared for the discernment it calls for, have called forth from me a renewed commitment to contemplative prayer.

For each of my interviewees too, contemplation was not another aspect of their spiritual life, but its overarching context. Being a charismatic was subordinate for all of them and I to the deeper search for a 'vision' of God in the midst of silence. It was also set alongside a more wholehearted embrace of what it meant to be Anglican.

This was expressed in the embrace of disciplines that were not part of each of our early faith experiences. Both Ben and Lauren had been surprised at their positive experience of praying the daily office. Lauren found the embrace of the liturgical year also surprisingly 'nourishing'. In contrast to the spiritual doughnuts that had constituted her diet previously, 'as far as I can see the steak is in the Anglican tradition'. Andrew,

like me, had found the need for quiet days and retreats and as we have seen, Andrew in particular correlated moments of discernment with such retreats.

Thus we have seen that understood as an expression of unconscious creativity, there are good psychological and scriptural grounds for seeing moments of surprise as part of the reflexive dimension of discernment. Set alongside a mature, intelligent and compassionate appreciation of the complexity of our motives and in the context of a broader contemplative spirituality, such experiences help us to discern where our unique being and history connect with the context of our ministry and the Holy Spirit's work within it.

3.3 The collective dimension

Sharing those spiritual practices with others should deepen discernment, particularly where the decisions being made have a communal dimension. Indeed as I argue above, nothing that OPMs do in their ministry should be seen in isolation from the rest of the Church.

For each of us in this study there have been moments that might call that into question. Andrew and Ben both experienced hearing from others, sometimes as or even before their work began, what it is they 'ought' to be doing. In Ben's case there was ongoing pressure from a senior colleague to roll out just the sort of models of missionary activity that Andrew disparaged above. Andrew himself faced the same pressure, except it came from well-meaning members of the local congregations with which he was to be linked.

Lauren and I have both faced resistance to pursuing a new direction from within the congregations to which we were attached. This was simultaneously with respect to the questions of authenticity and capacity.

Despite this, all of us affirm the importance of sharing the process of discernment with as broad a group as possible, and have found the practice of collective discernment helpful.

I suggest above that there is a need for an increased sharing of responsibility for discernment with the community concerned. This has been a feature of the practice of everyone in this study.

Initially, it seems, there is a very clear setting out of a vision. Andrew began with a clear set of values on which he wanted to found a new mission community and even an idea of what some of the practical outworking of that activity might be, though he stressed that the *Engage* community came together around the values and not a particular activity. Like Andrew, Ben began by setting up a website that outlined the values that informed his work and saw a new community coalesce around those values.

They were not dissimilar to the values that Lauren and her husband insisted should be the foundation of their alternative worship events:

We pushed through that very first year really hard. Steve and I were really clear about the values – it's got to be not churched, you know, not churchy... We were quite militant about the values – this is about participation; this is about multi-sensory; this is about nobody's got the answer; this is about creating space.

It was a little more difficult for me in that I was not starting wholly from scratch. I was working with the tiny remnant of a parish congregation, but a remnant nonetheless that already had its own values. I came with a clear charge from the Bishop to start something new. But much as I wanted to be direct about the mission values that I was clear would be the foundation for that new future, I did not wish to disparage what they had been before. I also had to take care that the handful of new people who were specifically drawn to the values I was espousing did not make the rest feel like old news. I was not wholly successful.

Alongside this setting out of a clear vision or set of values, the relational aspect of discernment also features. This is particularly true for Ben, Andrew and I. Ben's attachment to the Cathedral meant that there were colleagues in the chapter with whom he shares the process of discernment. He also has a pioneer mentor. It was in response to hearing Ben's story that I set up such a relationship for myself. Time spent with other groups in quite far-flung places was also important for him in finding affirmation of directions in which he was travelling. I have also been privileged to share discernment with a close colleague.

This applied to Andrew too. Relationships with all kinds of people, both in person and in print, were significant in helping him find affirmation. He contrasted this to previous experience of a somewhat dictatorial church leader:

I think discernment is therefore a conversation, isn't it? It's not just writing on the wall or Moses coming down from the mountain, kind of thing. You do that in community, and that's very important. I mean [pauses] I've always held quite lightly the kind of 'God told me' kind of approach to discernment. I suppose I work with someone who challenged me quite a lot and I challenged him quite a lot cause his attitude to discernment seemed to

be 'God has told me and therefore this is what's going to happen' and there wasn't a lot of testing with the people who worked very closely with him and who were going to be impacted by this word from God, you know what I mean?

I suspect that my own leading of my former parish congregation into a new way of being together on Sundays may have been experienced a little like that, despite some effort on my part to engage both the church council and the wider congregation in a process of discernment. The problem was that the process itself was a little compressed and that it had no precedent or context in the congregation's life.

After a month's experiment in gathering in the community room of a nearby tower block, we returned to the church building. There was relief for some and disappointment for others at that return, but it was what we had agreed to do. In my eagerness not to lose momentum, there was something of a rush about the way I approached the next decision. I wrote a paper for the PCC and then asked them to engage in a simple Ignatian discernment process.

Each member was invited to converse with Christ in his or her imagination on the basis of a short gospel reading. They were then invited to write down some things that excited and some things that concerned them about the proposed more long-term relocation. These were then shared in turn while the rest of the group practised silent listening. Discussion was allowed only when everyone had had the chance to share one concern and one excitement. This was the first time any of them had experienced anything like this and it was rolled out for a pretty major decision. It was clear by the time we got to a vote that there remained a sharp division.

With hindsight, it might have been better to slow the process down. When it came to reviewing that decision the following year and to preparing for a decision about the future of our building, there was more time to prepare. And so at a parish weekend away, we took discernment as our theme and explored some scriptural models of discernment (including the Jerusalem Council discussed above) both in study and practice.

It was important for a congregation with an evangelical history to root its understanding and practice in Scripture. Lauren similarly remarked on her desire to reincorporate the Bible in her leading of corporate discernment:

I think a weakness I've noticed in the last six months and started, hopefully, to address is that when you rely on prophecy and you rely on a kind of supernatural words type thing, although the Bible is often brought out and pieces are read out, there's not a coherent approach to the Bible. And I think I'd sort of – because I've got out of the habit of that in that earlier stage of my practice – I've realise that I don't really use the Bible systematically in discernment.

In our own communal practice, we have drawn inspiration from Victoria G Curtiss's (2008) *Guidelines for Communal Discernment*. Central to the process outlined is a communal *lectio divina*. Members of the community are invited to read scripture spiritually. This level of attentiveness to scripture spares the gathering from the sort of unthinking proof-texting that Lauren criticises above.

These guidelines have been criticised from within the American Presbyterian Church from which they came. Calvinist Viola Larson (2010) accuses Curtiss of giving undue weight to feelings over Scripture. It is *sola scriptura* which another Calvinist, Tim Challies (2007) takes as his yardstick for discernment. But this approach is not even consistent with the scriptural account of occasions of discernment, both in the history of Israel and of the Church.

Scripture features, of course, but as an aspect of a living tradition not an immovable point: witness the way St James handles Amos 9:11-12 in the Jerusalem Council in Acts 15. He reinterprets the hope of Gentile inclusion in the worship of YHWH, applying a text to Jesus that actually invests that hope in the Temple.

It was clear from my experience and that of others, that simply pulling a set of practices out when a decision is to be made, as if they were some sort of spiritual toolkit, will not enable effective discernment and could harm the unity of a community. Instead, much as Stanley Hauerwas (1981) envisages the 'performance' of scripture and particularly the life of Christ forming an ethical community, I suggest that the practice of discernment in its affective, reflexive and collective dimensions will form communities of discernment.

Conclusion

I began with the assertion that living in the foreknowing and will of God does not leave us with a simple choice between obedience and rebellion. Within the broad sweep of the greater purposes of God, we are invited to creatively participate in that will's unfolding.

That is particularly pertinent to Ordained Pioneer Ministry. OPM's work is not constrained to the same degree as their parochial colleagues by custom and law. It is constrained by their limited, human capacity. We have to choose where to focus our energies.

I suggested that the Anglican tradition of pragmatic reason was not adequate alone. It has to be accompanied by the exercise of the spiritual gift of discernment. That gift operates and develops in three dimensions.

We make appropriate and authentic choices when we are attentive to the deepest movements of our hearts. Our emotions are involved, but not the superficial stirrings of transient feelings. Both the tradition and the experience of the OPMs in this study confirm that the feelings we are searching for are those deep-seated drives which persist whether in the midst of trying circumstances or confirmed by uncanny coincidence.

Charismatic spirituality is especially helpful in opening up that affective dimension. Transformative joy in worship and ecstatic utterance are not specifically referred to by the OPMs in this study. But despite some lingering unease about our past experiences, all of us were attempting to integrate that aspect of our spiritual history into our future. It is at least part of the context of affective discernment for all of us.

The Ignatian *examen* and its attentiveness to the nuances of consolation and desolation were not quite so broadly in evidence but two of us at least had found the practice helpful both personally and corporately.

Contemplative spirituality does not have *self-knowledge* as its goal and so cannot be deployed in an instrumental fashion to achieve the reflexivity that is also one of the dimensions of discernment. It is however, one of its *side effects*. We seek deeper self-knowledge, both as individuals and communities so that we do not deceive ourselves about our motivations. That deepening understanding of ourselves is not intended to wholly deny our shadow, but to enable us to creatively channel its energies.

We saw this in operation in one pioneer's story in particular. We also saw how a close attention to experiences of surprise can reveal the logic of our creative unconscious. It opens new possibilities that nevertheless have a degree of continuity with our previous trajectory in mission and ministry. That inner reflection enables us to develop an ever-greater sensitivity to our unique giftedness and the prevenient work of the Spirit in our mission context.

However much OPMs develop these capacities personally, they need to be engaged collectively. Pioneer priests are not lone trailblazers but, like parochial clergy, they are charged with guarding the Church's catholicity and orthodoxy. As representatives of the wider Church, the process of discernment must engage the wider Church. This is evident in the practice of the pioneers who have engaged with this study, including the writer. In fact we have all specifically sought out the accountability and affirmation of colleagues near and far.

The communal intention of pioneer ministry means that OPMs need to be increasingly leading their communities in becoming communities of discernment. That leadership needs to be bold at the outset to establish a clear set of authentic values. But if those communities are not to remain dependent on their founding priest, they need to take increasing responsibility for their decision-making. They need to be formed through the practice and experience of discernment, handling scripture creatively and sensitively.

It is difficult, on the basis of a small and unscientifically selected sample to make a strong case for any changes that might be suggested by this study. Neither can one's own experience be generalised to the extent that selection, training or deployment policy for the wider Church can seriously be remodelled without broader-based research. Nevertheless, I make the following suggestions:

1. It appears that the integration of charismatic spirituality with more contemplative forms of prayer, whilst it might be challenging (and still evidently a work in progress for the four of us), does offer itself as a potentially fertile ground in which to grow a mature and sensitive affective discerning capacity. It simultaneously, particularly in its contemplative aspect, spins off into a growing self-knowledge of the sort that is helpful in discernment. If further research confirmed this, then it would seem fruitful to look for such an integrative spirituality in candidates to train for pioneer ministry, and whether it is initially present or not, to seek, perhaps through placements to encourage it in those in training.

2. If leading and training communities in discernment is, as this study suggests, going to be a critical feature of pioneer ministry, it is certainly a capacity we should be seeking to develop in training in its individual, relational and communal expressions. Contemporary developments of the Ignatian tradition appear potentially very fruitful here. Immersion in these practices too would very helpfully be part of priestly formation.
3. The hermetic distinction between parochial and pioneer mission and ministry is not one that can or should be indefinitely sustained. Many parishes will need to refresh, or even completely re-imagine, the form their mission takes. Many are becoming unsustainable in their current form and discernment will become as important a feature in parochial ministry as it already is for pioneers. If further research confirms my findings, consideration ought to be given to examining parochial ministry in the same way, and possibly, to consider whether the implications for selection and training of OPMs will also necessarily apply to all clergy in the future. It may mean that the process of selection itself will need to become slightly less based on reasoned evaluation in order that it may offer a firsthand experience of affective, reflexive and collective discernment.

Bibliography

Anonymous (1985) *A Study of Wisdom: Three Tracts by the author of the Cloud of Unknowing*, translated from Middle English by Wolters, C., Oxford: SLG Press

Anonymous (undated) 'Introduction to Discernment of Spirits' [Online]
Available: <http://ignatianspirituality.com/making-good-decisions/discernment-of-spirits/introduction-to-discernment-of-spirits/>
[29 June 2011]

Ballard, P and Pritchard, J (1996) *Practical Theology in Action: Christian Thinking in the Service of the Church*, London: SPCK

St Benedict (c540) *The Rule of St Benedict* [Kindle edition],
translated by Carolinne White (2008) London: Penguin Classics

Boden, M (1992) *The Creative Mind*, London: Abacus

Cartledge, MJ (2003) *Practical Theology: Charismatic and Empirical Perspectives*, Carlisle: Paternoster Press

Challies, T (2007) *The Discipline of Spiritual Discernment*, Wheaton: Crossway

Curtiss, VG (2008) *Guidelines for Communal Discernment* [ebook]
Available: http://www.hudrivpres.org/upload/docs/curtiss_discernment.pdf
[10 May 2011]

Farnham, SG, Gill, JP, McLean, RT, Ward, SM (1991) *Listening Hearts: Discerning Call in Community*, Harrisburg: Morehouse Publishing

Hauerwas, Stanley (1981) *A Community of Character: Toward a Constructive Christian Social Ethic*, Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press

Hawkins, Jacqueline (1996) 'Foreword' in
Discerning Together, the Way Supplement 1996/85

Howard, R (1997) *Charismania: When Christian Fundamentalism Goes Wrong*, London: Mowbray

Johnson, LT (1996) *Scripture and Discernment: Decision Making in the Church*, Nashville: Abingdon Press

- Larson, V (2010) *Guidelines for Communal Discernment: A Critique*, [online]
 Available: <http://naminghisgrace.blogspot.com/2010/09/guidelines-for-communal-discernment.html> [11 July 2011]
- Loring, Patricia (1992) *Spiritual Discernment: the Context and Goal of Clearness Committees*, Wallingford: Pendle Hill Publications
- Loring, Patricia (1997) *Listening Spirituality, Volume I: Personal Spiritual Practices Among Friends*, Greensboro: Openings Press
- Loring, Patricia (1999) *Listening Spirituality, Volume II: Corporate Spiritual Practice Among Friends*, Greensboro: Openings Press
- Loyola, (St) Ignatius of (1909/1548) 'The Spiritual Exercises' (tr Elder Mullan, S.J.)
 [online] Available: <http://www.jesuit.org/wp-content/uploads/The-Spiritual-Exercises-.pdf> [27 June 2011]
- McIntosh, Mark A. (2004) *Discernment and Truth: the spirituality and theology of knowledge*, New York: Herder and Herder
- Megitt, J (2011) 'Naked Quakers: Apocalyptic obsessions and public nudity – the world of the early Quakers' [online] Available:
http://www.forteantimes.com/features/articles/5023/naked_quakers.html
 [12 July 2011]
- Orsy, Ladislav M. (1976) *Probing the Spirit: A Theological Evaluation of Communal Discernment*. Denville: Dimension Books
- Parker, Stephen (1996) *Led by the Spirit: Toward a Practical Theology of Pentecostal Discernment and Decision Making*, Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press
- Pope Paul II (1540 and 1549) 'Papal bulls of September 27th 1540 and October 18th, 1549' [online] Available:
http://www.bibliotecapleyades.net/vatican/esp_vatican13.htm [14 July 2011]
- Rich, Anthony D. (2007) *Discernment in the Desert Fathers: Diakrisis in the Life and Thought of Early Egyptian Monasticism*, Milton Keynes: Paternoster Press
- Stevens, Anthony (1994) *Jung: a Very Short Introduction*, Oxford: Oxford University Press

Toner, Jules J. (1991) *Discerning God's Will: Ignatius of Loyola's Teaching on Christian Decision Making*, St Louis: Institute of Jesuit Sources

Williams, Rowan (1990) *The Wound of Knowledge*,
London: Darton, Longman and Todd