

Another criterion in discernment is God's providence. The great advantage of this approach is that it helps us see the whole of our life as a continuous dialogue with God. God speaks to us in all of the events of our life, and we speak to him in all of the choices we make. This approach is actually a good one as long as it is rightly understood. Since all things are under the governance of God's providence, in order to consider that providence is guiding us to a certain choice, we must do one of two things. First, we may look for miracles of providence, that is, things that are so improbable that they can be considered miraculous; things which somehow signify that we ought to make a particular choice.

A second way of taking guidance from divine providence is to try to see what is good in the various possibilities presented by providence, or even determined by providence. For example, if we happen to meet repeatedly the same religious community or the same person (whom we might consider marrying), to consider whether it might be good to join that community, or marry that person. Or again, if we find ourselves through a long time unable to pursue the course that we had wanted to pursue, to consider whether it might be better to do something else. This approach is good, as long as we bear in mind that it does not determine what the better thing to do *is* (unless only one good and possible choice remains), but only draws our attention in certain directions, so that we can think and pray about those possibilities. Often God would like us to persevere in spite of difficulties, or to look beyond the good possibilities being immediately presents to us, so that we can make an even greater gift of ourselves.

It is true that we should always live in the present, in the sense that we should seek to do and to act well now, but this often means having our eyes and hearts open for more than what is presently proposed to us. If, on the other hand, we want to be led by divine providence in the sense that our judgement about what is good is to be determined simply by providence, then we will most likely end up being led by our feelings. For example, someone with a well-formed moral conscience, who falls in love with a woman, could see the good to pursue as the good of marriage – while someone with a poorly-formed conscience, could see the good to pursue simply as sexual intimacy before he even gets married.

A third way in which a way of life may be found by divine providence is when providence determines the way of life. For example, if one believes that one was called to religious life, but due to an incurable case of severe depression, one was unable to enter religious life, then one should accept this is God's will, and turn one's attention to other ways of life. In such a case, he could then accept the situation as appointed by divine providence.

A fourth way in which providence may guide one's way of life is when one's choice is made directly on the basis of divine providence. For example, someone might make a specific choice because in God's providence, that choice is presented to him here and now, or because it has been presented to him several times through unusual coincidences. Perhaps several people, without any apparent reason, have suggested the same course to a person: that he enter the seminary, or that he consider marriage. Generally speaking, this way of using providence to make an important choice should be employed only to the extent that the other ways are insufficient because to look to divine providence *alone* in order to make one's choice would be analogous to making a decision by throwing dice. A decision should be made directly on the basis of providence only when it is an important decision for a spiritual good, only when it is necessary, that is, when a decision cannot be made in other ways; and it should be made in prayer.

For more information on how God's providence can assist you with your discernment, see the *Catechism of the Catholic Church*, nos. 302-314:

www.vatican.va/archive/ccc_css/archive/catechism/p1s2c1p4.htm

Reference:

'Paths of Love: The Discernment of Vocation According to Aquinas, Ignatius, and Pope John Paul II' (2008), pp. 82-83, 86-89, by Father Joseph Bolin (Retrieved from: <http://www.pathsoflove.com/pathsoflove-chapter5.html>)

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