

## BOOK REVIEWS

**Elizabeth Liebert, *The Soul of Discernment: A Spiritual Practice for Communities and Institutions* (Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox Press, 2015), 198 pp.**

Elizabeth Liebert has followed her helpful and much-read book about personal discernment—*The Way of Discernment*—with this eagerly anticipated expansion of her work to discernment in community. *The Soul of Discernment* elucidates through theory and illuminates with narratives a practice of social discernment that will serve communities and institutions as they seek “fresh, faith-grounded ways” to make decisions and “move together into God’s future” (pp. 1, 2). This is cause for celebration! Road-tested through years of organizational leadership, seminary teaching, spiritual direction, and consultation, Liebert’s methodology is presented with confidence and clarity, as well as the humble acknowledgment that true discernment is, ultimately, a gift of the Spirit. Liebert shows us that discernment is a gift we can learn to recognize, receive, and nurture, and she helps us do just that.

Few books offer guidance in spiritual discernment and even fewer in social discernment. Liebert introduces us to two case studies, one Roman Catholic and the other Presbyterian, the two religious communities in which she has lived and worked. We watch and learn as these communities engage in the Social Discernment Cycle and see how it works—or doesn’t—in practice.

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I have had the privilege of being a teaching colleague with Beth in the Diploma in the Art of Spiritual Direction program at San Francisco Theological Seminary during the years she has developed her ideas about discernment, both personal and social, and lived out her vocation as a scholar-practitioner. I have seen her practice what she teaches as she has led that program and served the seminary. We have all benefited from her wisdom and careful empirical methods.

Liebert has always focused on spiritual freedom while working systematically to articulate, test, and correct her theory. She masterfully holds the creative tension between the empirical and the pastoral, the personal and the social, the analytical and the prayerful. Such mastery is needed in the person who offers guidance in the often murky territory of spiritual communities. This book is the distillation of years of prayerful leadership and a navigational aid for all of us who aim to lead thoughtfully and prayerfully.

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