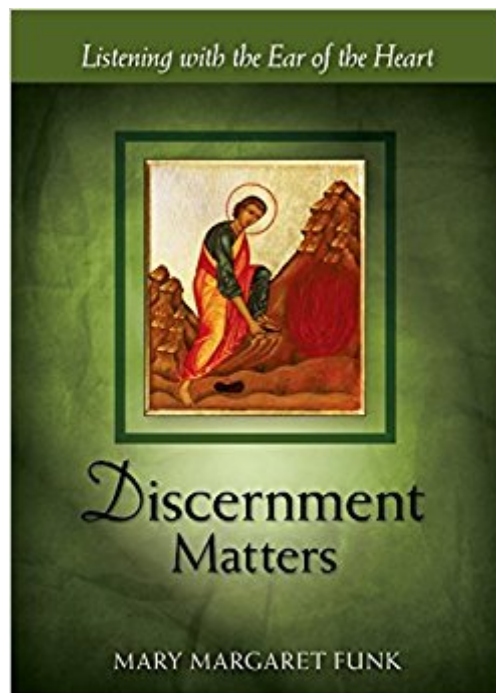




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Discernment Matters: Listening With The Ear Of The Heart (The Matters Series)



Synopsis

After fifty years of monastic life, prayer, and spiritual direction, Meg Funk knows what it means to listen with the ear of one's heart to the Holy Spirit. In *Discernment Matters*, she shares what she has learned. This book is a resource for those who want to learn and practice discernment as taught by the early monastic tradition. It includes an accessible summary of teachings about discernment from monastic traditions of late antiquity, consideration of important tools for making decisions today, and practical examples from the lives of St. Benedict and St. Patrick, as well as from the experience of monastics today. With this fifth volume of the *Matters Series*, Funk completes one of the most comprehensive presentations of the spiritual life available today, demonstrating why this inner work is both necessary and such a joy. Mary Margaret Funk is a Benedictine nun of Our Lady of Grace Monastery, Beech Grove, Indiana. From 1994 through 2004, she served as executive director of Monastic Interreligious Dialogue, which fosters dialogue among monastics of the world's religions. In addition to the volumes of the *Matters Series*, she is the author of *Islam Is a Gift: An Experience of Dialogue and Devotion* and *Into the Depths: A Journey of Loss and Vocation*.

Book Information

Series: The Matters Series

Paperback: 256 pages

Publisher: Liturgical Press (February 1, 2013)

Language: English

ISBN-10: 0814634699

ISBN-13: 978-0814634691

Product Dimensions: 4.9 x 0.6 x 6.9 inches

Shipping Weight: 7.2 ounces (View shipping rates and policies)

Average Customer Review: 5.0 out of 5 stars 12 customer reviews

Best Sellers Rank: #136,868 in Books (See Top 100 in Books) #19 in [Books > Christian Books & Bibles > Worship & Devotion > Monasticism & Asceticism](#) #20 in [Books > Religion & Spirituality > Worship & Devotion > Monasticism & Asceticism](#) #1089 in [Books > Christian Books & Bibles > Catholicism](#)

Customer Reviews

Sister Funk offers the reader a helpful synthesis of the theology and practice of the Christian discernment tradition. Contemporary readers will be gently challenged to examine and reorient the way that they have allowed themselves to develop the discerning heart. Funk's story of

her personal journey will be helpful to pastors, spiritual guides, and students of the Christian spiritual tradition. Howard Gray, SJ, Georgetown University A particular value of Sr. Meg Funk's latest book is that she doesn't speak only in generalities about discernment but gives specific examples of how she and others have gone about making God-centered decisions. In addition, she provides a very helpful summary of the core teachings of classic spiritual writers like Bro. Lawrence of the Resurrection and St. Teresa of Avila. James Wiseman, OSB, The Catholic University of America, Author of *Spirituality and Mysticism: A Global View* This is a guide for grown-ups, a sophisticated, intricate look at discernment, in the broad sense as: "the Holy Spirit at work in us." Carol Schuck Scheiber, *Horizon: Journal of the National Religious Vocation Conference*

Mary Margaret Funk is a Benedictine nun of Our Lady of Grace Monastery, Beech Grove, Indiana. From 1994 through 2004, she served as executive director of Monastic Interreligious Dialogue, which fosters dialogue among monastics of the world's religions. In addition to the volumes of the *Matters Series*, she is the author of *Islam Is: An Experience of Dialogue and Devotion* and *Into the Depths: A Journey of Loss and Vocation*.

Simple yet powerful insights into how to be more in touch with yourself and God. Along with *Thoughts Matter* (read "Thoughts" first) the best reads for spiritual growth. *Thoughts Matter: Discovering the Spiritual Journey* (*Matters Series*)

I've read the complete "matter series" by Mary Margaret Funk and have found a new life for myself. The author is presenting a talk this week at the local catholic church, I'm not catholic but plan to be the front row to her story

I love this book. It is so helpful during times of discernment!

In *Discernment Matters*, the culmination of the Liturgical Press "*Matters Series*," Mary Margaret Funk wisely states that "[a] heart that is not divided is at peace" (27). Funk, a Benedictine nun stationed at Our Lady of Grace Monastery in Indiana, uses her fifty years of experience as a teacher, author, and retreat leader, to guide the reader of this volume to a singular heart centered solely upon finding God amidst the turmoil and vice found in everyday life. Sister Funk believes that in returning to the ascetical practices found in antiquity, that "[w]e can recover [a] childlike immediacy with God through a combination of doing good works in our exterior life and noticing our

thoughts in our interior life" (xxi). This fine work, which balances the interior and exterior life quite nicely, contains chapters concerning tools for the journey, practices for discernment, and imitating those who went before us. In the chapter entitled "Discernment and the Holy Spirit," Sister Funk describes eight afflictive thoughts--as found in the teachings of John Cassian--which impede our discernment process. She rightfully admits that "most of the time we are covered over with one of the afflictive consciousnesses of food, sex, things, anger, dejection, acedia, vainglory, or pride" (13). Sr. Funk further views acedia as an affliction of the soul, wherein we suffer "a great weariness of the soul. The seeker's ability to discern sleeps. He or she is separated from reason and awareness" (42). She combats this affliction with the solitude and silence of sitting alone in her cell, and by compunction, or tears of sadness which soften her up her demeanor. Sister gives an excellent definition of discernment, which she sees as the pursuit of our awareness of grace, or "those personal, subtle promptings of the Holy Spirit" (xxiii). She later offers five steps in the discernment process, which include 1) appealing to the Holy Spirit for guidance, 2) making a virtual decision, which is a decision of the mind only, 3) asking for a sign of approval, 4) making a decision, and, 5) watching our thoughts, while also guarding our hearts. Sister Funk also advises that this process of discernment "works well when there's a clear question and a preferred method" (139). Sister Funk's final volume in this series is highly recommended for those seeking to discern a major life decision, Spiritual Directors, and adult faith-sharing groups seeking to broaden their spirituality. Her work is extremely well-written, and contains much in terms of spiritual wisdom. Of particular interest is her imaginary conversation with Nil Sorsky, the fifteenth century leader of the Russian medieval movement. Funk effectively shows that in addition to conversing with Jesus, Mary, and the saints, we can also discern a singular heart by communicating with saintly figures. They impart much wisdom, and so does Sister Mary Margaret Funk.

Robert P. Russo
 Lourdes University

i actually bought this book on the recommendation of my sprituall director (who wrote the introduction). This book offers wisdom and advice in an area that has beenm largely lost in the Western Christian tradition--how to recognize and deal with afflictive states of mind/tendencies that lead eventuallhy to sin, along with sevderal powerful spritual practices which really do work to overcome these tendencies. Much of this information has been preserbve4d in the Eastern church, and can also be found in sources like John Climactus. But most Westerners I know have had to turn to Buddhist teachings to find practices for dealing with this area. ow here is a whole treasure-house of tteaching and practice right from the roots of the Christian tradition. I have shared thisn book with my husband, with students and with friends. The unanimous conclusion has been that this is a

powerful book which could well be life-changing.

In an age when we all strive to be self-reliant, Sr. Meg Funk encourages us to follow the lead of the Holy Spirit instead in Discernment Matters. Who knows us better than God? A good beginning for turning our lives over to this guiding Spirit is to become aware of the "afflictive thoughts" that plague us. In reading over these eight time-tested tendencies, I recognized the two most problematic ones for me right away. I am grateful that Sr. Meg writes about deep and ancient wisdom in a way that is understandable and even appealing to the average reader, assuming that reader is attracted to growth in personal spirituality. The necessity of encountering God through prayer is emphasized in this book. Seven practices are outlined, and seven particular people who excelled at these types lead us through them, including one who was new to me, an interesting twentieth-century French actress and mystic, Gabrielle Bossis. I even found an English translation of Bossis' book in the public library. Sr. Meg's writings remind me of scripture, in that they can be read again and again, continually bringing forth fruit for our minds and souls to savor. Wife of Modelcarman

By taking us back to the wisdom of the early monastic mothers and fathers of the desert, and presenting it in a way that provides praxis for our era, Sister Meg has gifted us with something rare. For me, it has revitalized my spiritual journey after I had given up hope. One of its blessings is its reminder and presentation of the traditional "quality control" available to Christians as they navigate a world fraught with the dangers of disinformation, social engineering, "phony holy" teachers who do not walk their talk, and the vast dumbing down apparent in so much that passes for teaching and writing. The entire Matters book series, updated and published in early 2013, is a must for any serious seeker, whether Christian or not. I belong to an interfaith group based in Europe, and Sister Meg's contributions are a regular part of our dialogue.

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