



**Digital Commons@**

Loyola Marymount University  
LMU Loyola Law School

---

Spiritual Essays

Center for Ignatian Spirituality

---

2012

## Gray Area

Fr. Randy Roche

*Loyola Marymount University*

Follow this and additional works at: <https://digitalcommons.lmu.edu/spiritualessays>



Part of the [Catholic Studies Commons](#), and the [Religious Thought, Theology and Philosophy of Religion Commons](#)

---

### Repository Citation

Roche, Fr. Randy, "Gray Area" (2012). *Spiritual Essays*. 257.

<https://digitalcommons.lmu.edu/spiritualessays/257>

This Essay is brought to you for free and open access by the Center for Ignatian Spirituality at Digital Commons @ Loyola Marymount University and Loyola Law School. It has been accepted for inclusion in Spiritual Essays by an authorized administrator of Digital Commons@Loyola Marymount University and Loyola Law School. For more information, please contact [digitalcommons@lmu.edu](mailto:digitalcommons@lmu.edu).

## Gray Area

Many of our decisions are not about matters that are clearly “right or wrong,” as would be answers to questions on a mathematical quiz. Often, we hear or read, or perhaps we might say, that the rightness or wrongness of an issue is accompanied by reasons both for and against, and is in a gray area where it is difficult to make a determination one way or the other. One way of resolving such problems would be to say that, since the better option is unclear, it does not matter which choice we make. Another possible response to something that is in the gray area would be not to decide, so as to avoid making a mistake. Or, more positively, in dealing with a subject that has positive and negative ramifications, we could choose to make sure that both mind and heart are fully engaged in the process, not one interior power almost to the exclusion of the other.

In gray area circumstances where a decision is required, one way of proceeding is almost always better, and the other less good, even when there are reasons for and against both sides. That is, given an issue that is more important than the choice between vanilla and chocolate ice cream, and having a strong preference for determining which is the better option, we are often able at some point to tell the difference. The gray area can expand and contract not so much because of the particular situations, but because of the strength or weakness of our desire for, and commitment to, seeking to ascertain the better of the alternatives.

More is at stake than whatever subject might be under consideration. Our values and our implicit understanding of our purpose in life are revealed and expressed when we deal with significant questions that are in the gray area. We are not concerned with “perfection” in making decisions but with the direction and movement that might be more life-enhancing, more helpful for us and for others, more in keeping with reality as we are presently capable of perceiving it.

Though small matters appropriately occupy much of our time and attention, we do not need to expend disproportionate amounts of energy making decisions about them, even when they are in the gray area. But we can develop our skills and habits for making better decisions of any kind, by becoming more attuned to inspirations that support us and by growing in awareness of the disruptive mental habits of thought that tend to limit our freedom.

Reason alone is not capable of guiding our decision-making, at least not just a rational ordering of thoughts. We have a power of right judgment that provides us with essential information when we are deciding an issue

appropriately. For example, most of us have had experiences of thinking that something is just fine, while some movement within us indicated that the opposite was true. We might also have had experiences of feeling "right" about something but failing to distinguish between mere attraction and that true consolation and peace which we cannot create for ourselves, but which affirms the choice we are making.

The "gray area" presents an every-day challenge rather than denoting a place of danger for those who take into consideration reasons of the mind together with reasons of the heart.