

THE AFFECTIVE DIMENSION OF DISCERNING AND DECIDING ¹

Franz Meures, S.J.
Rector
German-Hungarian Pontifical College
Rome, Italy

Introduction

We read in the 14th Annotation of the Spiritual Exercises of St. Ignatius:

“If the giver (of the Spiritual Exercises) sees that the exercitant is going ahead in consolation and full of fervour, the latter ought to be forewarned against making any unthinking or precipitate promise or vow. The more unstable in temperament the exercitant is known to be, the greater the need for warning and admonition... Careful consideration must be given to the individual temperament and capabilities of the exercitant, as well as to the helps or hindrances that may be met with in fulfilling promises that such a person might want to make.”

Coming to Dobogoko, I understood that I would talk to people who try to assist young people in their spiritual way and help them in making good decisions. Therefore, I will not give a conference on a scientific level about the most

¹Conference given in Dobogoko, Hungary, in October 2006, during the INYGO European Encounter on “Accompanying young adults to choose and decide”. This explains the colloquial style of the article.

recent research regarding emotions, but I will try to offer some aspects to be kept in mind in accompanying others while struggling with their emotions.

As you can see in the annotation quoted above, the spiritual guide has an important role in accompanying a person. He/she has to be very conscious of the personality of the directee, his/her temper, his/her character. The first thing we can learn from this annotation is: that not always, when somebody is advancing in a spiritual process “in consolation and full of fervour”, he/she is going to make a good decision

So much for an introduction! How will I proceed? First, I shall give some general remarks on emotions in the framework of Christian anthropology. Then, I shall analyse more deeply the emotions in an individual’s spiritual process, as we find it in the Spiritual Exercises of St. Ignatius. And finally, I shall try to give you some recommendations for assisting young people in the process of decision making.

*Some general remarks on emotions in the framework
of christian anthropology*

What are emotions like?

We are used to live with our emotions, every moment, every day, but usually we do not think a lot about what they are. What is an emotion? I want to give you some brief points:

1) An emotion is a *psycho-physiological reaction*. It just happens. It is not planned, not intended. It just happens - on two levels: *psychic* – in the soul; *physiological* – in the body. Every emotion happens on these two levels. For instance: I feel sad and my mouth is turned downwards in a glum expression; I feel shame and I blush; I feel anger and my heartbeat is going at two hundred. As you can see, emotions are between the psychic and the physiological life. And in a certain sense, also animals can have emotions.

2) The second point: emotions are *felt* by the subject. They are felt by sensual perception.

3) Emotions come about *spontaneously*. This is especially surprising for people who are used to plan everything: “Then I shall do that and that, and that will be the next step”. They are always disturbed by their emotions,

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because they could not plan them. Emotions just come, they happen and quite often, we do not even know where they came from. I wake up in the morning and I feel a bit sad and I say: “What’s going on? Why do I feel sad?” And I don’t know.

4) Emotions have a *content*: joy, happiness, aggression, anger, envy, jealousy, etc. And my reactions depend on this content.

5) Emotions are a *motivational power* which sometimes can be very strong. Somehow the emotions are like fuel for our life. They fuel our engine. Sometimes you are aware that somebody is thinking out a very good plan, a very good idea; but when there are no emotions behind this plan, nothing moves. The good idea lacks the fuelled engine.

6) Emotions are moving us, sometimes very strongly and intuitively. It is *intuition*. Sometimes it is even like a *reflex*. Sometimes I am standing there, in a subway, and a pickpocket tries to grab my wallet. It is not thoughtful reflection that makes me react and try to stop him. It is a reflex. I feel something and – without thinking – I am taken by an enormous inner energy that makes me move rapidly to grab him.

7) That’s how emotions work: reflex, intuition, movement and they all have a certain kind of appraisal. An American psychologist, Martha Arnold, says: “Emotions can be defined as a felt tendency towards anything appraised as good and away from anything appraised as bad”. So, if, on the one hand, there is my emotional life, and, on the other, there is an object,

let’s say an ice-cream, this object elicits in my soul a feeling, an emotion, a desire. Thus, seeing the ice-cream, I move in its direction. This is a spontaneous appetite, which we sometimes express by our body language. Example: I come into a hall and I find

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myself spontaneously sitting down beside somebody I like, and then I say: “Oh, you’re here!” I did not think about it. But I came in and sat right here. Or suppose you are going to your room and you notice that there is a fire. The spontaneous reaction is to escape, run away, without thinking. This is an *intuitive appraisal*.

What is an emotional appraisal?

These remarks are very important for our topic of decision making. Before we start to put in motion our brain, i.e. our rational appraisal, we normally have already done a spontaneous evaluation of the situation. Emotional appraisal says: that is good or not good for me, I - spontaneously - like it or dislike it. That is what we call the emotional appraisal. But, as you know, if we function like that, we will never come to long-lasting decisions or commitments. If every nice girl that comes across the street towards me moves me so much that I make a spontaneous decision, where will I end up? Therefore, we also need to employ always our **capacity for a rational appraisal** in order to be able to make sound decisions. When something has affected us very emotionally we usually say: "Please, before taking a decision, think about it". Only by this second appraisal we introduce our knowledge, our long lasting convictions and our cultural, social and spiritual values in the process of decision making.

Self-centred and self-transcendent motivation and the role of emotions

Let's now - with this background, - come to some more special concepts regarding our motivation. Trying to find out what is really moving us, we become aware of a lot of motivations which respond to the question, "What is good for me?" (for example, the ice-cream, praise, security, food, all my needs, my desires, to be loved, etc.). In my basic emotional life I long mainly for things "important for me". A baby -for example - can strive only for the "good for me, for myself". This is self-centred motivation, which - on the one hand is necessary, but can not be our sole motivation for decision making.

If we would remain on the baby level of maturation, we would all develop into total egoists. But as you all know, as men and women we are endowed with spirit, with reason, with the capacity of rational appraisal and, therefore, we find in ourselves also the capacity to strive for something which transcends ourselves. If in a given situation, actually here in Hungary, one says: "I am fighting for justice in my country", he/she expresses a value, which is good in itself. "I am not only fighting for myself, for my social and political advantage, but in my political attitude I am really looking for justice

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for everybody in this country”. This which is “important in itself” expresses an objective value, a self-transcendent value.

So, we are all usually caught between *self-centred* and *self-transcendent motivations*. Saying, “Here we are at the altar and I take you as my wife”, is not only saying, “I love you, I like you”, but also, “We have a contract for life by which - for good or for bad, whether I feel fine or not - I shall be faithful to you, I shall stand by you and I shall carry out my duties as a husband”. So that is not only what is good for myself, but what is good for my partner. When I have understood and chosen the value of marriage by a promise, a kind of vow, I commit myself to this value. It’s generosity and it’s desire for self-fulfilment at the same time. And

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the struggle of our life is stretched out between these two motivations. We are living with mixed motivations.

Subconscious motivation and emotions

The psychic structure according to the psychoanalytic theory

Self-centred as well as self-transcendent motivations have an emotional impact. E.g. the self-transcendent values “love of Christ, the love of God” can find very strong emotional expression. Consequently, emotions can fuel our self-centred tendencies as well as our self-transcendent longings. Having all this on a conscious level, spiritual discernment and decision making would be quite easy. But – as you probably know - only a certain part of our motivations is conscious; the greater part is unconscious. This is the basic assumption of psychoanalytic theory. It says, that in the psychic life of an individual, there will always be a conscious part: reflecting, knowing, understanding, willing, etc. And, on the other, we have a greater part of forces, drives and emotions, which we do not perceive nor recognize at the present moment or at any moment, and which can be very important in our motivations. We call all this the dynamic subconscious. Psychologists tell us that there are two areas in the subconscious: the preconscious and the unconscious. By reflection and meditation we can find some access to the preconscious motivation. But usually in our conscious awareness we

have no access to the unconscious. This is the normal structure of operation in psychic life, this is not pathological.

The importance of the dynamic subconscious

The conscious person needs a certain inner barrier that creates a separation between the conscious and the subconscious. Without such a barrier the conscious would be always flooded by thousands of perceptions, feelings, memories etc. Without this barrier I would not be able to enter into an ordered dialogue here in the conference. I would always be disturbed by my own inner impulses. If I would stand here and everything that touches me at this moment would come up to my consciousness, I would stand in front of you completely confused. I would have to cope all the time with perceptions like "this man in the audience is smiling" "this lady is looking sad" or "the light in this hall is too strong". But my psychic system excludes all those perceptions and the emotions correlated with them from my conscious awareness. Therefore, in our conscious life we have the capacity, to focus on certain aspects, and to exclude all the rest - especially a lot of emotions which are always moving inward - away from our consciousness at the moment. If I listen just for a moment to myself, to my preconscious, I feel: "Oh, yes, my feet are very hot, I am a bit thirsty, etc." But, when I talk to you, I cannot concentrate on that, I have to forget all those emotions, so I can give all my attention to the talk that I am giving. But, nevertheless, all these hidden emotions are moving me, they represent forces which are moving me.

The affective memory

The basic concept of the affective memory is repression, the most important defence mechanism in psychoanalytic theory. By "repression" psychoanalysts mean, that certain experiences - especially painful emotional experiences - are no longer allowed to come to our conscious life. For example: *As a child*, every time I tried to speak up and say my opinion, I was punished. Thus saying my opinion *now* means a very bad experience. It's connected with pain. So, it can happen that, in order to clear my life a bit and not always live in pain, these emotions are separated from my

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consciousness, but they are present, working. If I am standing, for instance, in front of my Father General, I may feel a very quick heart-beat, because I wanted to express a decision I want to take. So, I am already deeply moved and emotions are working, but I do not understand why I am so tense, so worked up.

If we try to help young people in taking their decisions we have - as much as possible - to take into account the whole personality, also the subconscious affective memory. Therefore, if we lead them to the Spiritual Exercises, we give them an opportunity to open up more and to come into touch with an area of the unconscious. We say, "Calm down, just be present, open your heart, let whatever presents itself come up". And then - after a day or two - they might enter quite well into the preconscious psychic life and they might feel much more inner movements. This can be very useful for the screening of their motivations and help them in taking realistic decisions.

Affective maturation and the ability for good decisions

For a good decision, a person needs a certain *affective maturity*. What does that mean? We read in Church documents about the formation of priests that affective maturity is very important. But this is true for everybody. If I want to make a good decision for my life, I have to mature in this tension which we spoke about earlier, and I have to mature in dealing with all the forces that are inside me. That is, on the one hand I have to be, as much as possible, in contact with my emotions, just to feel them, to be aware of them, to know what is moving me. But, on the other hand, I have to be able to distance myself from those emotions, and say: "Ok, I feel that it would be better now to do such and such a thing, but there are other aspects that I have to take into account". Affective maturity is the ability to feel and to live in a certain sense with my own emotions, but at the same time, it is the capacity to control or to renounce the desires of these emotions. In this context it is interesting to read the title Ignatius gave to the Spiritual Exercises:

"Spiritual Exercises, having as their purpose the *overcoming of self* and the *ordering of one's life* on the basis of a *decision* made in freedom from any disordered attachment" [21]

Ignatius calls emotions which move me but are not in accord with the general goal of my life *disordered attachments*. He wants the retreatant in the process of *decision making* to be in contact with his/her emotions, but also to be able to control them efficiently, in order to reach the indifference, which is so important to listen openly to God's call. There is a concept, to be found in those books that have almost disappeared from our spiritual life, called *mortification*. In the old formation of the Society of Jesus, we were told, "Mortify yourself and you shall go to God". What does mortification mean?

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Mortification

Mortification is the ability to keep a distance between us and our strong emotions or passions. When St. Ignatius writes about the qualities of a Superior General, he says, it is very important that he be a mortified person. That is not that he is killing himself or killing his desires and emotions, or that he is a masochist, but that he is able to deal with his emotions in a very prudent and mature way.

So with this I close my first part, which happened to be much too long. But I hope that it can already give you a first impression about how you can help young people, i.e. how to help them grow in dealing with their emotional life.

The affective dimension in decision making according to Saint Ignatius

It is not possible to give you the whole theory of Saint Ignatius. I shall only give a few points, which are meant to be simple reminders of basic starting points regarding the emotions in a spiritual process.

The Ignatian understanding of “will”

As we read in the First Week, the first point is that we should do the exercises with the three powers or faculties, i.e. memory, reason and will. But, what is “will”? I don’t know well the cultural differences present in this conference. But when we in German language speak about the “will”, we think of something very rational. When we talk of a rational decision we say, “ich will”. But that is not the concept Saint Ignatius uses. The will, for Ignatius, is everything that is moving the person. Today, to express what Ignatius intends by the will, we would use the term *motivation*. “What is moving me” and therefore he says: look at the things that touch the will, that is, all those motions inside that move you. These may also be thoughts, reasonings, but mainly, as we know, they are emotional forces. For instance, when we Jesuits started preaching, they told us in preaching we should touch the will of the listeners, to move them. Not only give very prudent lectures, but move our listeners, i.e. touch the will.

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The important role of desire in the spiritual process

About 100 years ago, we mainly had an interpretation of the Spiritual Exercises which was centred on the rational point of decision making. So reasoning, seeing the pros and cons and the aspects on each side, and then making up one’s own mind, examining the advantages and disadvantages, etc. But that is not the whole story, according to Saint Ignatius, because he always says, in the prelude to every exercise: “to ask the Lord for what I desire and long for.”

In the beginning of my religious life, I learnt that I have to desire all those pious things: to follow Christ, etc.. But these were not my real desires. The crucial point is, to go back to one’s real desires. Do you remember yesterday’s Gospel, the blind man in Jericho, Bartimaeus. He’s shouting and crying, “Son of David, help me!” There is a lot of power in his cry and everyone tells him to shut up. Still he cries even louder, “Son of David come to help me!” Yes, there is a lot of power in the cry. The translators are sometimes quite decent and write, “*in a loud voice*”; but actually he was

screaming. And then the disciples say, "Go to him", and Jesus asks, "What do you want me to do? What is your desire?"

In the question "What is your desire?" we find a lot of emotions involved. And in our upbringing in good manners and in our education, quite often we have learnt not to listen to our desires. We have learnt to listen to what we are expected to do, but in many occasions we did not learn to listen and to become aware of what are our real desires? I remember a few years ago a seminarian came to me and was close to his ordination when he fell in love with a girl. It was a big conflict and he said, "Oh, yes, I must first get rid of all this and then proceed to my ordination." "Oh", I said, "to me that seems not to be a good idea. What are you praying for?" He said: "I'm praying to the Lord, that I may overcome all these temptations, and then I shall present myself for ordination." So I said, "I see that you are praying against your desires. Please learn to pray with your desires, even if they seem completely crazy." At breakfast we talked about those cases of sexual abuse. In spiritual direction I saw those people and I asked them, "Can you pray with those desires? They are your desires. Just listen to them! Open up. Bring them in front of the Lord and see what happens." If you open your real desires to the Lord, he may heal and reconcile them.

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Therefore, what is "desire" in the spiritual process? It means to come – together with our Lord - in touch with the deeper aspirations and emotions which are really living in us. If you see Ps 137, "By the rivers of Babylon", the Israelites are weeping and screaming. And then at the end, in the last two verses, which you never find in the liturgy as they are omitted, because a decent person never should say such things, we read, "Blessed is he who takes hold of your small ones and crashes them against the rocks". These slaves in Babylonian exile were so angry, that they dared to pray about it and put it into a Psalm which is printed in the Bible. That is what is meant by desires, the deep-rooted emotions in ourselves that are really moving us. Quite often, these desire are not all in congruence with the following of Christ, and with being mortified and humble and so on. But if you want to grow, you have to pray with your desires, your real desires.

The important role of the basic orientation of the person

These are the first two numbers in the “*Rules for the discernment of spirits*”, which are usually never read, because we think, that – obviously we belong to those “who advance from good to better in the service of God our Lord” (*SpEx 315*). Therefore we forget the important message of the first two rules.

“With people who go from one deadly sin to another” (*Spir Ex 314*). If somebody lives in this process, he/she experiences an emotional reinforcement of this process. “I like heavy drinking. Isn’t it great! Come on comrades; let’s have another bout of heavy drinking tonight.” So it’s a kind of reinforcement of what I am doing. Ignatius formulates it in another way. He says the evil spirit is supporting you and saying, “Go ahead, everything’s fine,” and you feel fine in that. Sinful and very risky behaviour is reinforcing itself. Therefore the question “Do I feel fine in it?” is not sufficient for spiritual discernment. In these cases – as Saint Ignatius says - it is the good spirit, the Spirit of the Lord, who is pricking the exercitant’s conscience, making him feel something is not going well and trying to move him in another direction.

And, as we all know, it is the good spirit who is reinforcing the other ones, who are making a certain progress in following Christ, on the road to perfection (cf. *Spir Ex 315*), giving them tears and consolation and inner peace and joy and so on, so as to stimulate them, to help them move ahead on their journey. And it is the evil spirit who says: “Oh, its better that you give up; you will never make it, you will never succeed”. He will create doubts and all those sorts of temptations that you know from your long life of prayer.

Therefore, what is the intention of Saint Ignatius giving us these two rules with the two basic orientations? It is that “feeling okay” is very ambiguous in spiritual discernment. The question “Am I in agreement with myself?” is very dangerous. Each basic orientation has its emotional reinforcement system, be it towards the good or the bad. If you have the feeling of being in full congruence with yourself, that does not say much. Even the one who is going from mortal sin to mortal sin may be in great congruence with himself. The emotional congruence cannot be the principal touchstone for a decision. There are other factors.

The rules of consolation and desolation

Then - as you know well - there are *the rules of consolation and desolation*, (*Spir Ex 316 and 317*). Sometimes, people think consolation means having good feelings. That is not true, according to the definition of St. Ignatius, because, for instance, in the 1st Week we ask for remorse, pain for our sins, weeping about our sins: that is called consolation. If, in the 1st Week, in front of Christ crucified, we feel real repentance and remorse about how we are living, around us, even though it is sometimes very depressing and humiliating to see all our mistakes and sins and so on, Ignatius says that if we do that honestly in front of the Lord, and all those sorts of bad emotions come out and we can weep, that is consolation, because consolation is what brings us in touch with the Lord. And sometimes that may be joy and the beauty of nature and everything that opens the soul. And what brings us in touch with the Lord is finally to be honest with ourselves.

Also in the 3rd Week of the Exercises we pray for the grace to “feel pain with the suffering Lord, to weep with Him.” We pray for com-passion, to accompany Him in His passion, to feel His passion. That’s not a fine feeling, but, deep down, it can give you a very deep consolation, because consolation means, “I’m close to the Lord!” – That’s just what I wanted to clarify about consolation.

Conclusion: What is meant by discernment of spirits?

“Discernment of spirits is a process of clarification whereby a person – by his intimate knowledge of Christ – examines his/her internal and external movements and drives, whether they lead him/her more to God or away from God; this discernment facilitates a decision about the way which he/she is supposed to go before God.”² This summarises what I have said so far.

The five steps of decision making

What I am saying now is taken from the Spiritual Exercises. I omit showing you where exactly you can find it in the writings of Saint Ignatius. I just want to point out the main process and structures:

Awareness of the spiritual interior movements

The first step is *awareness of the spiritual interior movements*, i.e. what I explained before about the preconscious. It is very important before making a decision that you be in touch with everything that is moving you internally. The whole process of the Spiritual Exercises centres around this: that you make the exercises being always aware where you are touched and what is your reaction, what is the outcome. And especially the exercises of “*repetition*”: Saint Ignatius says: “... *I will repeat the first and second exercises, noting and dwelling upon the points where I have felt greater consolation or desolation, or greater spiritual relish.*” (*Spir Ex 62*) If it was joy, go deeper into the joy and if it was anger, go deeper into the anger. Try to feel it, to be aware of it and to understand it. Be in touch with the deeper interior life. Therefore, we need silence. If we are in an atmosphere of silence, automatically, all that is inside us comes up. But there are people who have serious difficulties, who are somehow unable to stay five minutes in silence. If in silence they come into touch with themselves they are so afraid, that they feel like exploding. Once, I started an analytic therapy and I said to the young man: “Please sit here and just tell what’s coming into your mind, and the boy was so sick that he almost smashed the tape recorder on the table. For him, just having a bit of silence brought up so much fear, so much anxiety. I think all that culture of the headphones among young people today, where they are playing music all day long, is a way of avoiding the inner voice, the inner awareness. But for decision making it is so important to be aware of inner movements.

Understanding of those movements

The second step is the *understanding of those movements*. But in fact, sometimes first I am aware of them and then aware that I do not understand them. For instance, when I listen to myself I may feel that I am a bit nervous, tense. Why am I tense, here, in this situation? I do not understand. And maybe at a certain moment I see that the person with whom I am talking always looks at me critically. He/she does not say anything critical, but his/her face, which is very expressive (non-verbal communication), is very critical. So I understand that I am so tense because he/she is always looking at me so critically. But somehow about 80-90% of what is happening to us, we never understand. It just happens. If, however,

we try to be in touch with ourselves, if we reflect regularly on our experiences and make the “examen” twice a day, maybe we will touch on some point which helps us move forward a little bit better.

Discernment

That is what I gave you in the definition above. And what is very important here, in the definition I gave you, is *not to follow spontaneously the so called “good” emotions*. To do so does not lead automatically to good decisions. Rather, you have to take into account all those other self-transcendent values and then find out what is really an interior motion that leads to those values. And which are the ones that lead to the other trinity: I, me and myself. The two trinities: one is God the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit, and the other is I, me, myself.

Decision making

The fourth step is the decision-making itself. In the spiritual exercises it is entirely connected with the contemplation of the mysteries of Christ. In a period of close contemplation of Christ, I might find the right sense of him, that gives me clarity about my choices. The basic question of spiritual decision making is: Is my option in congruence with Christ? If it is, there will follow the emotions given in the rule of consolation.

Attentiveness to the emotional resonance of the decision

The fifth step is the emotional resonance of the decision; i.e. how do I feel in the days after the decision? Am I quiet, calm, with some hope, some confidence, or do I feel lost, with no interest? This is the emotional resonance.

Certainly, you all know those situations where, let us say, in a parish council you have a series of points to decide on in an evening, and then there are only 10 minutes left and they say, “Ok, let’s make a decision!” They had a long and hard discussion about a tricky point, but now they want to make a decision in a hasty manner, and they are happy to go home having made a decision. But in a case like that, you have to look out for the

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days that follow. Is there any move, is there anybody taking any initiative regarding the decision? If three days later, there is no movement at all, just forget it, cancel it from the minutes. It was not a good decision; it was just fixing things together with a hammer. A good decision has an outcome that leads to movement, even in a group. If there is no movement, forget the decision. All aspects might be very well put together, but if after the decision we say, "Ok, now I hope the other will do it," there is no real decision.

The three dimensions of attentiveness for spiritual discernment

For the spiritual discernment I will give you another point that I developed in the analysis of the Spiritual Exercises. Recently I published an article about the discernment of spirits in the Constitutions of the Society of Jesus. It has already been published in German and Dutch, and will be published in English next year in a book on the Ignatian Jubilee². The key point is what I call: *the three dimensions of attentiveness for a spiritual discernment*.

In order to make good decisions and to live a good spiritual life, i.e. respond in our lives to what God is calling us, we need a threefold type of attentiveness. I explain:

1) The first field of attention is *God and His Revelation*. That is we listen to the Gospel, we pray, we contemplate the Cross. All those symbols, texts, rituals that bring us into contact with what God is for us and what He said to us.

2) The second focus of attentiveness is to be attentive to *one's own interior movements*: "*las mociones*" as Ignatius calls them. I spoke about them: "What is going on inside me? What are my thoughts, my feelings, my plans, my aspirations, my day dreams, my night dreams. So all that I can find in the inner space of my soul is the second point of focus.

3) The third focus of attentiveness is external reality: the things that I can see, that happen, that I find in today's newspaper, what people tell me at breakfast, what has happened at work, the financial situation of my family, etc. I take into consideration all those facts and information.

If I am going to make a good decision, I need those three fields always to be in contact with each other; otherwise the decision will not

stand on its feet. For instance, you find people who are very good in awareness of their inner life. They can tell you everything about it. People who are very good, also in understanding the Scriptures, in deep prayer, contemplation, and so on, but on the aspect of life, of reality, they are a bit far, missing. They are very sensitive people, but somehow they are living in the clouds. They do not have their feet on the ground.

Or others who have understood very well the message of Revelation, and who have analyzed very well today's reality, the "signs of the time" in the light of the Gospel. They are people who are always calling to action: you have to do that and that. They start the big action, but after two years they start to suffer from burn-out. Why? Because they are not in touch with their inner feelings, are overriding the voice of their inner life. If you go to the very poor and abandoned people, you must be very careful about the way it touches you. It can cause enormous stress to your soul. Helpers who are always in touch with people who are very sick or completely helpless, and who are not very much in touch with their own emotional reactions, will be ruined. This is what is called "*helpers' syndrome*".

Or even, you might encounter people who do not know so much about God, but they affirm that they are spiritual persons. Somehow it is true, because they are so sensitive to others, to reality, and so much in touch with it. They say, "It strikes me, it touches me," and they can explain it very well. But without the explicit knowledge of Christ and closeness to him, spiritual discernment can not stand on its feet.

I think Gandhi was a man who had a spirituality of reality (satyagraha). His basic concept was to grasp reality. When he began his political life in South Africa, he felt, "Reality here is really terrible! So we have to be honest with reality and face it, and that will change us in our movements." But he was also a spiritual man, being moved by the spiritual values of his religion.

***Some recommendations for spiritual directories
and those involved in youth ministries***

Coming to the conclusion I want to give just some brief recommendations.

The importance of awareness, attentiveness, discernment, and affective maturity.

The challenge of the “fun/pleasure culture” and the “feel-good-spirituality”.

Quite often we see people interviewed and asked why they did something, and the answer is: “its fun!” “It was such great fun!” So, that is an argument of motivation that only brings a kind of emotional reinforcement.

What can we do for decision making in a fun/pleasure culture?

“Oh, I feel fine with it, its fun!” That is the central motivational argument that you can hear all over the world now. That is more or less our actual youth culture. I have difficulty listening to that and yet there they are. I do not want to give you too much advice about it, but I do want to stimulate your reflection. What can we do for decision making in a fun culture? Not easy!

The same is true with “wellness-spirituality”. There is a monastery of nuns in Germany called “wellness monastery”. I was so upset about it, I said, “What about the Lord? Is Christian spirituality still fellowship of the Lord in his mission, with joy and pain, success and hardships, or is it just feeling fine?” If you watch the cross in this room, what is the wellness of the Lord in this occasion? To be honest even I do not understand what people are trying to do by this wellness-feeling. I understand that many people today need a certain feeling of security, of inner harmony etc. But, please, never use it if you are going to make life decisions. But there is a whole culture around wellness, all those magazines, papers and so on - full of wellness. True, we live in a stress culture and I understand people are stressed. Life has five days stress and two days wellness. But it does not help for decisions.

“patch-work identity”

You know this concept of the post-modern sociologists that people in our culture are living in different spiritual regions at the same time. I go to church and I pray to Christ, but at the same time I’m involved in New Age practices, and maybe I am also in a military organization and I am member

of Buddhist prayer groups. In this example I am not exaggerating, I am talking about real people. "Anything goes", anything fits together. In this culture you will find that the identity of the person has several sectors, which are not in congruence with one another. And you find that the person is making a decision out of sector B. Fine! He has made a decision, but after three days, sector C is very important. So, forget this decision, because it is not the whole person that is involved, but only a sector of the person. Therefore, they do not make any decision that is long-lasting, because they are hip hopping from one to another. I find that very complicated and I have no solution. As I already said, maybe, I do not even understand it. Maybe in our discussions we can get back to that. But I think, in helping young people who wish to make a good discernment and a good decision, we have to be very careful with that aspect.

² F. MEURES, *Was heist Unterscheidung der Geister?* In: *Ordenkorrespondenz* 31 (1990), p. 278

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