

THE MIND AND HEART OF CHRIST

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MAKING DECISIONS with the mind and heart of Christ means we are discerning the activity of God within ourselves; and God's activity comes to us communally through the various historical experiences of the human race. Our responsibility, in freedom and in truth, will be to realize the upbuilding of the divine-human community which includes the whole human race.¹ This activity takes place in continuity with the faith-community presented and described to us in the New Testament. However, getting into the mind and heart of Christ does not mean we will be able to read the future. We will see that the activity of discernment (in the truth, freedom and love of Christ) constantly begins in a communal faith context and also urges our responsibility² towards the building up of the divine-human community.

The making of good decisions is the moment when all our human faculties are at work. This is the moment when our great relationships are recognized as influencing us. It is the moment when we are aware of the meaning of our life, when we commit our whole person to a course of action and judge that that course of action is in tune with our experience of God loving and drawing us in this love.³ It is the moment when our covenant relationship with other humans will focus on the apostolic concern to build up the divine-human community of the whole human race.

But coming to correct decisions is not an easy matter. We need someone to instruct us, to show us how, and to lead the way; that person is Jesus Christ. He is the paradigm of correct decision-making. How did he make decisions in a universe set free by God's creative act? In him we have both an example and a presence. We can meditate over the example of his life and we can contemplate his presence.

If we are meditating on the historical context of the early Church's story of Jesus as it bears on our own issues, then meditation helps us to meet the problem aspects of our present reality. In Philippians

2,5-11, St Paul gives us a paschal framework of the different phases in the story of Jesus as presented to us in scripture. We may then marvel at the total self-giving of Jesus to these humans in his midst. His example indicates that our lives and decisions are also to be governed by this same love.

As paradigm, Christ is actually present to us in the power of the Holy Spirit to enlighten, encourage and strengthen us in our decisions and actions.⁴ We speak of Christ as mystery, as symbol, as paradigm and by participation in the Holy Spirit we can contemplate the presence of Christ in the scripture. His word transcends space and time. It is a living word, as the author of Hebrews and Vatican II remind us.⁵

We can also contemplate the life of Jesus and seek to know in our hearts (*sentire*) the experience of Christ. Then instead of pondering the words of Philippians 2,5-11 we might go in imagination to the scene of Jesus's baptism and come in contact with his experience of being loved by the Father: 'You are my Son the beloved. My favour rests on you' (Lk 3,22). Later, in the garden of Gethsemane, this earlier experience of the Father's unconditional love for Jesus may help us appreciate (in our hearts) that the Father's love moves Jesus to love all others unconditionally. Contemplating in this way allows us the experience of Jesus's unconditional love for us. It puts us in touch with the 'mystery' aspect of our life. The experience of this unconditional love is the paradigm for the experience of love that we need when we are making decisions with the mind and heart of Christ (whether as an individual or a community).

The *two* aspects (active and passive) of the Father's unconditional love of Christ also operate in our being as spiritual consolation and become the basic experience from which we discern the activity of God within ourselves. Discernment is the process of interpreting interior movements to discover the origin of our motivation when making decisions. In the decision-making situation of our world, the dynamic of discerning the origin of our motives will involve a knowledge of social structures and their impact on our motivations. More precisely, discernment refers to the recognition of diverse movements of spirits, in and through the experience of spiritual consolation and desolation, in order that one may make decisions at the time of spiritual consolation.⁶

The activity of discerning the interior movement of spirits motivating our decisions is the proper subject of spiritual theology and spiritual direction. It flows from belief that the Godhead acts

immediately in the free creature drawing him or her to union in truth, beauty, love and goodness⁷ and so moves the person to act freely in a particularized unique concrete way and not in fulfilment of some mechanical or closed system of the universe.⁸ One interprets the motivation in terms of our interior experience of God's unconditional love.⁹

When discerning, it is important to know if I am truly in tune with the love of God flowing in the universe to me and through me, because this is the moment of correct decision-making.¹⁰ It is the moment when I am experiencing the 'love of God flooding my heart' (Rom 5,5). Such love inspires, encourages and strengthens me. It is a love that moves me beyond myself. It is not a self-centred, self-satisfying love; it is the love that is in harmony with the Trinity's unconditional love for all people. To judge my interior state at the moment of decision-making demands knowledge of this love. The key to discernment is the appreciative knowledge of the Trinity's unconditional love for me. People need to reflect prayerfully on their own experience or they will not obtain this appreciative knowledge of such love. Nor will they be in tune with the different levels and different expressions of this unconditional love.

There is the experience of creaturehood, the experience of forgiveness, the experience of suffering with Christ. But a heightened awareness is needed to recognize in these experiences the expression of the Trinity's unconditional love for me. A more complete knowledge of such experiences and their significance to my life will require the special activity of appropriating my graced history.¹¹

When I reflect on these experiences I recognize that there are basically two types of experience of the unconditional love of the Trinity in me. The first type is what I call a self-authenticated experience of God's unconditional love for me and for the human race. To speak about it as being self-authenticated means that the experience of being loved cannot be denied by the one having the experience. To grasp this truth, one has to reflect on one's own experiences of the love of God. No one else can know whether it is a self-authenticated experience of God's unconditional love. Something like this is suggested by Jesus in John's gospel: '... your hearts will be full of joy, and that joy no one shall take from you. When that day comes, you will not ask me any questions' (Jn 16,22-23).¹² No proof is necessary. The truth is in the experience. Simply, I know I am taken over by the Trinity's love when this happens. Paul speaks about this in Romans where he says: 'This

hope is not deceptive for the love of God has been poured into our hearts by the Holy Spirit which has been given us' (Rom 5,5). 'The Spirit himself and our spirits bear united witness that we are children of God' (Rom 8,14-16). Such self-authenticated experiences of the unconditional love of God St Ignatius Loyola calls 'consolation without previous cause' (Exx 330,336). One cannot find any adequate cause for it in sensible experience. Rather, it is an experience of being grasped or elevated by the love of the Trinity.¹³

Upon reflection, it seems that the first type of experience, the self-authenticated experience of the Trinity's unconditional love is a *passive* experience; I am grasped by the love of God (cf Phil 3,13; 2 Cor 12,2-4). In other words, what I experience is *my* being; it is something that I receive; it is not something I do. Now although this self-authenticated experience of the love of the Trinity (in me) is basically passive, upon further reflection I discover it has an *active* component as well. There is movement in it; it is a movement to love everyone else unconditionally.

There is a second type of experience of the Trinity's unconditional love in me that is not self-authenticated. These experiences I need to discern. I do this by checking out the interior movements stirred up in me. The basic movement one is looking for, is whether one is being drawn beyond oneself in love, beauty, truth, goodness, justice, beatitudes and so on. This criterion can also be applied to a community. Is it moving beyond itself?

This second type of spiritual consolation might be described as an *active* experience of unconditional love for others as Jesus encourages, 'Love one another as I have loved you' (Jn 13,43). In these words, we recognize that the criterion of a christian's love is in terms of how Jesus himself has loved us. The self-authenticated experience of God's unconditional love becomes the criterion to judge other interior experiences of love when making decisions. For discernment is the process of discovering the source of loving which is motivating us.

Images influence our motivations. Part of the discernment process is to recognize our operative images, and where necessary, to correct them. Generally speaking images (symbols) carry with them an affective and energetic component that moves us at the time of decision. These include the images we have of the nature and person of God, and of ourselves, the images we have of history, of community, of the world, of the will of God, of covenant, of our freedom and responsibility in building the kingdom of God.

In imaging ourselves as free and responsible it is important for us to become aware of and accept our responsibility as human beings. Responsibility includes responsiveness but in the mysterious dynamic that God has created, we are also the centres of responsibility. The Trinity achieves the redemption of the world through us. We are the free focal points of the Trinity's presence in the world; we are the focus of God's unconditional love. This is the presence that inspires, enlightens and strengthens us. The image of the Trinity so understood sees God as encourager of both the local and the world community.

And what is our image of discernment? Many of us tend to think of it as the activity of discovering the will of God that is already in existence. We image the will of God as a pre-existent book of future events. Discernment for the individual or community then becomes figuring out the future.

We are not trying to figure out the future so much as to create it in hope. We are trying to recognize the way in which the love of God is drawing us *eschatologically*. Our stance is not a rigid one but a free one even though good planning anticipates hoped-for results as well as possible sufferings and pain.

When the images of self, the human community and the Trinity are correct, the significance of one's present experiences can be discerned. Then I will be able to recognize the presence of grace operating in the human community, in me, and through me to the wider human community. Then I will recognize where the divine-human community is being realized and where it is not. Ultimately then, discernment is knowing the significance of the present both in the phenomena beyond me and in my interior motivation.

The spiritual consolation of one's whole history is a valuable criteria for discerning later interior movements. This is best done by an in-depth reflection and appropriation of one's graced history as experienced under topics such as beloved, identity, sinful, failure, success, suffering, joyful, hope-filled histories. It is helpful, therefore, to remember and appropriate one's personal graced history within the context of a group praying over its communal graced history.¹⁴

Discernment includes all the activities of our world and should take place over all the activities of our world; this is so because we are not isolated beings. If we remember the movement from global-to-local-to-community-to-individual and read the signs of the times we may understand both the divine and human context of discern-

ment. In the divine-human community the initiative is from God and the response is human. In Jesus himself we have these same two aspects (that is, initiative and response). They are also present in the community that responded to his life and teachings. This may be what is meant by the corporate personality of Christ and his titles of Second Adam, Israel, Moses, David.¹⁵ Besides the significance of Jesus as an individual we need to consider Christ as a collectivity. We get some glimmer of this concept when we realize the main thing Jesus left us was a community of faith, hope and love. We will find that his very expression among us is in this community.

What this means practically, is that we should be interpreting world events in terms of this divine-human community and responsibly activate the movements that will realize its upbuilding among the whole human race. In this sense our discernment and decision-making can never be totally private (cf 1 Thess 3,12). Public needs and ramifications should always be considered.¹⁶ Our task eventually is to transform social structures. This is to be done in continuity with the faith community begun by Christ and presented to us in the New Testament.

Scripture is the expression of a faith-community's experience with God. In the New Testament we are in contact with the community both remembering and reflecting on the experience of Jesus by different groups of people.¹⁷ When we pray with scripture we are trying to get in touch with the early faith-community's remembrance and reflection of Jesus. We are caught up in the collective memory of the faith-community somewhat as in the memory of our own blood family. What these early communities tell us about Jesus is that he experienced his creaturehood; he experienced his dependency on the Father for his existence.¹⁸ They also tell us that their community experience is an extension of Christ.

In the gospels we see that Jesus also had the same experiences as our own. We realize that Jesus is that person of weakness, that person of ignorance, whom the Trinity has used to overcome the world of strength, knowledge and power. We discover that Jesus came from a community, that his beginnings were in a faith-community, the faith-community of Israel, and that Jesus found his identity in the *anawim*, the poor. Furthermore, we see that the great achievement of his life, death and resurrection was the development of this faith-community of the *anawim*. A friend of mine insists that St Paul, for example, was not converted to Christianity. But rather St Paul discovered the true identity of the Jewish community through

the eyes of Jesus. If we accept this, then Jesus himself knew that he belonged to the true community of the Israelites, the *anawim*. St Paul realized that Jesus had *the* true jewish perspective of the *anawim*, *vis-à-vis* the world.

Being in touch with this communal *anawim* dimension of our faith-life is an essential part of discernment. It flows out of communal sharing and activity. Jesus's words to his apostles, 'Love one another as I have loved you' (Jn 15,12) points up the communal dimension, because for *them* he died! His death for the community is an expression of the *shema* as quoted by Mark: 'You must love your neighbour as yourself' (Mk 12,31). Jesus's action for all people beckons us to an interior attitude of unconditional love for God and neighbour. His words encourage us to judge our interior experiences in these same terms.

In my understanding, the basic reason for which one exists is to experience the unconditional love of God and to be a mediator of this love to (all) others. Somewhere in one's *searching*, one may discover that the task of mediating God's love cannot be done alone. It can only be dealt with communally; one needs to work with others in community; the searching continues. Both elements of the one experience of God's unconditional love for us are then present to us in our grace-filled experiences of creaturehood, sinfulness, call to mission, commitment, response in a community (*koinonia*), which expresses service and poverty.

As we shift from an individual to a communal approach in apostolic action in today's world, once again we ask, 'Are we truly loving?'. In order to test the reality of our answer we look at the state of our world; we try to analyze the historical causes of the economic, political, social and theological situations. Eventually in a process that is communal, we wish to know if the interior experiences of each individual are in harmony with previous experiences of the unconditional love of the Trinity. Our *main concern* is not about what we decide and what we do, but whether we are truly loving at the time of deciding and acting. The basic activity of discernment reduces itself to the question: are we as a christian community deciding and acting in tune with our own experiences of the Trinity's love for us and with the principles presented to us in the gospels and handed down to us by the faith-community, the Church? One exterior criterion the Church has been urging in the last ten years is our relationship with the poor of the world.¹⁹ Are we deciding from the perspective of the poor?

When I am considering an issue I may ask, how would the Lord meet this issue? What is his attitude? In today's world we are realizing that Christ's approach is from the perspective of the poor; Christ approaches life from the perspective of building the divine-human community. Such a perspective is important if we are to heed the call of Pope John XXIII at the beginning of the Second Vatican Council, to learn to 'read the signs of the times'. This is especially true when we are making decisions with respect to justice. We need to read what is going on beyond ourselves, beyond the individual, or even beyond the community, as the Lord does. We need the Lord's ability to know, to sense, to recognize good and evil tendencies beyond us, if we are going to read the signs of the times.

We move on to a way which will help us judge what is happening within us according to the mind and heart of Christ, that of contemplating the life of Jesus as given to us in scripture. Basically this is the attempt on the part of the one praying to be present to the inspired message. It is done by the use of the imagination. We may find it difficult because we do not trust our imagination. The imagination is the instrument of disposing ourselves so that the inspired message can have an impact on us. By the imagination we enter in and become part of the story of Jesus. When this happens we say that we are present at a 'mystery of Christ's life' and that we are 'with Jesus in our experiencing of life'. This probably means we are in tune with the communal authorship of the gospels and their imaginative (albeit inspired) presentation of Jesus's life (words and actions). Through this method I am seeking to take on the mind and heart of Jesus by living with him imaginatively. Eventually, I discover through the power of the Spirit that the Jesus of the gospels lives with me in my twentieth-century experience of life. And so I 'reflect on myself and draw some fruit' from what I imagine.²⁰ In the past we have done this alone. Can we do it communally? Can we as a community take on the mind and heart of Christ? Can we develop a communal spirituality?

Our tendency up to more recent times has been to focus on the individuality of Jesus presented to us in the gospels. So we have approached the gospels as individuals seeking to follow the individual, Jesus, although scriptural analysis recognizes that the events of the gospel are more than likely the experience of a community put into literary personification. So in prayer we have tended to focus on the individual Jesus of the baptism or of the temptations in the desert or in the garden or on the cross. Today in

order to appropriate a more communal spirituality, it might be helpful to pray with texts in scripture from the gospels, Acts, or Paul's letters that describe communal events. (The request of the sons of Zebedee in Matthew 20,20-28 is an example of such a communal experience of Jesus with community, as are the multiplication of loaves and fishes, the Last Supper, the apparition in the upper room). The significance of the communal has been recognized in analyzing the Old Testament experience. It is basically the community that is freed from Egypt and survives in the desert. This is also true in the gospels. We will discover the communal Christ in the contemplations. We will be aware of this Christ in the community of the apostles and the community of disciples. He is present to us in the continuation of this faith-community. This could give us some well deserved joy as we consider the activity of God in human history. But how do we discover and express this presence?

Among the ways by which I can discover this understanding and attitude of the Lord is that of contemplating the incarnate elements in both the life of Jesus and the faith-community he left us as it has developed down the centuries. In this way, by the power of the Holy Spirit, we can become present communally to the Lord. In some instances our communal imagination presents a solution which we realize is in tune with our experience of the unconditional love of God for the whole human race. In other instances it does not.

The process we have outlined has a number of elements; all are to be done in a proper theological and communal faith-context. These involve individual and communal experiences of prayer and discernment as well as methods developed in the last twenty-five years to help groups localize and deal with an issue. Discernment should go on throughout these activities. Yet, special reflective time for the interpretation of interior movements (discernment strictly speaking) is necessary. The main object of the latter is comparing and judging present interior experiences of faith, hope, love, joy or peace in the individual and community with previous ones experienced in their own histories. These have already been judged to be in harmony with the Church's remembrance and experience of the Lord. Out of the discernment of a present experience of the unconditional love of God for the whole human race, which is the mind and heart of Christ, a committed decision is made and possible ways of implementing the decision are then put into action. All these together are what it means to make decisions with the mind and heart of Christ.

NOTES

¹ The first time the concept of the divine-human community impressed me was at a public lecture by Sister Margaret Brennan I.H.M. in 1980. (Cf chapter V, paragraphs 77-93 of *Gaudium et Spes*, Vat. II).

² There is much discussion over the conflict of the subjective and objective criteria for a good decision, a distinction which may set up an unnecessary dichotomy. Even when some objective confirmation or rejection of a decision is given, the person or community still returns to his/her/its inner experience and discerns in that light. Cf Lonergan, B. F.: *Method in theology* (New York, 1972), p 138.

³ Cf Jn 15,12 and St Ignatius Loyola, *Spiritual Exercises*, 318 (subsequently Exx). For further light on discernment, see articles in *Way Supplement* 24 (1975), 'Ignatian discernment and Christian choice'.

⁴ Cf Mt 18,20 and Jn 14,16,17.

⁵ Heb 4,12 and paragraph 9 of *Sacrosanctum Concilium*, Vat II.

⁶ Cf Exx 318.

⁷ Cf Phil 3,13 and 2 Cor 12,2-4.

⁸ Cf Rahner, K.: *The dynamic element in the Church* (Montreal, 1964), pp 156-70.

⁹ Cf Exx 22,139,145, where Ignatius judges that correct doctrine is a necessary prerequisite to second week discernment.

¹⁰ Cf Exx 318.

¹¹ See English, J. J.: *Choosing life* (new York, 1978).

¹² One example of a self-authenticated experience may help; I know that I know in the act of knowing. (Cf B. F. Lonergan's 'What is grasped by understanding is the intelligibility of the individual', *op. cit.*, p 209).

¹³ Our means of analysis of interior motivation in any of the psychological, sociological, technological and theological frameworks, must themselves be open; as we know, it is impossible to contain the experience of spiritual consolation in words, or categories or images.

¹⁴ Cf my *Communal graced history* (CRC Publication, Ottawa, 1981).

¹⁵ Cf 1 Cor 15,22.

¹⁶ This is the Third Week concern, cf Exx 197.

¹⁷ Cf Fitzmyer, J.: *Luke of the Anchor Bible Commentary*, vol 28 (Garden City, New York, 1981), p 579 for a similar commentary on the Lukan community.

¹⁸ Cf Mateos, Juan, S.J.: 'The Message of Jesus', in *Sojourners* (Washington, D.C., July 1977).

¹⁹ Once again, as in footnote 2, individual objectivity can be had only in the dialectic between the particular subject (or within a communal context, subjects) and the existential reality of interpersonal relationships which provide the wider context.

²⁰ Cf Exx 115.