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Inboard - Outboard

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Inboard – Outboard

Many small pleasure craft have outboard engines that are attached to the back of the boat, providing both power and steering. Many larger boats, especially yachts and speedboats, have stationary engines and propeller shafts built into them, with steering provided by a tiller. Some boats have the engine inside, but the power is delivered through gears to an outboard steerable propeller.

What kind of internal power and steering arrangements are we using at this point in our lives? Outboard spirituality might be described as having the majority of our motivational sources external to us, and the practice of taking our hurts and needs to someone outside us. Inboard spirituality might be marked by keeping the engine as a permanent feature within ourselves, so that most of our personal concerns are dealt with onboard, and the power is delivered directly through one's self to the world about us, although we have an external tiller for steering. Inboard – outboard spirituality keeps the engine wholly within, where maintenance and fuel are applied, but the power and steering are both external.

Boats are designed and built for specific purposes that do not usually change, so the selection of any of the three power-and-steering arrangements is matched to both purpose and design. We are created capable of change, and of consciously choosing how we will make our way in life. At one time, we might put our primary reliance on others for helping to make decisions; in another period of our lives we might keep the determination of our concerns almost completely to ourselves. We also might choose to steer by direct application of power, or in other circumstances, to trust our links with a steering unit outside us.

Not only do we, as individuals, differ from one another as much as do the varieties of boats, but we ourselves are, while remaining the same persons, capable of changing our manner of decision-making as radically as if a boat with an outboard motor were to become a speedboat with an inboard engine. Perhaps we have changed so gradually, and at this time in our lives now take our manner of dealing with life's gifts and challenges so much for granted, that only upon reflection do we recognize that, for example, at one time we used to constantly ask others for their opinions on almost every matter before we would tentatively make a decision. And now, we might only consult with a very trusted person in rare situations when we are faced with a difficult choice.

Some of us learn earlier, and some later in life that we navigate best through decision-making when the steering is in consultation with God:

when we “check our inspirations” prior to changing directions or prior to applying power for more speed or less, or dropping the anchor. Whether we exercise our spirituality in the manner of outboard, inboard, or a combination of both, reflection on our experience will likely reveal cause for much gratitude if we recognize that God has always been with us in our boat.