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The Will of God (I)

"ssssHow do we discern the will of God?" It is an important and frequently asked question. What people often mean by it is this. What is the will of God for me in particular? How should I use those hours of the week, which are not consumed with more mundane matters, for the Lord?

To begin with, how we discern the will of God *assumes* several axioms of theological truth.

The first axiom understands, correctly, that God is a personal being and not simply a strange and mysterious *other*. When God revealed Himself to Moses in the burning bush, there was a great and holy mystery in the fire which burned and did not consume, but then the mystery also unfolded in divine personality when God spoke His Name, "I am that I am."

Only personal beings have wills. To speak of *will* is to speak of an intention that derives from an intellectual nature. The will of a person always presupposes rational discrimination. Whether such discrimination is done well or badly is another issue.

In a more inferior degree, my German Shepherd, King, uses discrimination, but only in small ways. His canine imagination responds to the objects at hand, pursuing pleasure or avoiding pain. His will is not rational in the profound sense of a human being. (Although at times King *seems* immensely more reasonable than some people!)

God's being is intellectual in the purest sense. His spiritual nature *is* perfect

goodness, infallible wisdom, and absolute power. The personality of God reaches far above that of animals and men, and therefore, his intention is inherently- free from prejudice or arbitrary whim. The will of God is always good and never suffers diminution or error.

Secondly, the question, "How do we discern the will of God?" assumes, correctly, that God intends for His creatures to share in His personal will. And to share in His will means that we have a part to play in the scheme of salvation. We pray, therefore, as our Lord taught us, "Thy kingdom come, Thy will be done, on earth as it is in heaven." In theological terms it is a matter of *participation*.

We participate in the will of God through Jesus Christ His presence with us renews and evokes our desire for God. Through Christ we learn to depend upon God, to seek His will first, here in this imperfect and sinful world, as it is sought perfectly in the unfettered joy of heaven.

St Paul helps us to broaden the dimension of our participation. To discern the will of God assumes our growth in moral and spiritual integrity. This is the third axiom in discerning the will of God.

In the Epistle to the Romans, Paul writes, "And be not conformed to this world, but be ye transformed by the renewing of your mind, that ye may prove what is that good, and acceptable, and perfect, will of God."

We cannot discern the way in which God would lead us, if our loves are wed to this world. Duplicity of mind and heart leaves the beam finely in our eye, and we cannot see truth apart from prejudice. As St James says, "A double-minded man is unstable in all his ways."

Participation in the will of God requires a transformation of the mind to see what is true and to desire what is good. To, discern the will of God one must forsake sin and draw near to Him, as He draws near to us.

If these three axioms are true, if we believe that God is personal, and intends for us to share in His will, and we truly repent of our sins and turn in true faith to Him, then how do we discern His will?

The first step is in knowledge. Knowing God means first of all to know that God is not related to time as we are. God does not interact in time on the same level as we do. If He did He would be finite, as we are, susceptible to error and chance and the unexpected. But God is eternal. Time is His creation. And with the rest of creation, God holds time in Himself, by His power, seeing and thinking the beginning and the end all at once.

St Paul can speak, therefore, of Jesus becoming man through the Blessed Virgin Mary, *in the fullness of time*. God works the flow of history according to His own wisdom. He is not subject to time; time is subject to Him. And we are forever grateful.

Knowing that God is not related to time as we are is the first step in seeking His will. The significance of this knowledge is that God does not react to you or your circumstances as you do. He does not need for you to inform Him. "Your Father knoweth what things ye have need of, before ye ask Him." His care for you does not depend upon your virtue, although a lack of virtue may well blind your own perspective. His love is constant "Cast all your care upon Him, for He careth for you." Because God is not subject to time as we are, His will may well be far different from what you think you may need or desire. This first step in knowing the will of God reminds us that God is God and we are not.

If then God knows what we need, does He want us to seek His will in every particular? The answer to this question is both yes and no.

It is yes in the sense that God wants us to depend upon Him. In our prayers, we show that we are indeed dependent upon His goodness and our desire is to show how grateful we are. But there is also

certainly a way in which" we need not pray for things in particular.

God has created us with freedom that is an image of His own. Whether I choose to write with a ball point or a fountain pen is completely within the realm of my God-given liberty. The fact of what I am doing, which is writing, and the instrument that I use to write, a fountain pen, are both matters that God has placed fully at my discretion. To fall on my knees and to seek divine guidance about which to choose is to reject what God has already intended when He made me a creature capable of writing. On the other hand to write about the *will of God* for the *Parish Paper* is indeed a matter of, prayer, both for the subject itself and in relation to those who will read it.

Simply put, the will of God has already been revealed in that He has created man with freedom. To refuse such created freedom would be to refuse the creative will of God, and commit oneself to a waste of time.

To be continued...

The Rev. Dr. Michael L. Carreker

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