

doing something. The mystery of the infinite God who creates being is the same mystery of the infinite God who provides doing. God is not one more player in human history, but hidden and bigger. All of history is in God, for whom the whole world is in his hands, not because we desire such a caring providence, but because that is the whole truth. God awaits nothing to happen in the future. God has no past or future, but only NOW. Providence as Creation itself remains ever sovereign.

Accordingly, neither creation in being nor providence in doing is in competition with God. Our created being is real; our human freedom is real. God allows us to be and to do; God wants us to be and to do, but not to do what God wants as if God might be in competition with what we want to do. With such an understanding of God, one can say that God wants what we want. God truly wants us to do what we want to do. We are not imposed upon with a task. God does not need us; God does not need servants or slaves. God wants us to be ourselves, just as good parents want their children to find their own gifts and their own way and not to exist only to fulfill the plans or dreams of their parents.

God wants us to do what we want to do, but not by being willful with a modern

sense of freedom as my willful choice no matter what. God wants me to do what the real me wants to do deep down. God does not want the me of mimetic desire that wants to do in imitation of what others are doing. God does not want me to do what the cultural propaganda of the moment tells me what I must have and must do to be popular and successful. God wants me to be the “me” God created me to be, albeit always inspired and strengthened by the grace of God who illumines our minds and enkindles our hearts. What we all deeply want to do, whether we recognize it or not, remains quite simply to give our life for others, to spend ourselves in that selfless love that is in imitation of God who in Jesus showed himself to be Love itself. In sum, there is no competition with God, who wants nothing but my freedom and flourishing. St. Irenaeus in the fourth century said it well: “Gloria Dei est vivens homo.” God’s glory is humankind flourishing, even while it always remains true that “Without me, you can do nothing” (Jn 15:5).

Born in New Jersey and educated early by Benedictine Sisters and later by Benedictine monks, I graduated from Notre Dame and Moreau Seminary in 1956. Theology studies and ordination were in Rome, and upon my return to the States I studied literature at Duke University. Assigned to the University of Portland, I taught there for ten years. Subsequently appointed Director of Novices, I worked with Holy Cross novices in Bennington, Vermont and later in Cascade, Colorado. I returned to Notre Dame in 1981 as a professor in the Great Books Program, where I taught theology and literature. My retirement years have been in Corby Hall. Aging has been more of an adventure than I anticipated, and I am still learning how to lead the Christian life to the full to the end.

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Thy Will be Done

Vocation: God's Providence
for Us and Through Us

by Rev. Nicholas Ayo, C.S.C.

Christians believe everyone on earth has a vocation, a calling revealed in ordinary considerations of life, but a calling that ultimately has its heart in God. “You have not chosen me, but I have chosen you” (Jn 15:16). Discovering the will of God and doing it would fit the definition of a “vocation” for most religious persons. Nonetheless, God’s will for us human beings will always depend on how you understand the word, God. In the end we are all theologians, some better than others, and that distinction is not just a matter of education.

“ You have not chosen me, but I have chosen you.”

One might think of God as the “Father Almighty, creator of heaven and earth” with the accent on “Almighty,” a loving father that is all-powerful. What God wants is what God gets. God rules, and our human role remains one of obedience in conformity with the known will of God. As the creator, God surely has every right to dominate what God has made, much as a traditional

understanding of parenthood gives the father the role of supervising an obedient son and choosing an appropriate husband for an obedient daughter. However, even if one grants that the Father would be all wise and all caring of his children, such a Father-God turns out to be either a dominating God or a paternalistic God who knows and does what is determined best for his dependent children. “Thy will be done” becomes simply a matter of submission and obedience to the mind and will of God.

Let me propose that we would seek to understand God as an enabler, rather than a controller, and as a parent who wants his or her children to be themselves, rather than a parent who demands and imposes. Given God as infinite power and love, could we not say in God’s Sovereign Providence that God needs neither help nor servants as helpers. Jesus says that he does not call us servants, “but I have called you friends” (Jn 15:15). Might we linger with that astonishing understanding of God and see where it may lead us.

To understand the ways of God much will depend on how you understand God to be the Creator God. In the Hebrew understanding of God the breakthrough came when they understood Yahweh was not one among the Gods, not even



the biggest and best among the Gods, but the one and only infinite God. There is no room for anyone or anything else. God is not like anything known before, whether of Gods or men. God is nothing, that is, God is no thing. God is not in the category of things or of beings. The one God is not one more person in the room. All the room of persons and things is in God. God is unique. No category can hold the true God. Creation adds nothing to God, and God created the world from no pre-existing material, not even from chaos. God somehow withdrew so that creation might emerge from nothing. How could there be room for something or someone if the infinite God were everything and everyone. Creation is not part of God, but it cannot be apart from God. Nothing is added to God or God’s glory by creation, but creation was given its own being and its own doing. Creation is not God, yet creation remains altogether in God.

Why is this understanding of God the Creator important? God does not need Creation, which flows from God’s infinite love and generosity to us. Consequently God is not in competition with anything (in its being) or anyone (in his or her doing). Consider the vision of the blazing bush that Moses relates to us in the Book of Exodus (3:2). The bush is blazing with fire and light, but it is not consumed. The bush is a theophany of God in creation, but creation is not consumed. The bush remains a bush, but the bush is also shot through with God, and yet the glory of God is not in competition with the welfare of the bush.



Creation so understood reveals the same logic in our understanding of Providence. Just as God is everything even while we are something, so God is doing everything even while we are