

THE BACK OF THE BULLETIN

Discovering God's Will

It isn't a small thing to find out what God wants of me. If you believe in the Creator, as we do, then you must believe that he made you for a special purpose; that is why you are an individual, not just a clone of some other good type. Although we can glimpse certain principles that apply to all human beings, yet *what God wants of me* remains something individual and personal, different from what he wants from others. As he is the Creator, he wants us to be creative with him.

Being An Individual

This, you might say, is the great aim of people in our culture: to be themselves, to be unique, irreplaceable. This isn't the same as wanting to be selfish. Looking back a few decades, there seemed to be a great anxiety to be what Americans call "a regular guy", and Britons called "normal". That mindset, tempered in the crucible of the economic depression of the thirties, called on everyone to be respectable, reliable, and a bit dull: to fit in, to be smart and clean, and to think the thoughts one's neighbour thought, to want the things one's neighbour wanted. This made you *acceptable*, and very importantly *employable*. Then the cultural pattern shifted, and people became concerned to express their originality, and learned to dress outrageously, to appear in strange colours and forms, to pierce or tattoo themselves, to amaze, dazzle, or shock. There is a fear of conformity, which ignores our uniqueness and denies us our dignity. The young are pretty firm about this; they are not keen to conform. All one can say is that they are right; God has not created us to wear uniforms, but to show forth huge variety in our personalities and our natures.

Community Amongst Originals

We have to find the way for such individualism to be welcomed and shared in our communities. We must learn how to offer our own gifts, finding joyous harmony rather than anonymous homogeneity. God has given us a huge impulse to do this, by creating our most powerful experience of unity in the love of spouses; they love each other, not because they are the same, but because they are different. This *complementarity* is a deeper bond than similarity. It creates a structural relationship where the strength of the sharing is directly dependent on the power of the individuals. The more husband and wife are what and who they are, the more powerfully the

marriage holds them, honours them and favours them. Where one person begins to be obliterated by the other, the unity diminishes and flags. It is a crude unity which is disrespectful. It is grinding away at the precious life of one of the spouses: if the process goes to term, there will be no-one left to be married to. This strange parody of love is what a lot of people experience; that is why so many believe that marriage is a cruel deception. They entered into it thinking they were being affirmed; they came out of it because they feared they were being destroyed.

Give God Some Space

Paul told the Romans, *If you want to discover the will of God, to know what is best, what is the perfect thing to do, then let yourself be changed.* Paul doesn't answer the question, and tell us what the will of God is for us. He speaks of letting God teach us. So the Christian life is not a strong-man act, demanding heroic conformity to clear instruction, like gaining an Olympic medal. Rather, it is a business of very personal dialogue with God, who will teach us how to accomplish what he has in mind for us in our making. Furthermore, our listening for God doesn't end there. It is a feature of all our subsequent life, right up to the very end, as today's Gospel tells us: *you are not to prepare your defence, because I myself will give you an eloquence and wisdom that none of your enemies can resist or contradict.* Sometimes our inner dialogue can waste undignified hours *preparing our defence*: we ponder endlessly over our situation, trying to justify the wrong things we have done, explain away our mistakes. Instead, this divine promise is magnificent, offering us a wonderful sense of freedom from fear. The future doesn't appal us because we are not, finally, relying on ourselves. God will give the meaning, the sense, to whatever we meet; even now we are training our ear to listen, like disciples, to his voice. We can be sure that if we are faithful listeners, he will not desert us.

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