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THE ROLE OF REASON IN FINDING THE FATHER'S WILL

Prayer is the most important way to discover the will of God; but finding the Father's will is not only a matter of listening, of inner openness. What else is involved? Seeking the will of God falls under the "laws of prevailing petitions" set forth in *The URANTIA Book*. The second of these conditions asserts, "You must have honestly exhausted the human capacity for human adjustment. You must have been industrious." (*1002:9)

What does it mean to be industrious in making human adjustments? If I am engaged in seeking the Father's will, I must do my best with all relevant human channels of enlightenment before I can expect revelation from within to augment my efforts. Reason helps us discern what we ought to do; one of the three realities to which our mind intrinsically responds is: "Duty—the reality domain of morals in the philosophic realm, the arena of reason, the recognition of relative right and wrong. This is the judicial form of the cosmic discrimination." (*192:4)

So one essential phase of a responsible prayer process is the use of reason, which includes drawing practical deductions from facts, gaining group wisdom, and critically examining the thoughts that come from our times of prayer.

How Jesus Reasoned

When Michael of Nebadon went forth to live in Joshua ben Joseph, he received this advice from Immanuel: "In all other details of your oncoming bestowal we would commit you to the leading of the indwelling Adjuster, the teaching of the ever-present divine spirit of human guidance, and the reason-judgment of your expanding human mind of hereditary endowment." (*1330:5) How did Jesus use reason-judgment?

1. When Jesus was seven, one of his teachers proposed that he leave his Nazareth home to study in Jerusalem. The decision was controversial; Jesus spoke with his mother, who was somewhat in favor of the idea, and with his father, who was hesitant; he then spoke with a

trusted neighbor. Still the answer was not clear, so Jesus went to the Father in heaven. And though Jesus' perception of spirit leading was not certain, he expressed his conclusion with a piece of reasoning: "...they who love me so much should be able to do more for me and guide me more safely than strangers who can only view my body and observe my mind but can hardly truly know me." (*1365:4) This reasoning reflects clear perceptions of (1) the goal to be sought, (2) the crucial advantage of the preferred alternative, and (3) the fundamental weakness of the rejected alternative.

It was possible to reason towards a different conclusion: a lad destined to be a great teacher could profit from education at the center of religious learning. It required a keen sense of measurement for Jesus to discern which facts and values were the most important ones in this situation. Wisdom is needed to select which ideas to use as major premises when we are drawing deductions in practical reasoning.

The Master in his adult life did not take counsel from others; but we cannot afford to imitate him in this regard. We were given "the spirit of counsel" (*402:8) to facilitate social harmony and cooperation. I know several individuals whom I would characterize as stallions of creative energy; they are full of positive ideas, energy, and commitment. But I know no one who can safely function alone. Without wisdom sought from a variety of sources, even the best of mortals will go astray.

2. By the time he was twelve, Jesus' power of reasoning could guide him unerringly to one of the most important decisions of his life. He had received a call to action: "The hour has come. It is time that you began to be about your Father's business." (*1376:2) But then his father died, and Jesus inherited the responsibilities of the head of a household. What would be the normal human response to this tension? Would we not tend to think in the following way: "I desire to fulfill the sublime spiritual purposes of the Father in heaven; I have received clear guidance from on high; therefore I must forsake conventional human responsibilities in pursuit of my mission."

How did Jesus handle this conflict? Despite the fact that he was going through a very difficult period, being "...troubled with confused thinking" about the character

of his mission (*1389:8), the midwayers do not even report that Jesus had to go to the Father for guidance on this decision: "Jesus rightly reasoned that the watchcare of his earthly father's family must take precedence of all duties; that the support of his family must become his first obligation. (*1389:8 - 1390:1) He knew that the need for his public ministry was very urgent; but his other responsibilities were so clear that he put them first without a struggle.

3. Reasoning requires good information, and Jesus was a model observer of the human scene. He designed his outreach strategy to fit the needs of the times; and when Jesus observed that the apostles needed a better comprehension of the gospel and that the controversy with the Jewish leaders had become overheated, he took the twelve into a two-month retirement on the slopes of Mount Gilboa. He gave them three reasons for doing so: "1. To confirm their understanding of, and faith in, the gospel of the kingdom. 2. To allow opposition to their work in both Judea and Galilee to quiet down. 3. To await the fate of John the Baptist." (*1617:5) Jesus also instructed us to be alert to current events: "But you should be wise regarding the ripening of an age; you

should be alert to discern the signs of the times. You know when the fig tree shows its tender branches and puts forth its leaves that summer is near. Likewise, when the world has passed through the long winter of material-mindedness and you discern the coming of the spiritual springtime of a new dispensation, should you know that the summertime of a new visitation draws near." (*1915:3) Reasoning without facts is like driving with bald tires on ice.

Praying More Alertly

The next activity of reason I want to mention is the critical examination of the thoughts that come into the mind during prayer. It is no fun to raise questions about our ability to discern Adjuster guidance, but many of us have had the experience of doing what we inwardly felt was right and then finding out later that we were wrong. The Adjuster, perhaps, had been trying to help us be true to the best we knew, but we simply hadn't done our homework. We didn't know what was truly best.

Imagine a young child whose mother has warned him not to swim in a dangerous river. Suppose the child ignores the warnings, keenly wants to swim in the river, and then consults inwardly about the best thing to do. What "guidance" is the child likely to perceive? Excellent prayer requires us to "... surrender every wish of mind and every craving of soul to the transforming embrace of spiritual growth." (*1002:10) Disobedience and needless ignorance can block reason and frustrate the prayer process. For adults who know what they are doing this is serious business: "If man will not listen to the Gods as they speak to their creation of the laws of spirit, mind, and matter, the very act of such deliberate and conscious disdain by the creature turns the ears of spirit personalities away from hearing the personal petitions of such lawless and disobedient mortals." (*1638:3)

So we must challenge ourselves. Suppose in the quiet time following prayer a beautiful thought arises in consciousness. We need to remember that this may be an Adjuster-sponsored answer or it may not. Perhaps it is simply a creative product of the human mind, fusing conscious and unconscious material into a new and satisfying synthesis. Because we do not know the origin of our new idea, we must simply evaluate it for its intrinsic worth. The warning is clear: "... it is hazardous to attempt the differentiation of the Adjusters' concept registry from the more or less continuous and conscious reception of the dictations of mortal conscience. These are problems which will have to be solved through individual discrimination and personal decision. But a

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human being would do better to err in rejecting an Adjuster's expression through believing it to be a purely human experience than to blunder into exalting a reaction of the mortal mind to the sphere of divine dignity... More often, in beings of your order, that which you accept as the Adjuster's voice is in reality the emanation of your own intellect. This is dangerous ground, and every human being must settle these problems for himself in accordance with his natural human wisdom and super-human insight." (*1208:5-6)

"The technique whereby you can accept another's idea as yours is the same whereby you may 'let the mind which was in Christ be also in you.' " (*1123:2) What do we do when accepting a friend's idea? We consider it, think about it, put it in the context of other things that we know, find reasons to support it, and draw conclusions from it and test them with foresight—we look before we leap. While at times something a friend will say rings true immediately, we do not simply open ourselves up to an authority, put ourselves in a heightened state of passivity, and follow whatever seems to be the most emotionally satisfying advice. We turn over the ideas in our minds, both because there might be some doubt that the idea is good and because we want to understand what would be involved in accepting the idea. We do not need to doubt the guidance of God, but we do need to test our mind's deliverances—our *perceptions* of divine guidance.

Reading More Carefully

For students of *The URANTIA Book*, using our reason implies careful study of the revelation. We can trust that inner guidance will not contradict epochal revelation. And as we study the book we become more aware of the "vocabulary" of concepts that the Adjuster is trying to use in communicating with the human mind.

Jesus had high standards for study; he himself was a good student at school; during one period of his life, while boat-building in Capernaum, "... he spent at least five evenings a week at intense study." (*1420:7) During the first four months they were together, Jesus led the six original apostles in more than a hundred training sessions (*1533:6); they went two evenings a week to study the existing scriptures of the day (*1535:7). Two years later during the training of the evangelists, Jesus would challenge Thomas to be more penetrating in his study of the story of Adam and Eve: "Why do you refuse to comprehend the meaning of the record...? And why do you refuse to interpret the meaning of the record...?" (*1660:7) He told Nathaniel that "... there is much in

the Scriptures which would have instructed you if you had only read with discernment." (*1662:2) And he addressed the same message to John: "My son, you do not comprehend the meaning of adversity or the mission of suffering. Have you not read that masterpiece of Semitic literature—the Scripture story of the afflictions of Job?" (*1662:4) Eventually he would stun the religious leaders by telling them that their *questi²ns* were the result of their not knowing either the Scriptures or the living power of god.

Jesus expected the intellectually capable to remember what he said. "And do you not remember that I said to you once before that, if you had your spiritual eyes anointed, you would then see the heavens opened and behold the angels of God ascending and descending?" (*1841:3) One saying should be enough. And now we have the Spirit of Truth to help us recall and understand Jesus' words.

Before telling a parable, Jesus once said, "I would test you to know how you would receive this." (*1693:5) The same high expectations that he had for his listeners then pertain today to us as readers.

Our ascendant career, "... the supreme study of mortal man" (*449:3), is illuminated tremendously by the religious life of Jesus, that knowledge "... of greatest value..." (*2090:4) Is all this study an end in itself? Of course not. Spiritual realities and personal relationships alone are ends in themselves. The coordination of knowledge and striving is beautifully presented to us: "One of the most important things in human living is to find out what Jesus believed, to discover his ideals, and to strive for the achievement of his exalted life purpose." (*2090:4)

Conclusion

Mysticism is that distortion of religion which results when we have too small a proportion of reasoning and socialization in our efforts Godward. Fanaticism occurs when commonplace obligations are neglected, or when linear, single-minded devotion to a project, however noble, departs from the elliptical direction of divine guidance. The maturity of the vision of religion presented in *The URANTIA Book* is destined to make mysticism and fanaticism obsolete. While skeptics look at the irrational episodes of planetary religious history and propose to supplant faith by reason, the book says, "Faith is a traitor when it fosters betrayal of intellectual integrity..." (*1114:8 - 1115:1)

Let us all enjoy the full and harmonious exercise of our faculties as we coordinate the thorough study of

The URANTIA Book, a keen knowledge of the world around us, rigorous deductions from facts with moral implications, and the surprising benefits of group wisdom. Then we can be all the more prepared for the enlarged revelations of God's will that the indwelling spirit has for each one of us.

—Jeffrey Wattles
Concord, California

PERSONS ARE GIFTS

At least Jesus thought so. "Father, I want those you have given me to be where I am." I agree with Jesus... and I also want those whom the Father has given me to be where I am. Persons are gifts which the Father sends to me wrapped. Some are wrapped very beautifully. They are very attractive when I first see them. Some come in very ordinary wrapping paper. Others have been mishandled in the mail. Once in a while there is a "Special Delivery." Some persons are gifts which come loosely wrapped, others very tightly. But the wrapping is not the gift. It is easy to make this mistake; it's amusing when babies do it. Sometimes the gift is easy to open up. Sometimes I need others to help. Is it because they are afraid? Does it hurt? Maybe they have been opened up before and thrown away. Could it be that the gift is not for me? I am a person. Therefore I am a gift, too. A

gift for myself because first of all the Father gave myself to me. Have I ever really looked inside the wrappings? Am I afraid to? Perhaps I've never accepted the gift that I am. Could it be that there is something else inside the wrappings than what I think there is. Maybe I've never seen the wonderful gift that I am? Could the Father's gifts be anything *but* beautiful? I love the gifts which those who love me give me, why not *this* gift from the Father? And I am a gift to other persons. Am I willing to be given by the Father to others?... a man for others? Do others have to be content with the wrappings?... never permitted to enjoy the gift? Every meeting of persons is the exchange of gifts. But a gift without a giver is not a gift, it is a thing devoid of relationship. Friendship is a relationship between persons who see themselves as they truly are: gifts of the Father to each other for others... brothers. A friend is a gift not just to me, but to others through me... When I keep my friend, possess him, I destroy his "giftness." If I save his life for me, I lose it for others. Persons are gifts, gifts received and gifts given, like the Son, like the Spirit, gifts from the Father. Friendship is the response of persons; gifts to the Father, the Giver.

—Fr. George Ninteman, OP
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"Reason, wisdom, and faith are man's highest human attainments. Reason introduces man to the world of facts, to things; wisdom introduces him to a world of truth, to relationships; faith initiates him into a world of divinity, spiritual experience.

Faith most willingly carries reason along as far as reason can go and then goes on with wisdom to the full philosophic limit; and then it dares to launch out upon the limitless and never-ending universe journey in the sole company of TRUTH."
(*1141:5,6)