



42. Sources of Knowledge of God's Will: The Times, Souls and Being

Faith in Divine Providence not only includes the question as to how we are to know God's will in the practicalities of everyday life, it also raises the question as to the direction of God's aim for us and for the whole of humanity, what he has in store for us, what is the meaning of our lives.

The following text rounds off our collection on faith in Divine Providence in three ways.

Firstly, it shows us the ultimate goal of Divine Providence: To bring every human being home to God. God is all in all.

Secondly, it clarifies the difference between God's universal plan and his personal plan of salvation, and relates them to each other.

Thirdly, it connects our usual teaching on the sources of knowledge of God's will with the way it is rooted in revelation.

*The text is taken from a sermon of Fr Kentenich on his feast day celebrated on 18 March 1967 (KENTENICH, Joseph, *Propheta locutus est, Vorträge und Ansprachen von P.J. Kentenich aus seinen drei letzten Lebensjahren – Talks and Addresses by Fr J. Kentenich from the last three years of his life – Vol. XIV: 1967, Berg Sion 1999, p. 165-188*).*

I. What, then, is God's will?

Perhaps you will ask me why I have chosen this subject for today. I will give you the answer immediately. In general, for the largest part of our lives we are very petty and mean-spirited. If we ask for God's will, we usually mean: What is God's will for me?

So what is God's will? It is to carry out God the Father's eternal plans for salvation. Within this plan for salvation, we can distinguish between his universal plan of salvation, and one that is individual or personal.

Usually we get stuck with God's personal plans for our salvation. If we have already begun to dare to fly on eagle's wings into God's heart and will, we put this question very seriously. Otherwise we

are very quickly terrified.

What is God's will for me personally? What is the meaning of my personal life? Some people's reaction to this question could be: For heaven's sake! Lord God, stay away from me! Please don't touch me too strongly, or expect or demand something from me! I don't think this applies to us, because our entire lives as children of the Family are directed towards searching after and carrying out God's plans.

Let me repeat, we can distinguish between a universal and an individual plan of salvation. We have to discuss both. At the moment I am far more inclined to describe **God's universal plan of salvation**, because that has to be our task. God's personal plan for me has always to be integrated into his universal plan of salvation. It is here that a certain weakness in our thinking, loving and living could lie.

God's universal plan of salvation

God wills, as we learnt in theology in the past, that everyone should be saved.

If we enter for a moment into the school of the Apostle Paul, and open the First Letter to the Corinthians, or his Letter to the Ephesians, we will be given an answer that will remind us of lines of reasoning defended today by the Jesuit, Teilhard de Chardin, although in a way that differs from traditional teaching.

In the First Letter to the Corinthians Paul transports himself to the final phase in world events. What is the meaning of world events and world history? For him, world history is always salvation history, just as it is for us. In the final stage "God will be all in all".²¹⁶

What is the living God to be most perfectly at the end of the world? God will be all in all. What does it mean to say "all in all"? In the whole history of the world! Whether this involves things, events or people: All in all. God is then all in all! So what is the meaning of my life? To see to it that this general plan of salvation is carried out as perfectly as possible. What does that imply in detail?

If we open the Letter to the Ephesians, we will be given a very clear, although mysterious, answer. The Apostle is unable to rejoice sufficiently over the fact that God the Eternal Father has now revealed his universal plan of salvation. In what does it consist? Every human being is meant to become holy. To become holy means that they have to become open towards the living God, they have to surrender themselves totally to God.

Yet this is not enough, the line of reasoning goes far deeper.

Let us first summarise what Paul meant. In order that the whole of humankind should become holy – listen carefully: all are meant to become holy! – God the Eternal Father sent his only begotten Son into the world as Redeemer, as the prophet to the world. As the Redeemer of the world he sees to it that everyone can become his member, that everyone can become a child of his Father. As the great prophet, the great teacher of the truth, his task is to see to it that the Holy Spirit comes into the whole world to make it a kingdom of truth. And the Church, the extended Mystical Body of the Saviour, has been given the task to lead and govern the world in such a way

²¹⁶ 1 Cor 15,28.

that in and through the Church a huge kingdom of the Father comes into existence, so that year by year, century by century, the Father is increasingly victorious.

You can read out of the text how amazed Paul was, how it almost took his breath away, that God had told us his mysterious plan that everything, absolutely everything and everyone should be united to Christ, the Head!²¹⁷

In the past we said instead – indeed, we are wise to look back on our past history from the perspective of today's Family history – that the meaning of our Family is the Marian formation of the world in Christ from Schoenstatt. It is by no means the point here to proclaim an abstract programme. The great mystery of God, which was revealed to Paul, was God's incessant and continual presence and effectiveness in the universe and in creation. The extremely important and powerful ideal of this mystery of salvation implies that we may never think of the living God apart from his creation. That was the great tragedy of modern mankind when it began to separate God from his creation.

[...]

Our theologians are concerned today about the crisis involving the sacraments. Of course, if I look upon the sacraments as only an external event, they could become a nuisance. Why administer the sacraments? However, if I know that Christ is made present through the sacraments, then the sacraments are no longer impersonal, they become very personal. Christ himself enters into those who receive the sacrament. They make him present!

[...]

We also pray, "Let all things be your kingdom, become like you, the Head."²¹⁸ So how can we describe God's universal will to redeem, the great "mystery of the world"?²¹⁹ Paul's point is that God, who will be all in all at the end of time, must also become our all in all already today. That is our task! It is not the case that this must become a reality only with me. The era of individualism has boxed in mind and heart in every way and to such an extent that it appears as though we are only here to save our own souls. We have been incorporated into the universal plan of salvation! The great drama of salvation history is a universal one. We have to broaden mind and heart, we have to see ourselves as members of the Church, and hence at the same time part of universal society and the world.

God's individual plan of salvation

If we now think of ourselves, we may not remain with ourselves. We want to break through this restricted outlook and broaden our hearts. We have to see the whole world, especially the world that is in ferment today: a world that is fleeing from Christ, fleeing from God.

Why are we here on earth? To make God present in this world, in all people and places. So we have to protect ourselves from two mistakes: overestimating our personal mission, but also not underestimating it. Not overestimating it, means never seeing ourselves apart from God's universal plan of salvation. Each one of us is individually drawn into this drama of world and salvation

²¹⁷ Cf. Eph 1,10.22; 2,15; 4,13-15; 5,23.

²¹⁸ Closing verse of the Mass in "*Heavenwards*", p. 44.

²¹⁹ St Paul speaks more often of the all-embracing mystery that was hidden in God and has now been revealed.

history. So I am also here to make Christ, to make God, present, and not merely to talk enthusiastically about it. He must be made present in me. However, this is only a tiny fragment of this tremendously powerful drama. So I mustn't place myself so much in the foreground that it appears as though there is ultimately no universal will on God's part to redeem the world. I have been incorporated into God's universal plan of salvation. So I am not alone. My task will, therefore, consist in repeatedly becoming aware of my connection with the world as a whole, a world that is able to be redeemed and longing to be redeemed.

From the first we were strongly motivated to break through the restrictions of individualism. That is why we have course communities; that is why we have a large Family as a whole; that is why we have a tremendous threefold goal! Everything urges us to go out into the open! We have to go out into the world just as the Lord God has foreseen, and how the mystery of God reveals itself in humankind, in creation and the government of the world.

So what do we have to do more than before? Leave behind the cloister of individualism! Leave behind this constant scratching at ourselves! Leave behind this constant centering on our little ego! Go out into the world! "The whole world is our field!" Of course, Schoenstatt has to become my world, and my world must also become Schoenstatt. God's universal will to save us has to meet up with the same universal will to save [the world] in us.

This is why we may not overestimate ourselves. We want to see ourselves as a little cog in the great drama of world history, in the great and mysterious drama of the redemption of the world.

On the other hand, we may also not underestimate ourselves. It is not the case that what I do doesn't matter. On the contrary, the history of the salvation of the world depends essentially on the history of my own salvation.

[...]

Let me transpose a saying of St Ignatius of Loyola: We have to trust as though we had no will, but we have to exercise our will so powerfully as though there were no God to help us.

The same applies here: We have to live so strongly as though there were no general will for our salvation, but only a personal. On the other hand, we have to remain so calm and wholehearted as though there were only a general will for our salvation, and not also a personal one.

So when we pray and say: May your will be done on earth as it is in heaven, we are affirming both God's universal and personal will to save us.

Now for the second question:

II. How can we recognize God's salvific will in detail?

Here I want to limit myself to God's will to redeem the individual. In our Schoenstatt way of saying things, we would say: How can I discover my Personal Ideal? The personal ideal is the idea God has had of me from eternity. How can I discover it?

First of all, a negative answer: By no means through a special revelation! There are very few people who are prepared to say: If I knew with certainty what God required of me, I would be ready for everything!

We want to distinguish between a special revelation and a general revelation. Of course, there are people who are granted a special revelation. We aren't one of them. We depend in every way on God's general revelation. That is the revelation in Christ Jesus.

Suppose for a moment we were to ask God for a special revelation, as the Pharisees and Scribes did at that time: "What must I do to have eternal life?"²²⁰ The answer: Obey God's general revelation. We are told there, "You must love the Lord your God," etc.

So if I were to ask God: Dear God, what do you want me to do? I think the first answer would be: You are asking me to speak to you individually, but I have already proclaimed everything I wanted to reveal to humankind through my only begotten Son. So, if you want me to say something to you personally, I would either have to allow the only begotten Son of God to become Man once more, so that he can tell you that I want to continue speaking to you through him. Or, I ask you to look into the life of the God-Man, because I have said everything through him that I want to say to the world. "*Verbum caro factum est*" – the Word became Flesh.²²¹

So in what does my personal mission consist? That I look into the life of our Lord and make the general mission of the God-Man my personal mission. So begin to study and imitate the life of Christ! I will and must emulate him in every circumstance. That is one answer, which is very plausible and a remedy for all hidden longings for something extraordinary.

The positive answer: We have defined the Personal Ideal as the individual and original appropriation of the idea of the *Corpus Christi Mysticum*. So I am an individual and original member of the Body of Christ. It follows that I must become not just any old member, but a living, individual and original member of Christ's body.

This once again places us before the question: How can I become aware of this original element? Once we have first examined the general revelation, after we have in a certain sense brought ourselves into line with and united ourselves with God's universal will to redeem us, and the universal redemptive act of Jesus Christ, we have to ask the question: How can I recognize with the usual means what I have to embody in Christ's Body in a practical and individual way?

I only want to say three things and then ask you to think them over in greater detail. What do I have to study? The times, the soul and being. I have to address my question to these three addressees.

What do our times demand of me? Pope John XXIII once coined the lovely saying: Much that we find in the Sacred Scriptures is and remains mysterious. If we want to interpret them correctly, we have to study our times. What does that mean? God also speaks to us through our times, through the circumstances of the times. A brilliant Frenchman said: The various currents of an age are our teacher. What do our times teach us? What God requires of me through our times. Consider for a moment how many people have grown up and remained insignificant because they were born in this or that era. How many men and women have become great because their times forced them upwards, because they understood the various currents of their times and answered them correctly? I don't want to go into any further details at the moment.

²²⁰ Cf. Mt 19,16 par.

²²¹ Cf. Jn 1,14.

Secondly, study the soul. That is to say, study the individual inspirations of the Holy Spirit. An old and wise theologian who lived in the fourth century once said those lovely words: What happens in the soul of a Christian, to the extent that he or she is Christian, is the breath of the Holy Spirit.

This touches upon a subject that the people of today hardly consider any more: the discernment of spirits. The Holy Spirit speaks in our soul with ineffable sighs.²²²

In practice this means that if we converse with God and listen to what he is saying within us, we often enough experience that our prayer knows what God wants of us even before we ourselves know it. What does that imply? In prayer we often receive such inspirations, we instinctively understand the related realities, God's intentions, although we are only slowly able to become fully aware of them.

So let me repeat: Obey the inspirations of the living God! Don't jump like a squirrel from branch to branch! Stop! Pause [and mull over] what God is speaking within us, what he expects and requires of us.

Finally, the third source of knowledge from which we can draw our knowledge about our individual character is the structure of our being. What we are is not something merely personal, subjective. It has also been created by God. How I have been constituted, whether I am a man or a woman, whether I have this or that character, is a source of knowledge. This is how we can increasingly recognize in every respect and with increasing clarity what God wants of us.

²²² Cf. Ro 8,26.