

TRUSTFUL SURRENDER TO DIVINE PROVIDENCE

THE SECRET OF PEACE AND HAPPINESS

“My son, reject not the correction of the Lord: and do not faint when thou art chastised by him: For whom the Lord loveth, he chastiseth: and as a father in the son he pleaseth himself.”

—Proverbs 3:11-12

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THE SECRET OF PEACE AND HAPPINESS

By

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and

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Translated by

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“And you have forgotten the consolation, which speaketh to you, as unto children, saying: My son, neglect not the discipline of the Lord; neither be thou wearied whilst thou art rebuked by him. For whom the Lord loveth, he chastiseth; and he scourgeth every son whom he receiveth. Persevere under discipline. God dealeth with you as with his sons; for what son is there, whom the father doth not correct?”

—Hebrews 12:5-7

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The following pages were written by a well-known French religious writer of the 17th century, Father Jean Baptiste Saint-Jure (1588-1657), and are an extract from his great work entitled The Knowledge and Love of Our Lord Jesus Christ, which was the constant companion during life of the saintly Curé of Ars. To them has been added a further extract from the writings of St. Claude de la Colombière (1641-1682).

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by *Father Jean Baptiste Saint-Jure*

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by Saint Claude de la Colombière

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PART I

by Father Jean Baptiste Saint-Jure

*“Can a woman forget her infant, so as not
to have pity on the son of her womb? and if
she should forget, yet will not I forget thee.”*

—Isaias 49:15

Chapter I

The Will of God Made and Governs All Things

Treating of the Will of God St. Thomas, following St. Augustine, teaches that it is the cause of all that exists.¹ The Psalmist tells us that “all that the Lord wills he does in heaven and on earth, in the seas and in all the deeps.”² Again in the Book of the Apocalypse it is written: “Worthy art thou, O Lord our God, to receive glory and honor and power; for thou hast created all things, and because of *thy will* they existed and were created.”³

Hence it is the Will of God which from nothingness drew out the universe with all its grandeur and all that

1. St. Thomas, Sum. p. 1, q. 19, a. 4; St. Augustine, De Gen.

2. *Psalms* 134:6

3. *Apoc.* 4:11

lives in it, the earth with all that is on it and beneath it, all creatures visible and invisible, living and inanimate, reasonable and without reason, from the highest to the lowest.

If God then has produced all these things, as St. Paul says, *according to the purpose of his will*,⁴ is it not supremely right and reasonable as well as absolutely necessary that they should be preserved and governed by Him according to the counsel of His will? And how could a thing remain, unless you willed it; or be preserved, had it not been called forth by you?⁵

But *the works of God are perfect*, it is written in the Canticle of Moses.⁶ They are so well done that God Himself, whose judgment is strict and righteous, found when He had created them that they were *good and very good*.⁷ It is quite obvious *that He who hath founded the earth by wisdom and hath*

4. *Eph.* 1:5

5. *Wis.* 11:25

6. *Deut.* 32:4

7. *Gen.* 1:31

*established the heavens by understanding*⁸ could not show less perfection in governing His works than in creating them. So, as He is careful to remind us, if His Providence continues *to have care of all things*,⁹ it is *in measure and number and weight*,¹⁰ it is *with justice and mercy*.¹¹ *Neither can any man say to him, Why dost thou so?*¹² For if He assigns to His creatures the end that He wills, and chooses the means which seem good to Him to lead them to it, the end He assigns them must be good and wise, nor can He direct them towards their end other than by good and wise means. *Therefore do not become foolish*,¹³ the Apostle tells us, *but understand what the will of the Lord is, so that doing it you may receive the promise*,¹⁴ that is to say eternal happiness, for it is writ-

8. *Prov.* 3:19

9. *Wis.* 12:13

10. *id.* 11:20

11. *id.* 12:15; 16:1

12. *Eccles.* 8:4

13. *Eph.* 5:7

14. *Heb.* 10:36

ten: *the world with its lust is passing away, but he who does the will of God abides forever.*¹⁵

1. God Controls All Events, Whether Good or Bad

Nothing happens in the the universe without God willing and allowing it. This statement must be taken absolutely of everything with the exception of sin. ‘Nothing occurs by chance in the whole course of our lives’ is the unanimous teaching of the Fathers and Doctors of the Church, ‘and God intervenes everywhere.’

*I am the Lord, He tells us Himself by the mouth of the prophet Isaias, and there is none else. I form light and create darkness; I make peace and create evil, I, the Lord, do all these things.*¹⁶ *It is I who bring both death and life, I who inflict wounds and heal them, He said to Moses.*¹⁷ *The Lord killeth and maketh*

15. *1 John* 2:17

16. *Isaias* 45:6-7

17. *Deut.* 32:39

alive, it is written in the Cantic of Anna, the mother of Samuel, *He bringeth down to the tomb and He bringeth back again; the Lord maketh poor and maketh rich, he humbleth and he exalteth.*¹⁸ *Shall there be evil* (disaster, affliction) *in a city which the Lord hath not done?*¹⁹ asks the prophet Amos: *Good things and evil, life and death, poverty and riches are from God* Solomon proclaims.²⁰ And so on in numerous other passages of Scripture.

Perhaps you will say that while this is true of certain necessary effects, like sickness, death, cold and heat, and other accidents due to natural causes which have no liberty of action, the same cannot be said in the case of things that result from the free will of man. For if, you will object, someone slanders me, robs me, strikes me, persecutes me, how can I attribute his conduct to the will of God who, far

18. *1 Kings* 2:6-7

19. *Amos* 3:6

20. *Ecclus.* 11:14

from wishing me to be treated in such a manner, expressly forbids it? So the blame, you will conclude, can only be laid on the will of man, on his ignorance or malice. This is the defense behind which we try to shelter from God and excuse our lack of courage and submission.

It is quite useless for us to try and take advantage of this way of reasoning as an excuse for not surrendering to Providence. God Himself has refuted it and we must believe on His word that in events of this kind as in all others, nothing occurs except by His order and permission.

Let us see what the Scriptures say.

He wishes to punish the murder and adultery committed by David and He expresses Himself as follows by the mouth of the prophet Nathan: *Why therefore hast thou despised the word of the Lord, to do evil in my sight? Thou hast killed Urias the Hittite with the sword, and hast taken his wife to be thy wife, and hast slain him with the*

*sword of the children of Ammon. Therefore the sword shall never depart from thy house, because thou hast despised me, and hast taken the wife of Urias the Hittite to be thy wife. Thus saith the Lord: Behold, I will raise up evil against thee out of thy own house, and I will take thy wives before thy eyes and give them to thy neighbor and he shall lie with thy wives in the sight of this sun. For thou didst it secretly, but I will do this thing in the sight of all Israel, and in the sight of the sun.*²¹

Later when the Jews by their iniquities had grievously offended Him and provoked His wrath, He says: *The Assyrian is the rod and the staff of my anger, and my indignation is in his hands, I will send him to the deceitful nation, and I will give him charge against the people of my wrath, to take away the spoils, and to lay hold on the prey, and to tread them down like the mire of the streets.*²²

21. 2 Kings 12:9-12

22. Isaias 10:5-6

Could God more openly declare Himself to be responsible for the evils that Absalom caused his father and the King of Assyria the Jews? It would be easy to find other instances but these are enough. Let us conclude then with St. Augustine: "All that happens to us in this world against our will (whether due to men or to other causes) happens to us only by the will of God, by the disposal of Providence, by His orders and under His guidance; and if from the frailty of our understanding we cannot grasp the reason for some event, let us attribute it to divine Providence, show Him respect by accepting it from His hand, believe firmly that He does not send it [to] us without cause."

Replying to the murmurs and complaints of the Jews who attributed their captivity and sufferings to misfortune and causes other than the will of God, the prophet Jeremias says to them: *Who is he that hath commanded a thing to be done, when the Lord com-*

*mandeth it not? Do not both evil and good proceed out of the mouth of the Highest? Why doth a living man murmur, a man suffering for his sins? Let us search our ways, and seek, and return to the Lord. Let us lift up our hearts with our hands to the Lord in the heavens, saying, We have done wickedly and provoked thee to wrath; therefore thou art inexorable.*²³

Are not these words clear enough? We should take them to heart for our own good. Let us be careful to attribute everything to the will of God and believe that all is guided by His paternal hand.

How Can God Will or Allow Evil?

However, you will perhaps now say, there is sinfulness in all these actions. How then can God will them and take part in them if He is all-holy and can have nothing in common with sin?

God indeed is not and cannot be the author of sin. But it must be remem-

23. *Lam.* 3:37-42

bered that in every sin there are two parts to be distinguished, one *natural* and the other *moral*. Thus, in the action of the man you think you have a grievance against there is, for example, the movement of the arm that strikes you or the tongue that offends you, and the movement of the will that turns aside from right reason and the law of God. The physical action of the arm or the tongue, like all natural things, is quite good in itself and there is nothing to prevent its being produced with and by God's cooperation. What is evil, what God could not cooperate with, is the *sinful intention* which the will of man contributes to the act.

When a man walks with a crippled leg the movement he makes comes both from the soul and the leg, but the defect which causes him to walk badly is only in the leg. In the same way all evil actions must be attributed to God and to man insofar as they are natural, physical acts, but

they can be attributed only to the will of man insofar as they are sinful and blameworthy.

If then someone strikes you or slanders you, as the movement of the arm or tongue is in no way a sin, God can very well be, and actually is, the author of it; for existence and movement in man not less than in any other creature proceed not from himself but from God, who acts in him and by him. *For in Him, says St. Paul, we live and move and have our being.*²⁴ As for the malice of the intention, it proceeds entirely from man and in it alone is the sinfulness in which God has no share but which He yet permits in order not to interfere with our freedom of will.

Moreover, when God co-operates with the person who attacks or robs you, He doubtless intends to deprive you of health or goods because you are making a wrong use of them and they will be harmful to your soul. But He

24. Acts 17:28

does not intend that the attacker or robber should take them from you by a sin. That is the part of human malice, not God's design.

An example may make the matter clearer. A criminal is condemned to death by fair trial. But the executioner happens to be a personal enemy of his, and instead of carrying out the judge's sentence as a duty, he does so in a spirit of hate and revenge. Obviously the judge has no share in the executioner's sin. The will and intention of the judge is not that this sin should be committed, but that justice should take its course and the criminal be punished.

In the same way God has no share at all in the wickedness of the man who strikes or robs you. That is something particular to the man himself. God, as we have said, wishes to make you see your own faults, to humble you, deprive you of what you possess, in order to free you from vice and lead you to virtue; but this good and merciful design, which He could carry out in

numerous other ways without any sin being involved, has nothing in common with the sin of the man who acts as His instrument. And in fact it is not this man's evil intention or sin that causes you to suffer, humiliates or impoverishes you, but the loss of your well being, your good name or your possessions. The sin harms only the person who is guilty of it. This is the way we ought to separate the good from the evil in events of this kind, and distinguish what God operates through men from what men add to the act by their own will.

Practical Examples

St. Gregory sets the same truth before us in another light. A doctor, he says, orders leeches to be applied. While these small creatures are drawing blood from the patient their only aim is to gorge themselves and suck up as much of it as they can. The doctor's only intention is to have the impure blood drawn from the patient and to