

## Choice, Will and the Soul

- an excerpt, Ch 7 *The Conquest of Anxiety* by Eugene Halliday

We are here in time to choose what kind of being we will to **become**. Finally, our being will be what the totality of our choices has made it. There is no escape from this. Each choice that we make changes our character in some way. **Character** is the result of our choices. As we choose we model ourselves, our bodies, minds and souls. Just as, if we repeatedly do a physical act, we predispose our body to become more able to do that act (as we see evidenced in the results of doing physical exercises), so if we repeatedly **think** in a certain way we predispose our mind to think more and more in this way.

We condition our physical body by doing certain physical actions. We condition our mind to think in certain ways by thinking in a certain manner. How do we condition our soul? By **feeling** about what we think and do, by **liking** and **disliking** what we think and do, or by allowing ourselves to be **indifferent** to our thoughts and actions.

Our soul is essentially a **feeling** being that takes attitudes of liking, disliking and indifference towards whatever it encounters. Of these three attitudes, that of indifference is strongly condemned in the Book of Revelation, where the Laodiceans are told, "I know thy works, that thou art neither cold nor hot; I would thou wert cold or hot. So then because thou art lukewarm, and neither cold nor hot, I will spew thee out of my mouth". So speaks God to the indifferent, the luke-warm. Why should God so view the indifferent?

When we are indifferent, our energy does not flow through our being as it should. Indifference is failure to **commit** ourselves to one course or another. When we commit ourselves to a course of action we **mobilise our energy**, we enliven ourselves, we vitalise our body and mind and soul. Whether we "blow hot", that is, feel intense interest towards something; or "blow cold", that is, feel a strong opposition to something, we live more intensely, we mobilise our spirit. Our life is on the way to greater abundance of experience, from which we will **learn** more about ourselves and about the world and everything in it.

But lukewarmness, indifference, does not vitalise us, does not mobilise our energies, does not enliven our spirit. Indifference persisted-in means loss of life-drive, loss of purpose. It is a first stage towards loss of the power to integrate ourselves, a first step towards corruption of being and failure to find a true centre of reference for our soul.

We sometimes hear people say that if God knows everything, then He knows every action that we are going to do. But to think this is to misunderstand God's purpose for mankind. Certainly God knows the infinity of action possibilities open to us, but He has given us, with His gift of the Spirit, a capacity for free choice, which He wills us to exercise. There are an infinity of ways that we may act, and all of these God knows, and He knows also the results of the following of any of these ways. But He has given us the power to **choose** which of these ways we shall take, which of these possibilities we shall activate. For God has a purpose for us. He wills us to become such as He Himself is. "Be ye perfect as your Father in Heaven is perfect," says Jesus Christ.

But how can we possibly become perfect as God is? God is infinite, and we are but finite. He is the all-powerful Creator, and we are but creatures. Yet Christ would not command us to be something beyond our capacity to be. There must be some way in which the perfection of God is attainable by us. In what does God's perfection consist?

Firstly we must see that God is God because of a definite quality that He has, and that He **wills** for Himself. God is above all things self-consistent. Supreme self-consistency is the characteristic of God. From this self-consistency derives the equation "God is Love"; for self-consistency is the ground of Love. Without self-consistency God could not remember Himself, nor remember His sacred purpose for mankind.

In this **will to self-consistency** can we see a possibility that we might become like God? Yes, for our will to self-consistency is a possibility for us. Even if we make mistakes, even if we fail in practice to attain it, our will to self-consistency can remain with us, can be repeatedly reaffirmed by us. Failure or success is here not the important thing. The important thing is the **Will**. It is our **Will** that God will judge, not our actual performance. A man with immobilised limbs, perhaps paralysed by an accident or by disease, may be unable physically to move them. But this incapacity says nothing about the state of his **will**. If, in the very middle of his physical disability, he retains the **will** to live, the will to make some contribution to life, no matter how small, it is his **will** that God will judge him by, not his actual physical performance.

When we will in relationship to something, we choose a certain direction rather than another one for our soul to take. The possibility of choice is a property of the will. Will and choice are inseparably joined together. We cannot choose except by act of will. We cannot use our will without choosing something.

Each choice we make is based on a judgement that the chooser makes. "With what judgement ye judge, with that shall you be judged", says Christ. This means that when we judge, when we choose, we judge and choose ourselves to be the kind of being that makes such judgements, such choices. In judging and choosing, we **make** ourselves, we build our very being. We are self-creators. Ultimately a man's being is the product of the totality of all his judgements, all his choices. How do we feel inside ourselves when we contemplate this truth?

Firstly it is probable we feel nervous, or guilty, for it is natural for a finite creature to make mistakes, to choose wrongly. As we are finite, so are we limited in knowledge and power, and so our physical actions will tend to be less than perfect.

But when we remember that it is not our physical actions that we shall be judged by, but the **state-of our will** whilst doing them, we might feel less nervous, for we know that when we fail to do a good action it is often not that we are willing to do a bad action, but that the doing of a good action demanded more from us than we could quite summon up the energy or presence of mind to do. Most of our wrong actions are not the product of a consciously evil will, but the resultants of lack of concentration, lack of vision of what such actions really signify for us within our soul.

If a man could see the corruption influence of **deliberate** evil deeds and their results in his soul, he would probably be afraid to perform them. But then his choice would result only from fear and not from **freedom**, and God wills man to choose freely, and not merely in fear. Certainly the beginning of wisdom is the fear of the Lord, but the end of wisdom, the purpose of wisdom, is not fear but love. "Perfect love casts out fear."

God, in His all-seeingness, sees the infinite number of choices that men can make, and He sees also the results, the consequence of making these choices. But He does not remove the possibility of man choosing a given course of action, and suffering or enjoying its consequences, for it is in this suffering or enjoying the consequences of his choices that a man can build his own character into the form which he desires or wills for himself. The final form and character of a man will be the natural resultant of all his choices.

This could be very frightening, unless we remember one very important thing. Just as the choices we make form our character, so the new choices we make will re-form it. This is the meaning of reformation. Each choice we make is a judgement, **a judgement willed by our soul**. The soul is furnished with the memories of all its judgements. At some point in time there will be a "last judgement". This might occur at the point of one's death, which we may call the individual's last temporal judgement of his earth life, after which his time-experience will cease, and the soul will enter Eternity. At this point a man finds himself with no more time left for "reformation", for reforming himself. Whatever by his choices in life he has made himself into, that pattern of being he now **is**, at the temporal end of his earth life. With that pattern he must now enter Eternity. When death strikes, in that moment the soul makes its last time-assessment of itself as its time-choices have made it

But before death strikes, whilst we are still living, we can **change our mind**, change our whole attitude towards all our previous choices. We can re-form our basic **will**, re-design our whole way of looking at the world, at ourselves, and at God. This is right and proper, for it is only as to our **will** that God will judge us in His last judgement, when He will judge **all** men not for what they have done physically, but for the state of their will in doing it; not for what they have thought or understood, but for the state of their heart when thinking it or understanding it.

That a man's last time-judgement on himself will occur at the moment before his physical death may seem most probable. But there is another possibility. It might happen that before a man's death in the time process that he is suddenly brought face to face with the fact of Jesus Christ. This is prophesied in the Bible where it says that Christ will come again, and at a time which no man will be able to foresee. This gives another meaning to the Last Judgement, as the judgement that each man will make of himself in the moment when, without warning, Christ shall present Himself before man, and man shall in that moment have to say to himself, "Up to this moment I have chosen to live in a certain way; but now I am face to face with God Incarnate. Am I glad to have chosen as I did? or do I wish I had chosen otherwise? And if otherwise, is it out of fear of reprisals or out of love that I would re-form myself?"

Because no man knows the moment of his possible encounter with the Christ, with the reincarnated God, it is advisable for him to choose **now** what attitude he will take towards this possibility. For it is in this possibility's possibility that the necessity of our here-and-now re-forming becomes obvious.

We are to remember that it is not on our actual physical performance that we shall be judged, but on **the state of our will**. "The spirit is willing, but the flesh is weak." Our physical body is an inheritor of the totality of our ancestry. It has a strong tendency to act in certain ways rather than in others. These tendencies are often not easy to control.

\*\*\*\*\*