

Few Elect?

January 22, 2011

Why is it so seemingly difficult to save one's soul? Why – as we are told – are relatively few souls saved in comparison with the number of souls damned? Since God wishes for all souls to be saved (I Tim.II, 4), why did he not make it somewhat easier, as he surely could have done?

The swift and simple answer is that it is not that difficult to save one's soul. Part of the agony of souls in Hell is their clear knowledge of how easily they could have avoided damnation. Damned non-Catholics might say, "I knew there was something to Catholicism, but I chose never to go into the question because I could see ahead that I would have to change my way of life." (Winston Churchill once said that every man runs into the truth at some time in his life, but most men turn the other way.) Damned Catholics might say, "God gave me the Faith, and I knew that all I needed was to make a good confession, but I reckoned it was more convenient to put it off, and so I died in my sins . . ." Every soul in Hell knows that it is there by its own fault, by its own choice. God is not to be blamed. In fact looking back on their lives on earth, they see clearly how much he did to try to stop them from throwing themselves into Hell, but they freely chose their own fate, and God respected that choice . . . However, let us delve a little deeper.

Being infinitely good, infinitely generous and infinitely happy, God chose – he was in no way obliged – to create beings that would be capable of sharing in his happiness. Since he is pure spirit (Jn. IV, 24), such beings would have to be spiritual and not just material, such as animal, vegetable or mineral. Hence the creation of angels with no matter in them at all, and men, with a spiritual soul in a material body. But that very spirit by which angels and men are capable of sharing in divine happiness necessarily includes reason and

free-will, indeed it is by the free-will freely choosing God that it deserves to share in his happiness. But how could that choice of God be truly free if there was no alternative to choose that would turn away from God? What merit does a boy have in choosing to buy a volume of Shakespeare if there is only Shakespeare for sale in the bookstore? And if the bad alternative exists, and if the free-will is real and not just a pretence, how are there not going to be angels or men who will choose what is not good?

The question may still be asked, how can God have foreseen to allow the majority of souls (Mt.VII, 13–14; XX, 16) to incur the terrible punishment of refusing his love? Answer, the more terrible Hell is, the more certain it is that to every man alive God offers grace and light and strength enough to avoid it, but, as St Thomas Aquinas explains, the majority of men prefer the present and known joys of the senses to the future and unknown joys of Paradise. Then why did God attach such strong pleasures to the senses? Partly no doubt to ensure that parents would have children to populate his Heaven, but also surely to make all the more meritorious any human being's putting the pursuit of pleasure in this life beneath the true delights of the next life, which are ours for the wanting! We need only want them violently enough (Mt.XI, 12)!

God is no mediocre God, and to souls loving him he wishes to offer no mediocre Paradise.

Kyrie eleison.