

THE FOOLISHNESS OF GOD

“For the foolishness of God is wiser than men, and the weakness of God is stronger than men.”

– 1 Corinthians 1:25

ST. PAUL, IN HIS FIRST LETTER to the Corinthians (1:18–25), demonstrates that he is in no way intimidated by the judgments and standards of the World. He is well aware, from his experience of preaching the Gospel, that a large portion, perhaps even the majority, of the Jews and the Gentiles consider the Gospel message he preaches to be foolishness and nonsense. But this dismissal and criticism in no way dampens his spirits or makes him cower in fear. He is completely secure in his awareness that he has received and is in possession of the greatest and most important truth; fully convinced that he has been entrusted with the most important message the world needs to hear. We see St. Paul standing up in the face of worldly opposition and almost taunting those who oppose him: “Where is the wise man? Where is the scribe? Where is the debater of this age?” We could translate this challenge of St. Paul into modern terms:

“Where are the Ivy League graduates? Where are those with power, money and influence? Where are those who have control of the means of communication and public opinion?” How many of these people are aware of this basic and foundational truth of the Gospel: that God has chosen to redeem humanity by means of a crucified Messiah and that this crucified Messiah is the one who is really governing the world. And if they are not aware of this truth is not their inner world one of darkness?

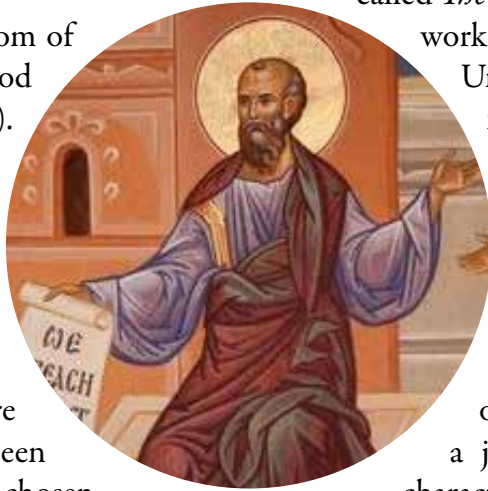
So we might ask ourselves whether we have the same depth of conviction and awareness as St. Paul that we possess a truth — a truth that we have received from God Himself through faith about His plan of salvation. Or are we embarrassed and intimidated by the World which sees our faith as foolishness and nonsense? It may be that we are troubled by the fact that it seems there are, relatively speaking, so few people in the world who are aware of

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God's plan of salvation. The fact that we are a minority could possibly lead us to start questioning ourselves and our own sanity. How can so many people be wrong?

St. Paul writes: "...in the wisdom of God, the world did not know God through wisdom" (1 Cor 1:21). St. Paul does not attribute the fact that so many are ignorant of God's designs and what He has done in the world to God's **justice**, but rather he attributes it to God's **wisdom**. It belongs to God's wise designs that there are only a chosen few who have been given the light of faith; only a chosen few who are fully aware of God's plan, while the rest of men remain in ignorance and darkness about these things.

God has chosen to redeem the world through the painful and humiliating suffering and death of His Son. And He invites us to enter into that same logic, as it were, and wants us to have a share in that same suffering. Very often, when we are faced in life with very difficult and painful situations we will receive the counsel to submit ourselves to the will of God. Properly understood this is, of course, very good and sound advice, but I think we can have a kind of unconscious repugnance to it because the will is a blind faculty. To be counseled to submit to the will of God can convey the impression of having to submit to something that is arbitrary and unreasonable. For this reason, it can be helpful to remind ourselves that behind God's will is His reason and infinite wisdom. And so, instead of speaking about accepting the will of God for our lives, we could speak instead of accepting the **wisdom** of God for our lives. To contend or rebel against the will of God is to rebel against the wisdom of God also. To rebel against the will of God, in effect, means that we



know better than God and that God really doesn't know how best to order the universe and our lives.

There is a book that was popular some time ago called *The Shack*. The basic idea behind the work and its message was very good. Unfortunately, it contained some rather serious theological errors. In any case, there was one scene in the book that was very well done and which has always stayed with me. At one point in the story the main character is brought before the God-figure of the book as if coming before a judge for judgment. This main character has suffered great tragedies

in his life. His young daughter was abducted and raped and murdered. When he is summoned before God for judgement, God does something totally unexpected and surprising; He turns the tables on the judgement. He makes the man the judge and puts Himself in the place of the one who is to be judged. In effect, he asks the man to make judgement on *Him* in what He has done and what he has allowed to happen in his life. If God would invite us to judge Him and how He has ordered our lives, or what He has permitted in our lives or how He has ordered the world, how would He come out?

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“Jews demand signs” — they want to see God intervene in the world with force, and right all wrongs just as we, at times, might wish He would. “Greeks seek wisdom” — they want a God who is intelligible to them, a God whom they can understand just as we, at times, might wish to understand His ways. “But to those who are called ... Christ the power of God and the wisdom of God.” May we enter ever more deeply into this power and wisdom of God and so participate in the victory of Christ's cross.



Monks' Table Reading

What we have for you this month is an important slice of our monastic life — a catalog of and commentary on some of the books we have been reading recently at table. Many of these books are among our favorites and could perhaps suggest Christmas gifts...arranged in no particular order:

***Catena Aurea, Matthew (Volume 1)* by St. Thomas Aquinas**

This work, also called *The Golden Chain* of St. Thomas, is his collection of quotes providing commentary on the Gospels from various spiritual authorities. Highly suitable for slow, meditative reading...a treasure trove of fresh insights into that part of Scripture most familiar to us.

***The 35 Doctors of the Church: Revised Edition* by Rev. Fr. Christopher Rengers, O.F.M.Cap.**

Pop quiz: quick, grab a piece of paper and pen, and write out the names of the 35 Doctors of the Church, and...maybe you can't name all 35? Who can? This book may help fill in the gaps.

"The declaration that a saint is a Doctor of the Universal Church implies the recognition of a charism of wisdom bestowed by the Holy Spirit for the good of the Church..." — Pope Emeritus Benedict XVI

***The Desert Fathers: Sayings of the Early Christian Monks* Translated by Benedicta Ward**

The Desert Fathers were tough. Consider this word: "A brother said to Antony, 'Pray for me.' He answered, 'Neither I nor God will have mercy on you unless you do something about it yourself and ask God's help.'"

***The Twelve Steps to Holiness and Salvation* by St. Alphonsus Liguori**

"The 12 virtues we must all acquire to be happy in this world and to save our souls."

***St. Thomas Aquinas & St. Francis Assisi* by G. K. Chesterton**

A winsome presentation of two of the greatest saints by the great Chesterton.



Illustration by Ben Hatke

***The Medal Or Cross of St. Benedict: Its Origin, Meaning, and Privileges* by Prosper**

Guéranger

Abbot Guéranger, spiritual son of Saint Benedict, wrote this book to promote this very powerful devotion.

***Ladder of Divine Ascent* by St. John Climacus**

"The steps of THE LADDER proceed gradually from strength to strength on the path of perfection.

The summit is not reached suddenly, but gradually, as the Savior says: 'The Kingdom of Heaven suffers violence, and the violent take it by force' (Mt 11:12)."

***The Regensburg Lecture* by James V. Schall**

Future historians may find this lecture to be the watershed moment leading to the next Crusade. The controversy over Pope Benedict's lecture at Regensburg obscured his substantial argument about the interdependency of faith and reason.

***John Ruusbroec: The Spiritual Espousals, The Sparkling Stones, and Other Works* The Classics of Western Spirituality series.**

John Ruusbroec is arguably the greatest expositor of mystical theology. "If above all things we would taste God, and feel eternal life in ourselves, we must go forth into God with our feeling, above reason; and there we must abide, onefold, empty of ourselves, and free from images, lifted up by love into the simple bareness of our intelligence."

***Life of Union with Mary* by S.T.D. Emile Neubert, S.M. and S.T.D. Sylvester P. Juergens, S.M.**

As St. Therese of Lisieux said: "Do not be afraid of loving the Blessed Virgin too much. You can never love her enough." For the Marian maximalist on your list.

Holy Bible

The Book of Books. The Word of God in the words of men. As St. Jerome said: "Ignorance of Scripture is ignorance of Christ."

