

## St. Alphonsus Liguori, *Uniformity with God's Will*

### 2. Uniformity in all Things.

The essence of perfection is to embrace the will of God in all things, prosperous or adverse. In prosperity, even sinners find it easy to unite themselves to the divine will; but it takes saints to unite themselves to God's will when things go wrong and are painful to self-love. Our conduct in such instances is the measure of our love of God. St. John of Avila used to say: *"One 'Blessed be God' in times of adversity, is worth more than a thousand acts of gratitude in times of prosperity."*

Furthermore, we must unite ourselves to God's will not only in things that come to us directly from his hands, such as sickness, desolation, poverty, death of relatives, but likewise in those we suffer from man -- for example, contempt, injustice, loss of reputation, loss of temporal goods and all kinds of persecution. On these occasions we must remember that whilst God does not will the sin, he does will our humiliation, our poverty, or our mortification, as the case may be. It is certain and of faith, that whatever happens, happens by the will of God: *"I am the Lord forming the light and creating the darkness, making peace and creating evil."* From God come all things, good as well as evil. We call adversities evil; actually they are good and meritorious, when we receive them as coming from God's hands: *"Shall there be evil in a city which the Lord hath not done?" "Good things and evil, life and death, poverty and riches are from God."*

It is true, when one offends us unjustly, God does not will his sin, nor does he concur in the sinner's bad will; but God does, in a general way, concur in the material action by which such a one strikes us, robs us or does us an injury, so that God certainly wills the offense we suffer and it comes to us from his hands. Thus the Lord told David he would be the author of those things he would suffer at the hands of Absalom: *"I will raise up evils against thee out of thy own house, and I will take thy wives before thy face and give them to thy neighbor."* Hence too God told the Jews that in punishment for their sins, he would send the Assyrians to plunder them and spread destruction among them: *"The Assyrian is the rod and staff of my anger . . . I will send him to take away the spoils."* "Assyrian wickedness served as God's scourge for the Hebrews" is St. Augustine's comment on this text. And our Lord himself told St. Peter that his sacred passion came not so much from man as from his Father: *"The chalice which my Father hath given me, shall I not drink it?"*

When the messenger came to announce to Job that the Sabeans had plundered his goods and slain his children, he said: *"The Lord gave and the Lord taketh away."* He did not say: "The Lord hath given me my children and my possessions, and the Sabeans have taken them away." He realized that adversity had come upon him by the will of God. Therefore he added: *"As it hath pleased the Lord, so is it done. Blessed be the name of the Lord."* We must not therefore consider the afflictions that come upon us as happening by chance or solely from the malice of men; we should be convinced that what happens, happens by the will of God. Apropos of this it is related that two martyrs, Epictetus and Atho, being put to the torture by having their bodies raked with iron hooks and burnt with flaming torches, kept repeating: "Work thy will upon us, O Lord." Arrived at the place of execution, they exclaimed: "Eternal God, be thou blessed in that thy will has been entirely accomplished in us."

Cesarius points up what we have been saying by offering this incident in the life of a certain monk: Externally his religious observance was the same as that of the other monks, but he had attained such sanctity that the mere touch of his garments healed the sick. Marveling at these deeds, since his life was

no more exemplary than the lives of the other monks, the superior asked him one day what was the cause of these miracles.

He replied that he too was mystified and was at a loss how to account for such happenings.

"What devotions do you practice?" asked the abbot. He answered that there was little or nothing special that he did beyond making a great deal of willing only what God willed, and that God had given him the grace of abandoning his will totally to the will of God.

"Prosperity does not lift me up, nor adversity cast me down," added the monk. "I direct all my prayers to the end that God's will may be done fully in me and by me." "That raid that our enemies made against the monastery the other day, in which our stores were plundered, our granaries put to the torch and our cattle driven off -- did not this misfortune cause you any resentment?" queried the abbot.

"No, Father," came the reply. "On the contrary, I returned thanks to God -- as is my custom in such circumstances -- fully persuaded that God does all things, or permits all that happens, for his glory and for our greater good; thus I am always at peace, no matter what happens." Seeing such uniformity with the will of God, the abbot no longer wondered why the monk worked so many miracles.

**Bishop George Hay, [The Sincere Christian](#) (pp. 31-42, bold added).**

Question 17. How does the Providence of God enter into the evils of creatures?

Answer. The evils of creatures are of two kinds; to wit, the evil of sin, and the evil of suffering. The evil of sin resides in the perverse will of man consenting to anything which is against the law of the Almighty : all evils of this kind God only permits. The evil of suffering includes all the afflictions, pains, and miseries, by which creatures suffer, whether in mind or body : **all evil of this kind, from whatever immediate occasion it arises, is ordained, intended, and expressly willed by Almighty God.**

Question 18. How does God permit the evil of sin?

Answer. The Scripture assures us that God hates sin, that He abhors it as a most grievous injury done to Himself, that He cannot look upon iniquity, and that He expressly forbids His creatures ever to commit it, under pain of the severest and most dreadful punishments. Hence it is manifestly impossible that He should ever will sin, or intend it in any creature, and much less that He should be the cause or author of it; for this would be acting against Himself, which is totally inconsistent with His infinite perfection. Seeing, however, that sin is actually committed by His creatures, and His laws numberless times are transgressed by them, all which God could hinder, if He pleased, but does not hinder, it necessarily follows that He only permits this to happen. That is to say, God has endowed some of His creatures with knowledge and free will, and from them He requires a voluntary service; He sets good and evil, life and death, before them, and leaves them to the freedom of their own will to choose the one or the other; He proposes to them the most powerful motives to induce them to choose the good, and threatens them with the worst of miseries to deter them from choosing the evil : " Consider," says He, by the prophet Moses, " that I have set before thee this day life and good, and on the other hand death and evil;" and a little

after, " I call heaven and earth to witness this day, that I have set before you life and death, blessing and cursing ; choose, therefore, life, that both thou and thy seed may live." And the wise man assures us "that God made man from the beginning, and left him in the hand of his own counsel. He hath set water and fire before thee ; stretch forth thy hand to which thou wilt. Before man is life and death, good and evil ; that which he chooseth shall be given him." He is always ready, however, to assist them to choose and execute the good ; for " God is faithful, who will not suffer you to be tempted above what you are able, but with the temptation will also make issue (that is, a way to escape), that you may be able to bear it;" but He will not force them to this, nor oblige them to good against their free will. When, therefore, they choose the evil, He leaves them to their own choice, and permits the sin they commit; for " He hath commanded no man to do wickedly, and He hath given no man license to sin." But in thus permitting sin, we must not imagine He does so either out of sloth, impotence, or negligence. **Man often permits things that are disagreeable to him out of mere indolence, or through carelessness and indifference, or because he cannot help it; it is not so with God. God is incapable of sloth or carelessness, and is far from being indifferent about what His creatures do; at the same time He is perfectly able to hinder and prevent them from sinning, if He pleases. But He permits sin, because it is His will to permit it, because He has the most just and wise reasons to permit it, because it enters into the plan of His providence, and contributes to the great end of His creating this universe ; and therefore He has, from all eternity, resolved and decreed to permit it; and in permitting it He displays, in the most admirable manner, His Divine perfections, by making it an occasion of infinitely greater good, both for exalting His own glory, and advancing the perfection of His creatures.**

Question 19. What do you mean when you say that God wills the evil of suffering?

Answer. That all the pains, sufferings, and afflictions, of whatever kind, that any creatures endure, whether in mind or body, are ordained, decreed, and sent upon them by God; that **He expressly wills all their sufferings, is the chief cause and author of them, and the first and sovereign source from which they flow, whatever be their immediate cause or occasion.** This is a truth everywhere displayed to us in the sacred Scriptures. " Good things and evil, life and death, poverty and riches, are from God." " The Lord killeth and maketh alive. He bringeth down to the grave and bringeth back again. The Lord maketh poor and maketh rich. He humbleth and He exalteth." " See ye that I alone am, and there is no other God besides Me ; I will kill and I will make alive, I will strike and I will heal ; and there is none that can deliver out of My hand." "I am the Lord, and there is none else ; I form the light and create darkness ; I make peace and create evil, I the Lord that do all these things." " Shall there be evil in a city which the Lord hath not done?" **And wherever we find Almighty God foretelling by His prophets the sufferings and calamities of His people, He always declares Himself to be the author of them:** " I will visit you with poverty; I will send in upon you the beasts of the field to destroy you; I will bring in upon you the sword, I will send the pestilence in the midst of you; I will destroy your land; I will scatter you among the Gentiles." " I will raise up evil against them," and the like, are the expressions He uses on such occasions. And hence we find that **all the holy servants of God, whenever they met with any disasters, immediately referred them all to God as the sovereign cause and author, and received them with resignation, as coming from His hand.** Thus Job, in the midst of his severe afflictions, cried out, " The Lord gave and the Lord hath taken away ; as it hath pleased the Lord so is it done ; blessed be the name of the Lord." And a little after he adds, " If we have received good things at the hand of God, why should we not receive evil?" So when God, by His prophet Samuel, foretold to the high priest, Heli, all the ruin and misery that He was to send upon his family, he immediately replied, " It is the Lord, let Him

do what is good in His sight." David also, when cursed by Semei, acknowledged this great humiliation to be from God, and said, " The Lord hath commanded him to curse David, and who shall dare say. Why hath He done so?" And Christ Himself acknowledged all His sufferings as coming from God His Father, when He said, " The cup that My Father hath given Me, shall I not drink it?" Hence Solomon, comprehending all the goods and evils of this life under the expression of the good and the evil day, says, " For God hath made both the one and the other, that man may not find against Him any just complaint."

Question 20. But how is it consistent with the goodness of God to render His creatures miserable by sufferings and afflictions ?

Answer. It is impossible that the infinite goodness of God should render His creatures miserable from any pleasure He takes in their sufferings as such ; or that He should directly intend or will their sufferings as an object which is in itself agreeable to Him. He, therefore, never sends any affliction upon them but with a view to some greater good, relating either to His own glory, which is the supreme end of the creation, or the happiness of the creatures themselves ; either for the exaltation of His own Divine justice in punishing sinners, for the correction of the wicked, or for the preservation and improvement of the good ; either in punishing past sins in those whom He afflicts, or in preserving them from sin for the time to come. Hence all the sufferings of this life are the effects of sin ; and the voluntary abuse we make of our free will is the cause that obliges or moves Almighty God to send them. Thus the holy Sarah, in her prayer to God, says, " For Thou art not delighted in our being lost; because after a storm Thou makest a calm ; and after tears and weeping Thou pourest in joyfulness." Where we see that God takes no delight in our sufferings, and only sends them with a view to good, bringing from them peace and joy, so also " God made not death, neither hath He pleasure in the destruction of the living, for He created all things that they might be, and He made the nations of the earth for health ; and there is no poison or destruction in them, nor kingdom of hell upon earth (for justice is perpetual and immortal). But the wicked with works and deeds have called it to them." "As I live, saith the Lord, I desire not the death of the wicked, but that the wicked turn from his way and live." And therefore He declares, by another prophet, " Destruction is thy own, O Israel ; thy help is only in Me."

Question 21. That all those sufferings which arise from natural or innocent causes, such as diseases, famine, pestilence, death, and the like, are sent expressly from God, and that He is the principal cause and author of them, it is easy to conceive ; because there is no sin in these things, and the occasions of them are incapable of sin ; but as for those sufferings which arise from our own sins, or from the sins of others, from their malice, hatred, injustice, or cruelty, how can God be the author of these, since they arise not from natural or innocent causes, but from wickedness and crimes, of which God cannot possibly be the author?

Answer. **This difficulty often proves a stumbling-block to souls, and leads to a pernicious delusion; for falsely imagining that God cannot be the author or cause of those sufferings which arise from the crimes of men, they attribute them solely to the mistake, hatred, or malice of their fellow creatures,** and seek from this to justify their own impatience, passion, and desire of revenge. But this is a very great mistake ; for it is a certain truth, that though God only indeed permits the crimes, of which our sufferings are the effects, yet **these sufferings He as positively wills, and has from all eternity as expressly decreed to send upon us, as any others which flow from the most innocent cause.** To understand this, we must carefully distinguish between the sin committed, and the effects which flow from it. The sin resides precisely in the perverse will of him committing it. The effects which flow from the sin are the sufferings which

it occasions in others. The sin in him who commits it, God only permits, because He is incapable of willing sin, or of being the cause or author of it ; yet from all eternity He foresaw it, and from all eternity, for His own most wise and just reasons, decreed to permit it. Now, what were these reasons? He foresaw that this sin, if permitted, would be the occasion of sufferings to others. He takes no pleasure in the sufferings of His creatures, and would never allow them to be afflicted, unless for some good end, either in justice or in mercy. No sufferings can come upon them against His will ; for " not a hair of our head falls to the ground without Him." It is equally impossible that He should be indifferent to the sufferings of His creatures ; this His infinite goodness forbids. We must conclude, therefore, that as all the sufferings of this life, as we have seen above, are either punishments or benefits, and as such expressly willed and decreed from eternity by God — the punishments by His justice, the benefits by His mercy — consequently, though God only permits the sin in the one who commits it, yet He expressly wills the sufferings of others, which are its effects ; and the reason of the sin being so permitted is, that it may serve as an instrument in the hand of God for executing upon those who suffer what He has decreed from eternity to inflict upon them.

**Hence we find in Scripture that when God Almighty foretells, by His prophet, sufferings and afflictions. He always declares Himself to be the author of them, even though the means by which they are inflicted are of the most criminal nature.** Thus, when the prophet Nathan reproved David for the sins of adultery and murder which he had committed, he says, in the name of God, " 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 the sun." Here is a most severe sentence passed upon David by the Divine justice, which God foretells He Himself would execute upon him ; and, therefore, which He positively wills and decrees that David should undergo. His infinite wisdom could have executed this sentence by many different means ; but He foresaw that David's own son Absalom, pushed on by his ambition, would rebel against his father, and abuse his wives. God could easily have hindered Absalom from committing such crimes, or have prevented the execution of them ; but He was pleased to leave him to the freedom of his own will, and make use of his crimes as the instrument for executing the punishment He had decreed to inflict on David.

When Jeroboam, king of Israel, provoked God to anger by his idolatry, the prophet Ahas declared to him, in the name of God, the punishment which God had decreed to send upon him. " Thus saith the Lord, Behold I will bring evils upon the house of Jeroboam, and I will sweep away the remnant of the house of Jeroboam, as dung is swept away, till all be clear." How was this sentence executed? By rebellion, conspiracy, and the most shocking cruelty. " In the reign of Nadab son of Jeroboam, Baasa conspired against him, and slew him, and reigned in his place ; and when he was king, he cut off all the house of Jeroboam. He left not so much as one soul of his seed till he had utterly destroyed him, according to the word of the Lord, which He had spoken in the hand of Ahas the Silonite," The crimes of Baasa, in conspiring against his sovereign and killing him, were the effects of his ambition; and his cruelty in murdering all the family of Jeroboam was a stroke of worldly policy to secure his own possession of the throne ; but whilst thus gratifying his own passion, he was, though unknown to himself, only an instrument of the Divine justice in punishing the sins of Jeroboam, and executing the decrees of the Almighty on the family of that unhappy prince. No doubt God could have prevented the crimes of Baasa, and have executed His own sentence on Jeroboam by other means ; but knowing Baasa's perverse heart, He permitted him to follow its suggestions, so that the crimes he committed were from himself, by God's permission ; but the effects which they produced in the family of Jeroboam were expressly willed, decreed, and foretold by Almighty God. **In like**

**manner when Satan, by God's permission, after having brought so many miseries upon Job, and reduced him to the most distressing state, appeared a second time before God, "The Lord said to Satan, Hast thou considered My servant Job, still keeping his innocence ? But thou hast moved Me against him, that I should afflict him without a cause." In which words God Himself declares that He was the author of his afflictions — Satan and the other means being only instruments for executing His will.**

Many other examples of the same kind are found in holy writ ; but the following one is particularly conclusive. When St Peter and St John, having been taken up and examined regarding the cure of the lame man, were set at liberty, and returned "to their own company, they related all that the chief priests and ancients had said to them. Who having heard it, with one accord they lifted up their voice to God, and said. Lord, thou art He that didst make heaven and earth, the sea, and all things that are in them, who by the Holy Ghost, by the mouth of our Father David, hast said, Why did the Gentiles rage, and the people meditate vain things? The kings of the earth stood up, and princes assembled together against the Lord, and against His Christ. For, of a truth, there assembled together, in this city, against Thy holy child Jesus, whom Thou hast anointed, Herod, and Pontius Pilate, with the Gentiles, and people of Israel, to do what Thy hand and counsel decreed to be done." And St Peter, in his first sermon to the Jews on Pentecost, affirms the same truth, in these words: "Jesus of Nazareth, being delivered up by the determinate counsel and foreknowledge of God, you, by the hands of wicked men, have crucified and slain." In both which places it is positively declared that all the sufferings and death of Christ were expressly decreed by God, who had previously foretold them by the mouth of His holy prophets ; yet the sins of the Jews and Gentiles, in what they did to Christ, were of the deepest dye ; these sins were not from God, but from the malice of their own hearts, and the abuse of their free will ; this God only permitted, but **He expressly willed the consequences of their crime in the sufferings and death of Jesus. The same is to be said in all similar cases : whatever troubles and afflictions come upon us by the malice, hatred, mistakes, or sins of others, or even of ourselves, we are to consider them all as positively willed and sent upon us by Almighty God ; the sins committed He only permits, but our sufferings which flow from them He expressly wills, and has, from all eternity, decreed ;** and whereas, if He thought proper, He could inflict these sufferings by many other means, yet knowing the voluntary abuse which we or our fellow creatures will make of our free will, He permits it, and thus uses our sins as the instruments of executing His will.

This is precisely the light in which all the holy servants of God consider their afflictions ; for, from whatever immediate source they come, they receive them all as from the hand of God — they look upon the malice and crimes of those who injure them merely as the instruments which He uses for their punishment, or correction and advancement in virtue, and as such they love them and do them good. To the examples of this truth mentioned above, add these others : When Joseph made himself known to his brethren, considering all the cruel treatment he had received from them as the orders of the Divine Providence, he comforted them, and said, "Be not afraid, and let it not seem to you a hard case that you sold me into these countries, for God sent me before you into Egypt for your preservation." A little after he repeats the same, and adds, "not by your counsel was I sent hither, but by the will of God." And after his father's death, when they feared he would then revenge the injuries they had done him, and sent a message, asking his forgiveness, he wept for concern on their account, and said, " Fear not; can we resist the will of God? You thought evil against me; but God turned it into good, that He might exalt me as at present you see, and might save many people: Fear not, I will feed you and your children; and he comforted them, and spoke gently and mildly." And our Saviour received the cup of His passion

in no other light but as sent by His Father, and considered His enemies only as the instruments made use of by Him. He also earnestly prayed for them with His last breath upon the Cross, instead of bearing any resentment against them. Oh, happy those who seriously consider these truths, and imitate these holy examples! They already enjoy a foretaste of heaven itself, even in the midst of this valley of tears ; no evil can come near them ; for what the mistaken world calls evil is to them a real good, a source of joy and consolation. In everything they see the finger of God, in everything they adore His Divine Providence, in everything they rejoice for the accomplishment of His will : and hence they learn, by the most endearing experience, that "all things work together for good to them that love God."