

GOD DOES PERMIT SOME BAD THINGS

by Rev. Donald L. Rose

Since Sept. 11 the subject of bad happenings has been on our minds as we reconcile deplorable events with our belief in God. For centuries people have questioned God's love and power when catastrophes occur. Some have wondered whether God willed bad things to happen, possibly as a kind of punishment to wayward people.

To me the concept of "permission" is a key. When you permit something, it is not the way you would prefer it. Even though it may not be your will, you allow it to happen. Somebody who permits something is still in charge and makes sure that in the grand scheme of things overall good shall prevail.

If God's will were always done, we would not have to pray "Thy will be done." We pray that more and more God's will may be done on earth as it is in heaven. When something is done that is not of God's will, we should not think of it as beyond God's control. It falls into categories of permission.

It's a big subject. Consider what theologian Emanuel Swedenborg wrote about this 250 years ago.

The first religious volume he wrote says, "Hitherto no one has known what permission is; what is permitted is believed to be done by him who permits. But the fact is quite otherwise, concerning which, of the Lord's Divine mercy more will be said hereafter."

In the next volume we read of different categories. Things happen. "some things from permission, some from sufferance, some from leave, some from good pleasure, some from will."

It is hard for some people to realize that when God permits something He does not actually will it. But think of the example of our own behavior.

Each day of our lives we do and say things in freedom. Some of what we do and say is helpful to others and is according to God's will. But we know perfectly well that there are regrettable things which God suffers us to do and say. Besides the things that are not so good, there can be things that are downright harmful. These come under the laws of God's permission.

It would be quite wrong to say that it was God's will if we did something heartless or destructive.

In the book Divine Providence we are told that the providence of God operates according to certain laws and that these include laws of permission. What I find comforting is the emphatic teaching that God will not permit anything which cannot be bent somehow to

good purpose. Nothing whatever is allowed to happen unless some good can come from it.

Already people have witnessed good coming from the terrorist attack. I have been amazed listening to people who have gone to New York and worked at ground zero. A young lady I know went and worked with traumatized people near the World Trade Center. She said that it was a life changing experience, and here's what surprised me. She actually said that this has renewed her faith in the human race!

Now wouldn't you have guessed the very opposite? Think about it. Wouldn't one expect that Sept. 11 would have shaken or diminished such faith?

Do you yourself already observe good arising from our tragedy? Have you even found cause for increase in your religious faith?

Reprinted with permission from The Intelligencer-Record, Doylestown, PA, USA.