



# **With All Your Mind**

*By Rev. Federico Suarez*

Booklet



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## INTRODUCTION

In St. Matthew's gospel (22:34-37) we read: "But when the Pharisees heard that he had silenced the Sadducees, they came together. And one of them, a lawyer, asked him a question, to test him. 'Teacher, which is the great commandment in the law?' And Jesus said to him, 'You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your mind.'"

It is easy to notice here, as on other occasions, that the man who asked the question was insincere. He wasn't looking for knowledge: he wanted to test Jesus, to put him in a compromising situation. But the answer he got was absolutely sincere. It was given clearly and directly, ignoring the hidden intention of the questioner. This answer is well known; it contains a phrase which I think has special relevance to Catholics today, and particularly to students, to people who work with their minds.

"You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your mind." With all your mind. What does it mean to love God with your mind?

Let's begin by asking ourselves: Can you love what you don't know?

The philosophers reply: No, you can only want something if you know it in some way or other. Knowing and wanting, having and loving, are so linked together that the act of the will—wanting—is somehow dependent on your mind. Or, in other words, the attitude of your will toward anything depends on the knowledge you have of that thing.

The mind, then, is a kind of governor in man's makeup. A person's conduct, the attitudes he adopts toward God, the world, and other people, depends to a great extent on the ideas he has. And he usually learns, rather than invents, these ideas—particularly his ideas about revelation, and God's message of salvation. You will, I am sure, have noticed that God did not reveal himself to everybody all in one flash. Being God, how could he? When the chosen people left Egypt, they were little more than a horde—not even a people—incapable of understanding the most elementary and simple truths about the supernatural world. To give them then the fullness of revelation would have meant burdening them with something they could not carry.

With infinite patience and over hundreds of years, first through Moses and then through other prophets he raised up, God set about preparing their minds. In this way, in the fullness of time, the people he had

chosen would be capable of recognizing his envoy and grasping the message of redemption.

In fact, it is even possible, in Jesus' own words in the gospel, to distinguish the gradual unfolding of God's teaching. When he begins to preach, our Lord refers to the old law ("You have heard it said...") and he recalls the precept:

"You will love your friend and hate your enemy"; now, centuries later, the chosen people were ready to take a step forward, and Jesus, who had come to fulfill and complete the law ("...but I say to you") opens up new horizons and perfects the law: "Love your enemies, do good to those who hate you, pray for those who abuse you..."

We are made in such a way that we have to come to the truth in a gradual way, step by step. This holds good for man in himself and for the subject matter of his knowledge.

## STUDYING GOD

Let's now look at the first question. What should we understand by "You will love God with all your mind"? What is the gospel saying? Only the Church can explain the exact meaning of Jesus' words without risk of error.

Yet, it is true that these words contain a teaching meant for all of us, a teaching which is not just confined to the intellectual sphere but which affects our life. So reflection on these words, or on any other parts of the gospel, is a normal way of going deeper into the message of salvation.

But this deepening or, if you will, this knowledge has to suit each person's intellectual development. You cannot give an eleven-year-old the same geometry textbook as is used by a third or fourth year math student in college. Clearly intelligence undergoes a considerable development between the years of eleven and twenty, and a university text seems as big to a child as the school text is small to a university student.

Very well then: when a child goes to make his First Holy Communion, he has learned the catechism but not the small print. He has a knowledge of God and of the supernatural world which is suited to his mental development. He knows as much as he can know at that age about the basic truths. And, what is more, this knowledge is on a par with his secular knowledge. There is no disproportion between what he knows about God, men, and things—nor any difference in the way he knows all these. I would say that the child loves God "with all his mind," because his knowledge of God is as complete as it can be: it reaches the limit of his intellectual ability at that stage in his development.

As a person's intelligence develops, he grows in knowledge of the world and of life. A suitable program of studies keeps opening up his intellectual horizons; normal biological and psychological growth, social relationships, and even things that happen to him all play a part in shaping his mind through the ideas he acquires in books, movies, television, conversations, and experience.

Generally speaking, a university student (at least in the country I live in) tends to think, especially if he has been to a Catholic school, that he "knows it all" as far as the faith is concerned. He thinks that because he has learned the articles of faith in a particularly well-defined way there is nothing more to it. And in a way he is right, for there are few dogmas

and you can't find more over the horizon. Revelation was closed with the death of the last apostle. He makes his mistake in confusing the number of truths of faith which he holds and the way in which he as a particular individual holds them.

And he is also missing out on the connection between these truths and his real life: for revelation is no mere speculative system. It is an expression of realities which affect the core of each man's personality, the world which surrounds him and in which he lives, and his ultimate and definitive destiny.

## STOPPED ALONG THE WAY

As far as the first point is concerned, that is, the way in which he has a hold on the truths of the faith, we should remember what we have already noted: only when his knowledge of God and of revelation is on the same level as his mental development and grasp of human knowledge is he fulfilling the commandment (if it can be called that) of loving God with all his mind. But in the case of the average college student this is definitely not the case, for his religious knowledge tends to stop when he is thirteen or fourteen. After that age he rarely continues to read books which are attuned to his development. He doesn't work at religious knowledge after that age. The result is obvious: when he is twenty or twenty-five (and older) he is still discussing subjects connected with the faith using concepts which suit a twelve-year-old. He has learned nothing since that age. In fact he has forgotten part of what he knew. And so it happens (even more so in these times of crisis) that when he tries to solve some problem of faith with his childish knowledge, he finds the argument, the apologia, ridiculous (for it is childish) and the problem logical (for it is the result of a much more developed outlook and general education).

In fact it is my view that a very high proportion of the crises of faith which you meet among college students (I refer to the honest crises, not the other kind) are rooted in the solid, increasing ignorance of the faith which has accompanied their growth in other areas of knowledge and experience.

These crises are the result of underdeveloped religious knowledge.

I think you cannot argue that lectures on religion and theology in colleges are an adequate counterweight. Quite apart from their effectiveness (if they have any) it is not the classes themselves that need attention (in some universities, at least, they have changed a great deal in format and content) but the attitude of the people who attend them. Revelation is not a philosophy. It is not something which should be learned like just another subject. Either you try to live it or you simply fail to understand it. In other words you cannot get a mature understanding of the gospel unless you are prepared to practice it in your own personal life. When there is no active practice of the gospel (and there very commonly is none), then religion—your relationship with God born from faith in revelation—is completely separated from life. Then religion just has no influence on life. Perhaps certain practices remain, but these eventually become empty of meaning and even lose their basis. Piety then is purely external and gives way to hypocrisy.

And since the student finds hypocrisy repulsive, and his knowledge of the faith is superficial and inadequate, he decides to "be genuine" and give up the practice of his faith. He even stops thinking about such things. The enthusiasm with which a person like this adopts humanitarian ideals, taking up the fight against poverty, injustice, hunger, or war in a kind of philanthropic and altruistic crusade is partly (at least in many cases) a kind of substitute for the faith he has given up, if not lost. The situation gets worse when somebody feels he is now freed from his bonds and devotes himself to living according to the flesh, smothering the spirit. And it is very hard to find any cure when you set up your own intelligence in the center of things and make your own ideas the criteria of truth. In your blindness you are capable of even putting the blame on God rather than admitting your own mistakes, your obvious limitations, and your evident carelessness.

## WHAT COLOR IS YOUR MIND?

Maybe I'm not expressing myself well. What I mean is this: we are on the receiving end of a continuous barrage of ideas which reach us through television, newspapers, radio, magazine articles, films, theater, books, social behavior, and the environment we live in, just like a skin-diver who feels the pressure of the water on all sides. All right: generally all these ideas which reach us, or at least the great majority of them, not only do not lead us to God (unless by way of exception and through pure reaction) but rather tend to keep us from him. Faced with this barrage, what defense does the faith normally have? A mind which is constantly being fed with ideas, concepts, and criteria which have no reference to the gospel or go against it: what chance does it have of remaining loyal to the faith of Christ, if it starts out with almost no knowledge of that faith?

In fact, I think that it would not be difficult to find, in Catholics, non-Catholic minds: that is, Catholics whose thinking on many subjects is either not in agreement with or directly contrary to the faith which they claim to hold or at least have never explicitly denied. I think Msgr. Ronald Knox was getting at this when he said that a nonintellectual conversion often meant an unconverted mind. But, in this case, what hope is there for the world if those who should save it have, through their ignorance of saving doctrine, made themselves incompetent to save it, since they themselves have not yet saved their own minds?

Except through a special grace from God it is not possible to love him with your mind if you don't take steps to develop your mind in matters connected with revealed truth. And you will not get a developed grasp of revealed truth unless you learn it, unless you work at it. It is not something you can make up by yourself, no matter how intelligent, intuitive, and sensitive you are. Therefore, the development of your mind in order to get an adequate knowledge of the faith (adequate to your intellectual development and on a par with your secular knowledge) should be sought through reading.

## FINDING GOOD GUIDES

It might be helpful, illustrative, at this point to recall that St. Teresa noticed she had a strong and almost instinctive tendency not to read religious books unless they were "really approved." To our modern minds this rings of censorship, limitation of freedom, and narrow-mindedness. I think St. Teresa was not that kind of person; she simply did not want to be fooled. I quote her here because I have the impression that college students are more inclined to read something that is easy and not too deep than a book which contains sound doctrine but which is not entertaining. And I suggest that possibly some young college people only read books which are topical and fashionable, not caring whether their content is true or their arguments well founded. And I think that some read only books which back up their own opinions.

You cannot love what you do not know. Can you know Jesus without knowing the gospel? How many times has the average college man or woman—you can average them from the oldest professor to the freshman—read the four gospels? How many of them have read them in their entirety even once? This ignorance of essential matters may be the reason why there are intellectuals whose idea of Christ, the gospel, and the Church is so ignorant and deformed that when the time comes that they decide they need a spiritual element in their lives, they get carried away by any ideology or religious leader that comes along, rather than dedicate themselves to the faith they were baptized in.

If you were to ask my advice this is what I would say: every day spend some time reading a book which acts as nourishment for the mind. Not just any book but suitable books, books which meet at least these two requirements: sound doctrine (this is the same as saying that it is in keeping with the teaching of the Church) and intelligibility (it is suited to the intelligence and training of the reader). If a person wants to learn physics he does not go to Jules Verne or some modern science-fiction writer; he looks for books written by physicists, preferably by physicists of good standing.

That's just common sense. Well then, if someone wants to get a deeper understanding of his faith or simply a better knowledge of the gospel and he takes up articles about theology-fiction or religious sociology, he is being very stupid. Not only will he not increase his knowledge, but he is liable to mess up the little knowledge he had when he started. As regards the second requirement, you need only remember what we

were saying about the geometry textbook for the twelve-year-old and the fourth-year math student.

"You shall love the Lord your God with all your mind." An adequate knowledge of the faith which is at least on a par with your secular knowledge is not a luxury.

You are free, and you can read or not read. But don't forget that, because you are free, you have to answer for what you do... and what you fail to do. The use of freedom, which has been given you so that you can love, involves supreme responsibility before God. The judgment of God, the particular judgment, is no theory; it is not something we can choose or reject. It is an event which we all have to confront as soon as death comes.