**The Game of God**

**By Tom Dorsel**

Some years ago, a student in my psychology class sighed in anguish, “Don’t make me think, just give me the answer.”  Of course, this took me aback as a teacher, but also because**“**thinking” is my hobby.  I love to think!

If I go out to a restaurant alone, for example, I don’t take a book.  I take a pencil and a small notepad to jot down pros and cons of some decision I have to make.

If I am the one to start a conversation, I don’t ask, “What have you been *doing* lately?”  I ask, “What have you been *thinking* about lately?”

Even with small children, you can ask them, “What’s been running around in your head today?  Or what have you been dreaming about?”

**Thinking about Religion**

Lent, the 40 days of preparation and penance leading up to Easter, offers a special time to think about religion.  Indeed, a whole area of study exists called *Philosophy of Religion*, which is basically where religion thinks, speculates and philosophizes about its own beliefs.

Pope John Paul II encouraged such activity in his encyclical, *Fides et Ratio*, which is Latin for *Faith and Reason*.  Seminaries historically have taught both theology (faith) and philosophy (reason).  However, Pope John Paul II felt that philosophy was not getting enough attention in recent years in both seminaries and universities, and he called for its reemergence.

So, I decided to accept the good pontiff’s invitation to think about my religion, to reason about my faith.  I do not put forth my thinking as the doctrine of any particular religion, just my own personal thoughts.  And, remember, we are allowed to think.

**The Game of God**

With all due respect to the Almighty, trying to understand God is like playing an unfair game we have no chance of winning.  We are commissioned to try to decipher the undecipherable, fathom the unfathomable, and understand the incomprehensible.  Clearly, we are not going to win this sacred game!

But the interesting part is that we are invited to try.  We should not be afraid.  It’s okay to question, speculate, imagine, and philosophize.  We don’t have to simply submit to faith alone – we are allowed, even encouraged, to think about our religion and our faith in God.

**The Players**

Curiously, many “refuse to play the game” – they don’t even want to discuss the subject.  They might say they don’t believe in God, or they simply don’t like to talk about it.

Others “forfeit the game” – they just blindly believe whatever they are told and refuse to think at all for themselves.

Still others “take the game too seriously” – such as ideological extremists, crusaders and radical religious groups.

And, then, there are those who “welcome the game,” enjoy the challenge and are not afraid to play – such as philosophers, theologians and normal people, like you and me, who are not afraid to think.

**Why a Game?**

Pope John Paul II encouraged people of all religions and cultures, East and West, to come together in pursuit of a common core of beliefs and universal truth.  He felt that no one culture had all the answers, and that they all have made contributions in advancing our understanding of God and our existence.  Eloquently said, and, indeed, a sacred and holy endeavor.

So, why do I insist on calling this pursuit a game?  Because our culture understands games!  Games are accessible to everybody; we are encouraged to participate; they are healthy, fun and not reserved for just a special elite.  Games are viewed as contributing to our development, as well as adding excitement, even fulfillment, to our lives.

Now, shouldn’t the “Game of God” be viewed in much the same way – accessible, participative, healthy, even fun?   And not reserved for just a special elite, like philosophers, theologians, academicians and the clergy.

I might even be so bold as to end with a respectful paraphrase of John’s Gospel:  “In the beginning was the game, and the game was with God, and the game was God.”  God gave us the game, put us in the game, and wants us to play the game, without worrying ourselves to death about possible blunders, misplays or poor strategies.   We are to play as well as we can, and get as far as we can in understanding God, rather than sitting meekly on the sidelines worrying about losing or offending God or violating our religion.  God wants us to get into the action and play the game until the Kingdom comes, and then we can all find out how we did.

P.S.  While religious matters are not the sole focus of this column, I may continue with this theme into my next column by offering an *example* of playing “The Game of God.”

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