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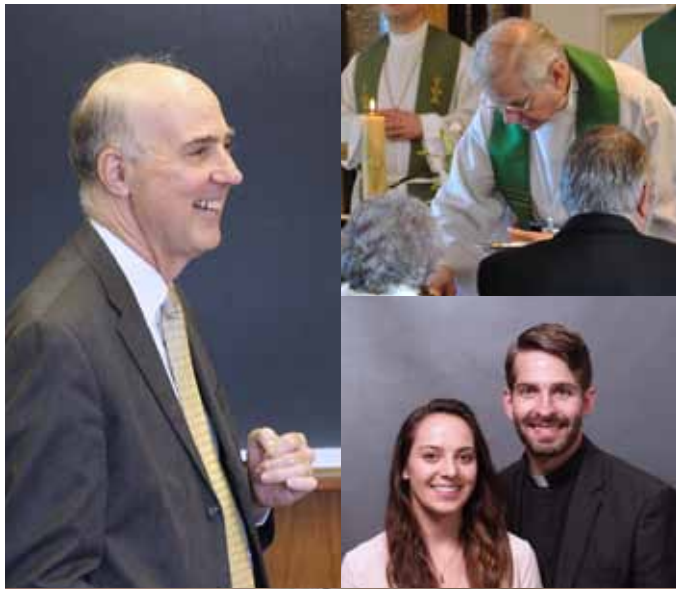
I have come to the realization that the young secular humanists do not simply want Church to be a weekly social event akin to pop culture. Those who inquire want to be permeated by the Holy. They want deep and symbolic meaning to waft around them like a sweet and unique fragrance different from the world.

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People often torment themselves trying to find out what God’s will is for their life. Some people even think that if they try to listen to God speaking in their hearts and conclude that He wants them to do one thing, but then that thing does not succeed—in this case they think they have sinned and need to repent, since they did not obey God’s will! To them I would respond with *Sola Scriptura* (Scripture Alone).

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Does God Speak in Your Heart?

Benjamin T. G. Mayes

Does God speak to us in our hearts when we pray or when we are making a tough decision? On the one hand, it is possible that God gives us various good desires. If you women felt that you wanted to become a commissioned church worker (such as a deaconess), that is a good desire, and God might have put that desire in your heart. If you men felt that you wanted to become a pastor or a commissioned church worker, that is a good desire, and God might have stirred that up. It is similar for other good works, such as if I desire to help the urban poor. But this desire should not be confused with God’s command or God’s call. The command or call comes later, through human beings, through the Church.

People often torment themselves trying to find out what God’s will is for their life. Some people even think that if they try to listen to God speaking in their hearts, conclude that He wants them to do one thing, but then that thing does not succeed—in this case they think they have sinned and need to repent, since they did not obey God’s will! To them I would respond with *sola Scriptura* (Scripture Alone). If God has not set it forth in His Word as applying to you in the moral Law or in your specific vocation, then it is not a sin.

Martin Luther encountered people who thought that God spoke to them in their hearts apart from the Bible, preaching, absolution, Baptism, and the Lord’s Supper. In his 1537 Smalcald Articles, part of our Christian *Book of Concord*, he wrote: “God does not want to deal with us in any other way than through the spoken Word and the Sacraments. Whatever is praised as from the Spirit—without the Word and Sacraments—is the devil himself” (SA III VIII 10).¹ Yet elsewhere in the *Book of Concord*, Philipp Melancthon states that further prophecy after the apostolic era is possible (Ap XXIII 3; XXVII 1–4). That is, our Lutheran fathers in faith believed that God had given further information and revelations even after the apostolic era. Nevertheless, such revelations

had to be evaluated and judged, not just accepted by faith, and they do not add to the Law or Gospel. “Beloved, do not believe every spirit, but test the spirits, whether they are of God; because many false prophets have gone out into the world” (1 John 4:1).² So, then, how should they be evaluated?

When Luther lectured on Genesis from 1535–45, he came to Genesis 28:16, Jacob’s dream at Bethel, and spoke on revelations given in dreams (AE 5:236–41). He points out that:

1. Dreams, signs, and omens happen not just to believers but also to unbelievers, so they are not signs of being a true Christian.
2. Yet these are often sent by the true God.
3. These dreams must be distinguished between physical-political and spiritual-churchly.
4. The physical-political dreams must be evaluated based on whether they correspond to facts and whether you are in a governmental vocation.
5. The spiritual-churchly dreams must be evaluated based on whether they correspond to the Word of God.

This is an issue of *Sola Scriptura*. If we want to know God’s will for our life, we look to the Bible as the only source for God’s

commands and saving revelation. We do not look for Him to speak elsewhere. He has given us His Word, which contains the Law and the Gospel. He wants to forgive us our sins for Christ’s sake and give us the Holy Spirit (Gospel). He wants us to live lives of love according to the Ten Commandments within our roles in family, country, and church (Law).

Beyond that He gives us freedom. He does not want us to feel guilty over things that He has not revealed in Holy Scripture. He does not want us to take comfort from things that He has not done for us in Christ. If we find other revelations nowadays, we must “test the spirits to see if they are from God.” If God has not revealed His will in Scripture, then we should not feel guilty one way or the other in making a choice. But if God puts good desires in our hearts, leading us back to Himself in Holy Scripture and the Church—what a gift that is! ▲

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1. Paul Timothy McCain and Edward Engelbrecht, eds., *Concordia: The Lutheran Confessions*, 2nd ed. (St. Louis, MO: Concordia Publishing House, 2005), 281.
2. *The New King James Version* (Nashville: Thomas Nelson, 1982).