

The Preference Test

Father Richard Veras

I was once teaching a morality class in a Catholic school when a student was offended that I spoke of God's existence with certainty. He felt it was insensitive to those who are not certain about God. I was dumbfounded. I wondered if the cutting edge of our current cultural atmosphere threatens to forbid certainty about God to be expressed even by a professed believer teaching in a religious institution.

The life that's in us

That evening I thought, "How can I express the truth of Christianity, even to those who are offended by the truth?" I decided I would count on their hearts, that very core of their being that, I am certain, is made in God's image. In James Baldwin's play *Blues for Mister Charlie*, one character says that belief in God is not up to you, it's up to the "life that's in you," and the "life that's in you... believes in God."

The test has to do with your desires. The last question asks whether the test is easy or hard. To my surprise, many students have responded that the test was hard, because they are not accustomed to looking sincerely at their own desires. How many of us do not look at our own experience without first subjecting it to the prism (prison?) of our ideologies or the influences exerted upon us by the cultural claims that presently prevail?

It is my hope that those who have an aversion to truth will find it interesting, and thus worthy of further consideration, that the Christian claim seems to correspond to all of our human desires, while the atheist proposal levels them, and the agnostic position leaves them floating in limbo. Is the life that is in us trying to tell us the truth? Do we dare to trust it?

PREFERENCE TEST

Answer the following questions from your own experience. Please answer sincerely.

PLEASE NOTE: You are not being asked which possibility you think is true, or which you believe, but which you would prefer, whether or not you think it is true or believe it.

- 1) **A.** When someone you love dies, they are dead and that's it. You will never see them again.
- B.** When someone you love dies, they somehow live on and you have the possibility of seeing them again, because when you die, you will also somehow live on.

Which would you prefer? Choose A or B and give a reason for your choice.

- 2) **A.** Your desire for happiness will find an answer. You will desire more and be given more and you are promised that this will go on for ever.
- B.** Your desire for happiness will last for your biological life; it might be answered sometimes, but it will die when your life ends.

Which would you prefer? Choose A or B and give a reason for your choice.

- 3) **A.** You are loved.
B. You are not loved.

Which would you prefer? Choose A or B and give a reason for your choice.

- 4) **A.** There is a God who created all of reality and who loves you like a Father and who wants you to exist.
B. Life is accidental, outside of what you see and touch, there is Nothing that cares if you exist.

Which would you prefer? Choose A or B and give a reason for your choice.

- 5) **A.** Your value depends on your abilities. The greater your abilities are, the more important you are. You are more important than people who can't do as much or as well as you. People who have greater abilities than you are more valuable and more important than you. When you lose your abilities, your value will diminish.
B. Your value comes from the fact that there is a God who wants you to exist. So even when your abilities are not the best and when other people don't think you are important, he still loves and values you. Thus, you are always of infinite value.

Which would you prefer? Choose A or B and give a reason for your choice.

- 6) **A.** God exists, true love exists, but in this life he, and his love, can never be known.
B. God exists, true love exists, God and his love can be known and experienced in this life.

Which would you prefer? Choose A or B and give a reason for your choice.

- 7) **A.** Your existence is summed up in your biology. Everything about you is dictated by your physical and chemical makeup. There is nothing about you that science, at some point, will not be able to figure out, and perhaps even reproduce.
- B.** Beyond your biology, there is something about you that is mysterious and could never be subject to any analysis. Your existence is irreducible to any measure because something at the core of your being is somehow connected to the infinite, i.e., you are ultimately immeasurable.

Which would you prefer? Choose A or B and give a reason for your choice.

- 8) Was this test easy or hard? Give reasons for your answer.

Fighting against the life

After giving the test I went over it with the students, and an argument occurred at the very first question. The boy who was offended by certainty regarding faith in God opted for choice “A”, i.e., he preferred that when a beloved friend or family member dies, the person would remain dead, never to be seen again. I questioned him about this. What does it mean to say that you love someone, yet you never want to see that person again? The very thought made no sense! Could we at least agree on this “little” truth? I bantered back and forth with this student much to the interest and, at times, the amusement of his classmates. At length the boy said to me very forcefully, “Father, I don’t want to want something that is not going to happen!”

As soon as he said that, the other students sat back in their chairs, because they knew that the arguing was over. For, with that statement, the boy revealed that indeed he would want to see a departed loved one again; he just didn't want to admit it. He wanted to ignore his desire in order to hold intact his ideology. He was fighting against the life that is in him, that life that somehow knows that love is stronger than death.

It is this life, deep within the heart of every human being, that can never be completely vanquished by ideology and that longs for the proclamation of Christ; but so many of us are habitually alienated from this life, from these most elementary desires. Let us pray that the Truth will penetrate our various ideological prisons, and set us free.

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