

Grains of caring

By Katharine Bird
NC News Service

Two brothers worked together on the family farm. One was married and had a large family. The other was single.

At day's end, the brothers shared everything equally, produce and profit.

Then one day the single brother said to himself, "It's not right that we should share the produce equally and the profit too. I'm all alone and my needs are simple."

So each night he took a sack of grain from his bin and crept over the field between their houses, dumping it into his brother's bin.

Meanwhile, the married brother said to himself, "It is not right that we should share...equally. After all, I'm married and I have my wife to look after me and my children for years to come. My brother has no one, and no one to take care of his future."

So each night he too took a sack of grain and dumped it into his single brother's bin.

Both men were puzzled for years because their supply never dwindled.

Then, one dark night, the two brothers ran into each other. Slowly it dawned on



them what was happening. They dropped their sacks and embraced one another.

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That rabbinical tale appears in Father William Bausch's book, "Storytelling, Imagination and Faith," (Twenty-Third Publications). The story makes a vital point about what can motivate the human will in the decisions people make.

The two brothers were motivated by love and concern for each other. Both acted as they did for years without counting the personal cost.

But the human will is not always motivated by love.

In Masterpiece Theater's presentation on public television of "The Jewel in the Crown," British officer Ronald Merrick is portrayed as a nasty bigot.

Merrick is motivated by hatred, anger and the need to get even. He is ruthless and conniving.

"What can people do when faced with perplexing situations that require making a choice?...An old maxim says 'Only a fool is guided by himself.'"

In one scene Merrick enters a psychiatrist's office intent on looking into the confidential files of a woman he has decided to marry. Rebuffed, he threatens to blackmail the psychiatrist's assistant, a young soldier with a secret. Motivated by fear, the soldier allows Merrick access to the file.

Merrick makes decisions that cause pain and misery for others.

"The human will is marvelous," Father Francis Kelly said in a recent interview. He is director of the Religious Education Department at the National Catholic Educational Association in Washington, D.C.

The will can be molded to make wrong and damaging choices. But it also can be motivated to make beneficial choices.

"It is a fact of people's experience that they have options in life," Father Kelly said.



"Sometimes it's clear" that one choice is in line with gospel teachings. "Other times, the choice isn't so easy," he added. Choices can fall into a gray area.

"Then too," the priest continued, "traditional Catholic moral theology realizes there are many factors which mitigate free will." People's freedom of choice is hampered by "emotional pressures, the passions, even fear," he said.

What can people do when faced with perplexing situations that require making a choice? Father Kelly stressed the value of a "process of discernment." An old maxim says, "Only a fool is guided by himself," he added.

This discernment process involves "consultation with others, seeking advice, prayer and reflection," Father Kelly said.

"If faith is the driving force," Father Kelly concluded, Christians "will choose the long-term good over the short-term appealing good."

(Ms. Bird is associate editor of Faith Today.)

A wish is

By Sister Prudence Allen, RSM
NC News Service

What is the human will? The will is a remarkable gift of human life. It is the power we have in our intellect to make decisions and to transform them into action. This is the gift that makes love possible.

St. Augustine, a fifth-century philosopher and bishop in Africa, developed a theory about the relation of free will to Christian life. He based this on his own struggle to become free in relation to God.

There are two central aspects of his theory:

—We must learn to will with our whole will.

—We need to ask God to help us do this — especially if we have developed negative habits or even addictions.

All of us have differences in our personal lives which keep us from giving our will the total power it is capable of. Augustine believed it was his own nature that most fully blocked his freedom.

Augustine chose an example from his own life to help illustrate this theory in the candid "Confessions" he wrote.

He confessed that his life was driven by a strong attachment to sexual pleasure. Not married, he lived for many years with a woman. Then, driven by worldly

ambition, he set

away in order to an heiress.

new fiancée was enough to marry. He took another

Years later he reflected back on he described his

— caught in a from desire to

How, he was possible to break

difficult situation change but for so. He described

observing:

"The new was strong enough old. So these

one old, one conflict and between my soul apart.

Augustine described as a halfhearted his way of life

sions," he revealed details of his prayer

"I had prayed and continued For I was afraid

answer my prayer cure me too soon. Augustine recalled this prayer was

he did not want clear act of will understand that

"No more was

The power

By Father John Castelot
NC News Service

When the ancient Israelites were about to enter the Promised Land, Moses delivered a series of sermons to them, spelling out the conditions of their relationship with God.

The Israelites, Moses made clear, could accept or reject God's offer of love. Acceptance involves a commitment on their part.

Toward the end of the last sermon, Moses made the choice confronting the people crystal clear:

"I have set before you life and death, the blessing and the curse. Choose life, then, that you and your descendants may live, by loving the Lord, your God, heeding his voice, and holding fast to him" (Deuteronomy 30, 19-20a).

Having endowed people with the power to make choices, God always respects human freedom. To force people to conform to his will, to order events in such a way as to absolve people of their responsibility, would dehumanize

them. For freedom

human beings

The power

— to exercise

is a precious asset

We can use it

or to destroy

rightly, free choice

God's own creation

Jesus himself

or a robot. He

deliberate, often

This is clear from

the temptation

the agony in the

Choices always

People are torn

at once. That

will power often

exciting possibilities

not always easy

There are people

they can account

they have enough

Often this leads

ment, frustration

St. Paul gave

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Speaking not in

in that of all h

"I cannot even