

Obstacle to Discernment of God's Will: Satan, Evil Spirit, or Reason misled by Self-love?

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Christianity, as a theistic religion, defines spirituality as obedience (i.e., hearing and doing) God's Word/Will, not without discussion, dialogue and even debate. This process of hearing and doing implies a mental procedure known technically as *discernment* which ensures that it is genuinely God's word/will that one hears and executes. The question discussed in this paper is who or what stands in the way of discernment. The general answer is "Satan" a rational creature, who goes by many other names. The Author asks whether it is necessary to have recourse to such an external agent and proposes an alternative explanation as a mere *hypothesis*, namely that the "serpent" mentioned in Genesis 3,1-24 need not refer to an agent outside the human person (such as Satan) but *symbolizes* human reason misled by greed or inordinate passion. This hypothesis avoids the contradiction between the belief in all-loving and all-powerful God on the one hand and an irredeemably wicked rational being either created by God or having an independent existence.

Keywords: Christian theology, serpent, devil, Satan.