

**32963 Faith Column – 4/11/11**  
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### *Tests*

We've been watching with fascination as the dictator-toppling, society-shaping, government-reshuffling events are unfolding in the Middle East. Commentators have offered us many perspectives on the likely causes for these changes. And they speculate endlessly about the shape of the Middle Eastern world that will emerge from all this upheaval.

Of course, many are pondering the role which religion has and will play as the nations reconstruct themselves under new leadership. Each of the Middle Eastern nations which forms a new government will need to determine how significant religion will be in its functioning. How tolerant will the new governments be of minority religious viewpoints and practices?

We've heard commentators compare the revolutions of the Middle East to our American revolution. They wonder if the linkage of democracy and religious freedom, which we know in the United States, is a likely outcome for the emerging governments of the Middle East.

And if meaningful democracy results from this current turmoil, what of the electorate? How will any individual, concerned to act in accordance with God's will, discern that will for himself or herself – especially as God's will may be sought regarding the election of new leaders and the development of new structures, new laws, new policies?

Only time will answer these intriguing questions. But all the speculation about the future, and the role of religion in shaping it, got us thinking. How do any of us, who long to act in accordance with God's will, determine how best to accomplish that goal? How do you do it? This is not a question for tumultuous times and places only, but for us, every day.

For example, if someone offers you an argument in favor of supporting some action or another on the premise that God would support it, how do you weigh the likelihood that the premise is true? Do you have any tests to employ in evaluating life's options against God's intentions? Some would cite sources of authority which help them, perhaps Biblical passages or church teachings. And these are critically important for many of us as believers.

But we also appreciate a test for evaluating our religiously motivated decisions that Father Richard Lawrence, a Jesuit priest, said that he learned from his mother. He said her lifelong "litmus test" for any assertions about what God would want was this question: If this were true, what kind of person would God be? Lawrence's mother felt her test ferreted out the mean-spirited and silly assertions, because they were unworthy of the God they supposedly represented.

A simple test, perhaps, but not a bad place to start. Maybe it's a test we could all use. If we began every deliberation about our own actions and decisions by first considering the nature and character of the God we serve, we might not be so likely, either individually or collectively, to get off course.

As our world continues to reshape itself, we certainly hope thoughtful, faithful people will employ meaningful tests as they deliberate about actions to take in God's name.