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# THE TRUE VINE AND ITS BRANCHES

*by*

REV. EDWARD LEEN  
C.S.Sp., M.A., D.D.

“Abide in Me, and I in you. As the branch cannot bear fruit of itself, unless it abide in the vine, so neither can you unless you abide in Me. I am the vine, you the branches: he that abideth in Me and I in him, the same beareth much fruit; for without Me you can do nothing.”

—*St. John, xiv. 45*



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† PATRICK CARDINAL HAYES

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*To*  
DOCTOR J. B. MAGENNIS,  
TO WHOSE MEDICAL SKILL AND CARE  
IS DUE,  
UNDER GOD,  
THE PHYSICAL HEALTH WITHOUT WHICH  
THIS WORK  
COULD NEVER HAVE BEEN COMPLETED.



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THE TRUE VINE  
AND ITS BRANCHES



## INTRODUCTION

Two views of the social bonds which should bind man to his fellows tend to divide the world into two opposing and bitterly hostile camps at the present hour. On the one side there is an intense, narrow and exaggerated Nationalism. The characteristic of this form of human aberration is to exalt unduly the accidents of blood and territory. A mystic importance is attached to those portions of the earth's surface that may happen to be occupied by a particular people. The qualities and the mentality developed through historical experiences and climatic conditions are conceived as being not only necessarily good in themselves but as imparting a definite superiority over other people, less fortunately situated. Whatever can be discovered to be, or even imagined to be, distinctive of the race comes to be regarded as an ultimate good. There is but a short step from this to making the race be man's final end. The individual citizen is taught that his glory is to be won by sacrificing himself to promote the might and the exaltation of the state to which he may happen to belong. Worship of the nation as organized into a state replaces the worship of God. The state becomes the supreme being.

A patronizing attitude towards other peoples, often shading off into one of disdain and, all too frequently, hardening into positive hostility, is the natural consequence of this ultra-nationalism. Friendship can

exist only between equals. There can be no real friendship between a state and its neighbors, if one people assumes an inborn superiority over the other. If material strength belongs to those states that regard themselves as representing the best that humanity can offer, it is easy to understand that they will provoke active dislike on the part of the weaker peoples. Suspicion, jealousy, rivalry and fear will create estrangement between the great powers. Solidarity amongst the peoples of the earth cannot develop in such an atmosphere of mutual dislike, antagonism and jealousy. The only ties possible between the nations in these circumstances are ones of a purely juridical nature. Alliances based on self-interest, or on fear, are the only available substitute for the mutual trust, esteem and friendship based on the possession of a common heritage.

Over against this extreme nationalism, there rears itself a pseudo-Catholicism. This is Internationalism. Scorning the ties of race, treating as wholly artificial the boundaries which nature and time and accident have set up between the diverse nations, it recognizes no bond between men except the bond of "class." It dreams of a grand unification of the world on the basis of "class-consciousness." The unity derived from this sense of belonging to a class which knows no artificial frontiers and finds itself with the same sympathies, the same antipathies, the same wrongs, and the same rights under every clime, is conceived as preparatory to another unity more perfect, when all men shall look upon themselves as being equal members of a race, whose frontiers shall



be the frontiers of the habitable globe. This supreme unification of mankind will be achieved as soon as the *raison d'être* of "class" shall have disappeared, through the complete overthrow of the forces in the world that stand for inequality, privilege, class distinctions, and national diversity.

The spirit begotten of ultra-nationalism sets itself in irreconcilable opposition to that which finds its inspiration in Internationalism. Reconciliation between them would seem utterly impossible. As creeds believed in with ardent conviction, and propagated with intense fanaticism, they are, indubitably, mutually exclusive. But the elements of truth that lie embedded in these false theories of social relationship can, in fact, be preserved, and made complementary, in a higher synthesis. The Catholic Church, in its dogma of the Mystical Body of Christ, presents such a synthesis. This central truth of the Christian faith shows how the world solidarity dreamed of by the Internationalists can be realized, without in the least degree impairing the national distinctions which are of such paramount value in the eyes of the ultra-Nationalists.

The unity of mankind was very dear to the heart of Christ. His avowed intention of consecrating His life to effecting it brought Him into violent conflict with the fanatical exclusiveness of His people. His mind dwells insistently on it on the night of the Last Supper. It is a sustained note running through all the changes of thought that mark His last injunctions to His disciples. In the numerous communications that He is obliged to crowd into these last

moments, He, again and again, returns to this great objective of His life: that all men destined to be His followers, should be one. "And not for them only (i.e. the Apostles) do I pray, but for them also who through their word shall believe in me; *that they all may be one*, as Thou, Father, in me, and I in thee, that they also may be one in us." <sup>1</sup> It was not then, for the first time, that Jesus revealed His great longing to bring to an end the divisions which rent mankind into so many warring elements. The disruption to which He was so keenly sensitive, and for which He grieved so much, was seen clearly, by Him, in its cause. It was sin that had disintegrated humanity. It was His mission to destroy sin and to undo its effects. Of these effects, disunion was not the least baneful. His role was to be the vital bond, linking all men together in the unity of a common life. St. Paul gives us an insight into this truth, saying: "But now in Christ Jesus, you, who some time were afar off, are made nigh by the blood of Christ. For He is our peace, Who hath made both one, and breaking down the middle wall of partition, the enmities in His flesh—that He might make the two in himself into one new man, making peace, and might reconcile both to God in one body by the Cross, killing the enmities in Himself."<sup>2</sup> The Saviour had long before clothed the same thought in one of His most gracious images: "I am the Good shepherd . . . and other sheep I have, that are not of this fold, them also I *must bring*, and they shall hear my

<sup>1</sup> St. John XVII, 20-21.

<sup>2</sup> Eph. II, 13-16.

voice, and there shall be *one fold* and one shepherd." <sup>3</sup>

An understanding of the scheme of redemption sheds clear light on the reasons why the question of unity was such a preoccupation on the part of the Saviour. The redemption of mankind had been decreed by God. Those who had fallen from grace were to be restored to divine favor and brought back to their Heavenly Father. But men were not to make their return as isolated units, each treading his own path. There was only one road of return appointed. The Sacred Humanity was, in virtue of the Hypostatic Union, by the very nature of things, united with God. All other human beings were to effect contact with God, by effecting contact with the Sacred Humanity of Christ. As incorporated with Him, *and only as incorporated with Him*, the divinity was to become accessible to them. Drawn to "oneness" in Christ, they are necessarily drawn to "oneness" with one another. Salvation is for all men of all time. Hence this vital solidarity is meant to embrace people of every nation, every color, and every degree of civilization. By the Sacrifice of Christ it is not *men* that are restored to God, it is *man*. The process of salvation is a process of unification. The saved are Catholics, that is, internationalists, in an eminent manner. The more perfectly a person enters into the plan of redemption, and the more fully its effects are worked out in him, the more Catholic he becomes. An imperfect spirituality, on the other hand, is characterized by limitation of out-

<sup>3</sup> St. John X, 14-16.

look and narrowness of sympathy. Christ ardently desired that men should be "one," because the perfection of their "oneness" marks the measure in which they participate in the life of grace that He came to communicate to them. The ideal aimed at by Jesus is the consolidation of all mankind into one single living body, with Himself as its Head. The unifying principle of this body is that supernatural life, which, contained in Him in its fullness, is allowed, as a reward of His Sacrifice, to extend itself to, and flow through, every soul that wills to adhere to Him. In this manner every soul, whilst developing its own individual spiritual life, becomes a living cell in an organism which it helps to build up, and in whose total life it shares.

The members of a body are one in that they combine to constitute one organism. The "oneness" is organic not numerical. The eye and the hand are one when they are vivified by the same vital principle and subserve the interests of the same living body. They would not be one by being the same. If the eye were the hand, and if the ear were the eye, and so on for all the other members, there would be no body. There would not even be any member. The eye and the ear, losing their individual functions and characteristics, and sinking together into an imaginary sameness, would cease to be anything recognizable. It is a fatal error to confuse unity with sameness or a dull material uniformity. A living body is one in a way that a heap of stones, all exactly alike, are not one. Unity, in a living sense, so far from being opposed to diversity, presupposes it.

A true unity cannot be realized unless diversity be respected. What is not beautiful cannot have a true human value. Beauty postulates unity in variety. Dull repetition of the same note is the death of harmony. The harmony of mankind demands a multiplicity of nations, each contributing its own characteristic note to the universal concert. Nations are not the natural enemies, but the natural complements, of one another. The good of the world is most perfectly achieved when each people is allowed freely to develop its own peculiar gifts and its own distinctive qualities. If this ideal were realized so that each nation, using its powers rightly, developed along its own lines to the best expression of itself, then the whole earth would present a pattern of beauty, in which the natural diversities would harmoniously blend with, and enhance, one another. The grace of Christ's Headship contains in Itself the power to compass this dazzling ideal, if only men would consent to utilize it. The Catholicity aimed at by Christianity, far from necessitating the obliteration of natural boundaries, rather favors the maintenance of regional variety. Not only national, but even local patriotisms, find a congenial atmosphere in Catholicity. The spirit of the Church is not merely to tolerate but even to consecrate them. Christianity combines in a marvelous way the most complete centralization and the most liberal decentralization. The best ideals of Nationalism and of Internationalism find themselves amply fulfilled in the higher synthesis of Catholicity.

In Christ this synthesis is effected. The bond that

He devised to unify men, was not a mere juridical one. A mysterious life existing in Him, and communicating itself to all His adherents, was the principle of unity. Enduring contact with Him is needful if men are to be in harmonious and organic relations with one another. Hence there is demanded some kind of perpetual presence of Christ amongst mankind cementing their unity. This precisely was the scheme conceived in the Divine Mind from the beginning and ordained as a remedy for the Fall.

In fact, the life of Jesus on earth has two distinct phases. The first began at Nazareth and pursued its course to Calvary, or perhaps, it might be more accurate to say, to the Ascension. It was characterized by pain and conflict. He confronted the forces of sin at every step. These forces massed themselves against Him. The decisive struggle was fought out on the Hill of Sacrifice. Jesus was seemingly overborne. But it was speedily revealed that His apparent defeat was a triumphant success, bringing about the utter overthrow of the powers of evil. The Saviour died, but death did not long maintain its hold over Him. Its grip was speedily and decisively shaken off. God did not permit Him, who loved Him so loyally and with such utter devotion, to see corruption.<sup>4</sup> Christ rose on the third day. The entombment was not the end of His life on earth. It was but the conclusion of that life in its physical or mortal phase.<sup>5</sup>

<sup>4</sup> Ps. XV, 10.

<sup>5</sup> Another work, *Why The Cross?* (Sheed and Ward, London and New York, 1938) dealt with the mortal life of the Redeemer. It analyzed that life as a brilliant plan of campaign, thought out by God, for the purpose of vanquishing the forces of evil and undoing the work of Adam. The final chapters treating of the Sacri-

But the physical sacrificial death on Calvary purchased for the Redeemer another kind of existence in this world, to last until the end of time.

After Calvary, began Christ's mystical life on earth. Through that life He lives, and works, and suffers, and energizes, in the living members that His death formed to Him. Theology teaches that the Living Body of Christ, present under the sacramental species, is a symbol of the life and unity of His Mystical Body. It is natural then that it should be possible to retrace in the vicissitudes of the life of the Mystical Body the features of the life set forth in detail in the Gospels. In the fifteen chapters which make up the present work there are set forth the chief characteristics of this mysterious life of Christ prolonged in the Christian.

The fundamental disposition of the soul of Jesus in the presence of God was one of unqualified docility, finding its completest expression in the sacrifice of the Cross. In the Mass, which is the sacrifice of the Mystical Body, is found the same disposition expressed in a manner which is a sacramental presentation of the drama of Calvary. The Christian who enters wholeheartedly into the spirit of his incorporation with Christ and possesses in himself the mind of Christ towards life's circumstances, expresses through the Mass his oneness with Jesus in readiness to obey God unto death. All Christians, as members of Christ, unite with their Head in this offering of

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the sacrifice of Calvary showed that the reward of that sacrifice was the formation of the Mystical Body of Christ. The present work takes up the theme at the point where the former ended.



the morning sacrifice. The perfection of their co-offering is according to the degree in which they reflect in their souls, the humility and the obedience of the Saviour.

The life of the Christian in Christ is a mystical life and as such requires its appropriate food. The Body and Blood of the Saviour, administered in the Sacrament of the Eucharist, constitute the divine nourishment which sustains, restores, and intensifies the vitality of the Christian mystical life, and which builds up, and brings to its perfection, that great Mystical Organism which extends over the whole earth. Jesus, after the multiplication of the loaves, revealed that the body ultimately to be formed to Him would find its nourishment in this manner. "The bread that I will give you is my flesh for the life of the world . . . for my flesh is meat indeed, and my blood is drink indeed. He that eateth my flesh and drinketh my blood abideth in me, and I in him." <sup>6</sup> Two chapters are devoted to a study of the Blessed Eucharist and its effects.

A living body demands an atmosphere in which to exist. Supernatural prayer is the atmosphere which is congenial to the Mystical Body of Christ. The great need and the great desire of that Body is to grow in Christ and thus enter into fuller possession of God. True prayer is the expression of that desire. Several pages are given to an analysis of the nature of prayer and of the conditions on which its efficacy depends.

As the Saviour's path through His mortal life was

<sup>6</sup> St. John VI, 52-57.

strewn with thorns, so is the path along which He passes in the unfolding of His mystical life. Suffering is the lot of the adherents of Christ. If the Christian is to profit by the trials he is called on to endure, he must have some initiation into the mystery of pain. It is not to be regarded as an evil thing that must be avoided at all costs. Neither is it to be an object of morbid satisfaction. When looked upon, and accepted, as an extension of the purifying and saving cross of Christ to Christ's members, then, and then only, does it produce a great transforming effect on the soul. Suffering, borne in union with Christ, purifies, spiritualizes and adapts for the process of divinization. The ninth chapter treats this question of suffering. Closely linked with suffering is self-denial. This is the strong ascetic discipline that the Saviour imposes on all His members and insists on as the condition of walking in His footsteps. The nature of self-denial and its distinction from mortification are treated of in the tenth and eleventh chapters.

The maturity of Christianity is found in the dispositions of spiritual childhood. This was the ideal of soul traced by the Saviour Himself for the apostles. The childlike attitude of soul is not one that is easy to analyze. It has all the intangibility of the utterly simple. It is mysterious as a child is mysterious. Objectivity and trustful dependence on God are, perhaps, its chief notes. Negatively it can be described as the absence of that independence of soul to which the pride of men so much inclines. It is a spirit that is impossible to capture unless one trains

oneself spiritually to live in the constant, all-pervading sense of a heavenly mother's solicitude, care and influence. Mother and child are correlative terms in the matter of supernatural childhood. A study of what the child is, necessarily calls for a study of what the mother is. The four concluding chapters are consecrated to the spiritual childhood of the consummate Christian and the supernatural maternity of Mary, Mother of men.

Reason and science and even ethics do not suffice to give a Christian contact with what is for him the underlying reality of his life on earth. That reality is the supernatural life and influence which streams from its fountain-head in Christ and penetrates over the whole earth to every soul that adheres to Him. The living organism that is knit together through that all-pervading vital current, does not disclose itself to any human tests. And yet, if the Christian is to live fully in the spirit of his vocation, he must regulate all his moral activities in the consciousness of being a living cell in that mighty organism. Reason will not enable him to do this. Faith has to come to the aid of reason. Under its light there shows forth clearly this mysterious hidden reality which is the divine and unifying principle in human things. "Faith is the evidence (that is, the clear manifestation) of things that appear not."<sup>7</sup> As the framework of the body stands revealed under the penetrating Röntgen rays, so the divine framework of regenerate humanity, namely, the Mystical Body, is laid bare under the penetrating rays of the light

<sup>7</sup> Heb. XI, 1.

of faith. It is seen not only in itself, but also in what it holds out of promise. The Christian forming one body with Christ, is drawn into the destiny of Christ. He suffers with Christ, and with Christ, he bursts the bonds of mortality and ascends into heaven, there to share in the glory of the Sacred Humanity. The Mystical Body is the guarantee to the Christian of his glory that is to be. For "God (who is rich in mercy) . . . hath quickened us *together* in Christ . . . and hath raised us up *together*, and hath made us sit *together* in the heavenly places through Christ Jesus."<sup>8</sup> The Mystical Body, as seen by the light of faith, is, in truth, "the substance of things to be hoped for."<sup>9</sup> The Christian must direct his steps through life guided by this vision of things. He must not allow himself to falter because the vision transcends all human reasonings, for the just man liveth not by reason, but by faith.<sup>10</sup>

<sup>8</sup> Eph. II, 4-6.

<sup>9</sup> Heb. XI, 1.

<sup>10</sup> Heb. X, 38. See Chapter VIII of this work.

## CHAPTER I

# ASSIMILATION TO JESUS

*"For whom He (God) foreknew, He also predestinated to be made conformable to the image of His Son."—Rom. VIII, 29.*

THE necessity that there is of using terms drawn from ordinary human experience, to describe the things of the Supernatural life, imposes certain precautions. Diligent attention must be paid to the limitations of sense that a word inevitably suffers when it is transferred from its function of naming things in the natural order, to naming things in the supernatural order. If the word, in its new role, is understood in all literalness, it becomes more apt to mislead than to enlighten. It is in this way that fundamental notions in religion become obscure or even deformed.

Our restoration to the favor of God, through the reconciling sacrifice of the Saviour, is termed a redemption. The blood shed on the Cross was a ransom, on payment of which mankind passed from the slavery of Satan to the freedom of the divine life. It was a picturesque or figurative manner of describing the process of salvation in an age familiar with the joyous ceremonial which marked the passage of men from the condition of slavery to that of freedom. When the slave became a free man, he acquired a new status, indicated by exterior signs

and carrying with it many legal rights. By the change he won a higher social condition but he did not necessarily become a better man. The difference in him was outward, not inward, legal not moral; it affected his civic condition not his personal character.

Far different is the notion of redemption as applied to the Christian. In the case of the neophyte, there is a revolution not merely in status but in quality. It is not simply that he acquires new rights: he becomes "a new creature." A new character with its appropriate powers, tendencies, tastes, aspirations, exigencies, is formed in him. The change is not so much in outward condition as in inward form. What is more it is something that is rather progressive than instantaneous. The moment the legal forms were complied with, the slave of the ancient world was fully a free man. The moment that, by baptism, the child of Adam is withdrawn from the thralldom of Satan, he is not fully redeemed. This is but the beginning of his salvation. Salvation lies not so much in an alteration in the relations in which other beings stand to him, as in a progressive alteration to take place in himself. It is true that after Baptism, God and God's adversary are otherwise to the soul than they were before, but this would be of little avail unless the soul were to become "other" in itself.

The child of Adam is not saved by means of a legal transaction and by mere compliance with a number of legal prescriptions. He is saved by a process of transformation, by becoming a man formed on a certain definite exemplar of true manhood. In plunging into the waters of baptism a person implicitly

commits himself to the achievement of excellence in moral and spiritual character. He engages himself to become a true man. Baptism might be termed an initial redemption. By it are deposited in the inner being of man those active vital principles, which, if made use of and given free play, will enable man to shake off the clinging vileness of his earth-born instincts and to force his way upwards into the light of heaven, thus achieving a true personality. The Christian vocation does not dispense a man from moral effort: rather it summons him to it. What Christianity supplies is not a substitute for personality, but a potent means to the achievement of personality. To respond fully to the Christian vocation, is to become fully a man. It was to this that St. Paul urged the Ephesians when he wrote: "I beseech you that you walk worthy of the vocation in which you are called."

In this matter the Christian enjoys a great advantage over those who lived under the old dispensation. The followers of the Law labored under a two-fold disability. They had not before them a living embodiment of the ideal man. But even if they had had this perfect pattern of human conduct, they would have been but very imperfectly able to reproduce its traits in themselves. Grace was given to them in limited measure. There was no dynamic force in the Law to aid them to attain the ideal. The Law could point out what was fitting in action but could not give them strength to achieve it. "For the Law brought nothing to perfection."<sup>1</sup> It could only hold

<sup>1</sup> Heb. VII, 19.



out hope that both itself and its ineffectiveness would one day yield place to a force strong enough to overcome the stubborn resistance that fallen human nature presents to its own betterment. Things changed with the coming of Christ. "For what the Law could not do, because it was without strength, owing to the flesh, God (has done) sending His own Son in the flesh, . . . that the justice of the Law might be fulfilled in us." <sup>2</sup> In Christ, the Christian has a model of perfect manhood in action. But Christ is not merely an inspiring ideal. He is an effective force which, if given free play in the Christian, is capable of impressing on him the form of the ideal which God, in creating man, had before His mind: the ideal of true manhood. In so far as a human person, co-operating with God's action, reflects that divine idea, in so far is he a real *man*. The Son of Mary reproduced in his earthly career, a faultless expression of God's idea of what a man should be. He was the perfect embodiment in action of God's thought. The human worth of all others is graded by the Creator, according to the faithfulness with which they reflect in their life, their principles of conduct, and their actions, the perfect Exemplar of human conduct. God wills men—in fact has predestinated the elect—"to be made conformable to the image of His Son."<sup>3</sup> Exacting this conformity He gives men all the means necessary to achieve it.

Jesus was the "Truth" in every application of the

<sup>2</sup> Rom. VIII, 3, 4.

<sup>3</sup> Rom. VIII, 29.

term. He is the "Truth" because He is the eternal living, adequate expression of the Godhead. He was the Word that intellectually expressed God fully. He is the "Truth" because He is the complete adequate expression of what man must be. Christ's human life has a twofold truth and a twofold beauty. It is the accurate translation into human terms of the life divine, that is, it is the earthly mirror of the divine morality. It is also, as has been pointed out, a perfect response to the divine ideal of what man should be.

Now God, setting out to embody, in a manner accessible to our perceptions, His conception of the perfectly human, could have chosen elements other than those He actually selected. An artist can, in diverse ways, and varied colors, make visible the forms of beauty, begotten of his creative genius. So God, aiming at presenting men with a masterpiece, expressing in vividness of coloring and clarity of form, His ideal of true manhood realized, could have made use of human materials other than those He actually employed. To exemplify the divine idea, rank might have been assumed rather than humble circumstances: comparative ease in preference to strict poverty: power and not weakness, and so on. The Son of God made man could have moved with the same moral perfection, the same distinction, the same ease, in human circumstances different, in every respect, from those that were His actual lot. Another kind of earthly career could equally well have procured God's glory and could have merited grace for men.

But, with an indefinite number of alternatives before Him, God chose that type of life which should prove eminently effective in securing man's salvation. Man's interests were consulted in the decisions of divine mercy and goodness. The career of obscurity, simplicity, poverty and suffering, chosen by Christ was one most appropriate to human needs. It is by the way he lives out his life on earth that man gains heaven. Christ chose the most ordinary, the most common life. He fulfilled God's good pleasure and exhibited moral and spiritual perfection in conditions accessible to the lowliest of men.

Jesus is the Way that leads to God. It is by living our life in the spirit in which He lived His, that we win the approval of God and progress in friendship with Him. Every Christian is obliged, by his vocation to the faith, to imitate Christ. Had the circumstances of the Saviour's life been such as could only be the lot of the "privileged" few, the ordinary man might consider himself dispensed for that reason from imitating Christ. But the extreme "ordinariness" of Christ's way of existence leaves no grounds for pleading this dispensation. All, no matter how circumstanced, no matter how lacking in worldly advantages, can aspire to copy the manner, the bearing and the ways of the Son of God. "Jesus," writes St. Thomas, "has been proposed as an example to men in all respects: hence it was needful that there should not appear in Him save what, by the common law of things, belongs to all."<sup>4</sup> Christ, in His daily humble duties, showed how it becomes

<sup>4</sup> S. Th. III, Q 39.a.3; ad. 3.

a child of God to bear himself in this world. Christians are children of God by adoption. To live worthily of their calling it is of obligation for them to acquire the manner of the royal house of God. Jesus has that manner in perfection, because He is the true Son of God and the perfect image of His Heavenly Father. Even in the most commonplace doings and experiences it is possible for a man to "put on Christ," as St. Paul exhorts his disciples to do, saying: "Put ye on the Lord Jesus Christ; and make not provision for the flesh in its concupiscences." <sup>5</sup>

This putting on of Christ is a work that cannot be accomplished in a day. Before the iron can be wrought to the required design, it must be made malleable in the fire. So too the soul of fallen man must be submitted to a long process before it can receive, under the action of the Holy Spirit, the form of Jesus. It must, in the fire of effort and suffering, lose the hard resistance of its inveterate egoism. To become conformed to Christ means to grow like Him in mind and in heart. Saint Paul insists on the necessity of this. "Let this mind be in you," he says, "which was also in the Christ Jesus." <sup>6</sup>

As the Christian develops in spirituality, he comes to realize ever more clearly to what an extent he is alien from the mind of Christ. The average man is prone to think that once he is converted from evil ways and has begun to lead a life free from disorder he has caught something of the spirit of the Lord.

<sup>5</sup> Rom. XIII, 14.

<sup>6</sup> Philipp. II, 5.

Yet what an abyss separated the "mentality" of the Apostles from that of their Divine Master even after they had spent three years at His school! Their thoughts were not His thoughts, nor their ways, His ways. Jesus is wholly supernatural in outlook. In His view everything human is subordinated to the necessity of attaining to the Beatific Vision. Each thing has value according as it leads to the ultimate possession of God. That is the measure He applies to the testing of all human things. To judge as He judges, to think as He thinks, to love what He loves, is to think and to judge and to love in a wholly supernatural manner. For Jesus, God alone was "good." He alone was worth desiring and seeking. Nothing could be regarded as in any way "good" unless it led to the possession of the "One Good."

Men do not easily attain to this simplicity of vision. Not the divine to be won, but the human to be satisfied, is commonly the motive of their actions and the inspiration of their judgments of value. There is a reason why this is so. At birth man receives a mind to whose vision the supernatural is wholly eclipsed. Grace operates to remove this blindness to divine things, which is an effect of Original Sin. The passing of the eclipse takes a long time.

Now, it is of great concern to God that we should share His views with regard to the function and purpose of all that constitutes our human life on earth. It is through life's experiences that we are to achieve our happiness. It is through them only that we gain God. But it is only by dealing with our life's cir-

cumstances as God would have us deal with them, that we fit ourselves to be intimate friends with God. That we associate easily with God, that we find ourselves at home with Him, it does not suffice for us to regulate our daily doings and sufferings by principles of right reason. If we are to share the divine intimacy, our acts must be inspired by principles of a divine order. Divine motives govern God's appreciations. Divine motives must govern ours if we are to find ourselves on harmonious terms with Him. This might seem an unattainable ideal for men, for whom it is much to be reasonable and all too usual to be led by passion.

Yet, it is not impossible, for God expects it of us, and He cannot expect the impossible. One day in the course of an instruction to the multitude, the Saviour said: "Be ye perfect as your Heavenly Father is perfect."<sup>7</sup> He uttered these words in the most ordinary tone, as if making the most casual remark. He gave this injunction as if its statement called for no unusual emphasis, and demanded no special comment. He spoke as one who would be surprised if His words excited surprise in His hearers. He did not give the impression of one who realized that He was making a bewildering demand. Yet bewildering it must have been, disheartening even, for the poor mortals listening to Him, so conscious of their human frailty and imperfection. This invitation to be like God is issued to all the followers of Jesus during all time and there are few that do not find

<sup>7</sup> St. Matt. V, 48.

it a hard saying. The many seek to evade it or explain it away.

In the long series of events that make up the supernatural history of man, there are many curious parallels and contrasts. In the very beginning of the story of mankind the first human beings heard words that sounded strangely like those of Jesus, on the occasion just referred to. To Adam and Eve it was said, "Be you as Gods knowing good and evil: aim at the divine excellence, emulate the Most High." ■ This was, in substance, the suggestion that was made to them. Strange to say they did not shrink from it. And yet their children shrink from a proposition made to them by the Saviour and couched in somewhat similar terms. Satan's promise was false. Our First Parents were too eager to listen to His suggestion and found themselves, as a result, stripped of the divine resemblance. He could not give them the likeness of God: he could but make them, like himself, the caricature of God. It is otherwise with Jesus. He can endow man with the likeness to God to which He invites him. It is not to the impossible that He encourages man to aspire. He does not bid him aim at the Power, the Impassivity and the Independence of the Almighty. It is to the Purity and Holiness of God, He urges him. It is in the spirit of his actions that He wishes him to resemble his Heavenly Father. In His own dealings with life He portrays, in action, the remote and inaccessible God; He gives a revelation of God acting humanly, doing human things in the way of God's doing. The

■ Gen. III, 5.

Saviour asserts this saying: "But the Father who abideth in Me, He doth the works."<sup>9</sup> And again in another connection He tells His hearers: "My Father worketh until now and I work. . . . The Son cannot do anything of Himself, but what He seeth the Father doing; *for what things soever He doth these the Son doth also in like manner.*"<sup>10</sup> Men cannot plead their powerlessness to be perfect as their Heavenly Father, on the grounds that He is beyond their ken. Jesus forestalled this objection. "Philip," He said, "he that seeth Me, seeth the Father also."<sup>11</sup> The Son of man came on earth and set before men in a vivid, palpable, and striking manner, an example of a life which, whilst remaining perfectly human, was eminently divine. He exhorts His followers to live this human-divine life. He assures them that in their efforts to shape their lives to His bidding, he will not only be before them as a model, but also within them as a force.

No mere human courage carried even to the highest degree could rise to the strength of soul needed to carry into practice the principles of life on which the Man-God acted. Mere conviction that His way and His conduct are most excellent and most worthy of imitation, is not sufficient for us. It is more disheartening than inspiring to have to approve and yet to be unable to imitate. And admiration that does not lead to imitation is a sterile thing. The Christian by his very vocation is called to ex-

<sup>9</sup> St. John XIV, 10.

<sup>10</sup> St. John V, 17-19.

<sup>11</sup> St. John XIV, 9.



press Christ in his own life. To do this demands a divine *energy*. That energy is, in a mysterious manner, latent in the mysteries of the Saviour's life on earth. These mysteries are quasi-sacramental in their character. Each is a manifestation of the divine. It is that and something more. For those, who by faith, lay hold of Christ in a willingness to be united with Him in act, the mystery possesses a divinizing power. It can make contact with the ordinary experiences of the Christian's life and impart to them a superhuman dignity and worth.

The mysteries of the life of Jesus are not dead, static, historical happenings that have been. They are living and dynamic. They have been lived for the members of Christ. All the states that the Saviour traversed, all the human experiences that He willed to go through, have for their purpose the sanctification of all that enters into a man's deliberate life. These mysteries of His have accumulated vast reservoirs of merit in order to communicate this human-divine quality to the Christian's doings and sufferings. The events of the Old Testament instruct us: the events of the New Testament give us life. Into these latter has passed the vitality of the Incarnation.<sup>12</sup> That vitality is ever ready to communicate itself to all parts of the Mystical Body, vivifying them with the divine life of Christ.

That this divinizing process take place, there is required a willed contact between the individual and Christ. This contact is effected by the activity of the virtue of Faith. It is perfected by sympathy

<sup>12</sup> Cf. Faber, *Foot of the Cross*, p. 143.

and love. The Christian who wills to have the life of Christ develop in himself, must consent to "steep" mind, imagination and heart in the earthly career of Jesus. He must aim at a *sympathy* with the Saviour in all that He went through. He must strive to identify himself with the Divine Master, to think with Him, to feel with Him, to judge with Him, to see with His eyes and to speak with His tongue. He must will to be as the Saviour was in all these incidents.

This effort at spiritual identification must be accompanied by the firm trust that the Lord is willing, and able, to purify the soul of what is earthly and corrupt, and replace it by the Heavenly and the pure. In the Church and the Eucharist the Incarnation is perpetuated through all time. The Sacred Humanity was made by the Holy Ghost to be the instrument of the divinity in effecting the divine. That law of things remains. As during the mortal life of the Redeemer effects of sanctification flowed out on souls through contact with Him, when that contact was made in Faith and Love, so now too, in as real a way, effects of deification reach us through His mysteries contemplated in similar dispositions of soul. The Saviour is, at the very least, as willing to allow the divinity in Him to bring its energy to bear on souls as on bodies. In an interesting incident in the Gospel, it is shown how a slight contact inspired by a firm faith in the divine healing power of Jesus was sufficient to release the divine energy. It is the story of the woman suffering from an issue of blood. She said to herself: "If I shall

touch only His garment I shall be healed." She did it without attracting attention, taking advantage of the movement of the crowd that surrounded the Master. The result responded to her expectations. Amongst all that number that pressed to the side of Jesus, He singled out *one as having touched Him*. Peter was profoundly astonished, for to his mind this statement could have been made of several. It was true that many touched the Saviour, but only one did it with faith. And at that touch, as Jesus Himself said, *virtue* went out from Him. The Son of man is ever at the service of His brethren for their good. The transformation of their souls is His chief concern, though He is not indifferent to their bodily welfare. It is certain, then, that if a soul lays hold of Him in faith and trusts to receive an inflow of divine life through that contact, its expectations will be fulfilled. Christ Himself states that He came to give life. By life He meant the supernatural life of divine grace.

Christ's mysteries belong to all Christ's members. To secure the advantages that follow from their privileged condition the members of Christ must deliberately aspire to harmonize thoughts, affections and aspirations with those of the Lord. They must try to be, in fact, *one spirit* with Him.<sup>13</sup> It is this "Oneness" in spiritual ideal that releases the streams of life accumulated through Christ's merits and permits them to circulate through the soul. To appropriate the mind of Christ is to appropriate the life of Christ.

<sup>13</sup> I Cor. VI, 17.

In this matter a pitfall is to be avoided. A vivid, imaginative representation of the incidents of the Saviour's life can be a powerful aid in the work but it is, by no means, a "conditio sine qua non." Fortunately the sanctifying effect of the mystery does not depend on ability to reproduce its details on the imagination. Those who are poorly endowed as regards that faculty are not necessarily at a disadvantage. The events of the thirty-three years are not to be laid hold of by the Christian in the sense that he has to undergo exactly similar things. It is the spirit of these experiences that is important. And it is by putting that spirit into his own encounters with circumstances that the Christian posits the condition that enables the virtue and the merits of Christ to transmute his actions into something of divine worth. An excellent imitation of the Lord may be realized without demanding anything extraordinary in the way of poverty, sufferings, trials or persecutions.

To attain the ideal towards which Christianity directs the moral and spiritual efforts of man, this constant dwelling on the Humanity of the Saviour is imperative. This presents no difficulty for imagination, mind and heart, for the life of Jesus is woven, for the greater part of it, of the same humble threads that go to make the fabric of the existence of ordinary men. It is easy for us to imagine Him expressing Himself through our own activities. It ought to be our desire that He should. Our ambition must be to allow Him to live through us. Our "oneness" with Him grows in the measure in which

this takes place. The Christian should accomplish his life task as a conscious member of the Mystical Body of Christ. Everything ought to be done and suffered "in Him, with Him, and through Him." It is scarcely necessary to remark that it is not necessary to be actually, at all times, adverting to this. The idea should be so interwoven with all our thoughts, that it spontaneously stamps itself on the whole pattern of our lives. It becomes the more effective the more it has become a habit and the less need there is of directing actual attention to it in the several details of conduct. It is the habitual sense of obligation to harmonize the spirit of our actions with those of Christ's Humanity, that gives organic unity and consistency to our personal life. The deliberate and repeated efforts at putting a supernatural form into our acts cease to be isolated incidents connected merely by time. They become elements, all contributing to, and converging on, the formation of a truly supernatural personality.

The following words, addressed by Cardinal Mercier to his priests, in a retreat given not long before his death, express concisely the thoughts so far developed. "When we love, the object of our love abides in our thoughts. It was in this sense St. Paul spoke to the Philippians saying: 'I have you in my heart.' Further he who loves is attached to the object of his love in this way also, that he is not content to have a mere superficial acquaintance with it. He strives to penetrate it, to consider and to dwell upon whatever, in any way, pertains to it. In a word he tries to reach the very heart of what he loves. So,

brethren, until you study with assiduity in the school of the Divine Master, until you make it your aim to understand Him, to learn all you can of His ways and of Himself—until for that purpose you make it a law of your lives to follow Him with eager attention through all the stages of His life on earth, through His hidden life, His ministry, His Passion, His crucifixion, through the mysteries of His life in the Eucharist—until you concentrate all the faculties of your soul upon each of these states in fervent and humble prayer, *with the will to assimilate them, to absorb them, into the very marrow of your spiritual life*<sup>14</sup>—you may perhaps, reproduce some superficial traits of our Divine Ideal, but you will not realize in your lives a work of Christian art, a living, harmonious, communicative form of sanctity.”

<sup>14</sup> Italics mine.

## CHAPTER II

### “RE-CAPITULATION” IN CHRIST

*“That he might make known unto us the mystery of his will, . . . in the dispensation of the fullness of times, to re-establish all things in Christ.”—Eph. I. 9, 10.*

THE Sacrifice of Calvary was the supreme act of the religion of Jesus Christ. Because of that and because of the consequences that issue from it, it is the culminating point in the destinies of mankind. All that precedes it converges on it and derives its significance from it. What follows from it is but the evolution of what it contains in germ. It is a sign of contradiction and a source of salvation. If the history of man from the beginning to the end of time were likened to a lofty mountain, Golgotha would be the summit of that mountain. World events prior to it would be an ascending slope. World events following it would be a gradual incline falling away from that towering eminence. This is an idea familiar to every Christian from his infancy. He is aware that, were it not for the Crucifixion, his life and that of others would be robbed of hope.

That the Cross alone unbars Heaven to us and makes happiness attainable is, in itself, sufficient reason for considering the passion and death of the Saviour as an event of supreme and unique importance for the human race. Salvation is the one thing

absolutely necessary, hence, what happens in this world has value and significance only in so far as it bears on the salvation of souls. Events are good or evil according as they promote or frustrate the attainment of heaven. It is not, however, only in reference to what is to be that the Cross has significance. A full understanding of it carries our vision right into the heart of the mysteries that surround actual human life. "The Cross," writes Newman, "has put its clear value upon everything which we see. It has given a meaning to the various shifting courses, the trials, the temptations, the sufferings of this earthly state. . . . In the Cross and Him who hung upon it all things meet: all things subserve it, all things need it. It is their center and interpretation."<sup>1</sup> Until one has, in some measure, probed the depths of the mystery of the Cross and glimpsed there the plan of God's marvellous designs, radiant with wisdom, goodness and mercy, one can but imperfectly grasp the full Christian Philosophy of life.

It would be difficult to over-estimate the extent of the change that would be wrought in the outlook of the average Christian were he to pass from the mere knowledge of the fact of his redemption through the Cross to an intelligent grasp of the mode according to which that redemption was worked out. That vision, in a blinding flash of light, burst upon the soul of Saint Paul. What he beheld, he reveals in terms rendered lyrical by his enthusiasm. "Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ who

<sup>1</sup> Newman, *P. and P. Sermons*, Vol. VI, "Sermon on the 'Cross of Christ.'"



hath blessed us with spiritual blessings in heavenly places in Christ. . . . Who hath predestinated us unto the adoption of children through Jesus Christ unto Himself according to the purpose of his will . . . in the dispensation of the fullness of times, to re-establish all things in Christ that are in heaven and on earth in Him.”<sup>2</sup> In these last words the Apostle enunciates what, for him, is the great central theme of Christianity: “the wondrous mystery hidden from ages and generations.” He strains language to express what he feels to be inexpressible, because it is so far beyond human thought and human imaginings.

Redemption was a word familiar enough in a world where slavery entered into the very frame of the social fabric. But human experience furnished no adequate analogy to supply a term to convey the exalted, yet sublimely tender, manner in which God brought mankind out of the slavery of sin into the freedom of grace. The word ‘re-establish’ which is the Douai translation of Saint Paul’s term in the text above quoted, gives a very feeble rendering of the Apostle’s meaning. It must be confessed that the locution invented by the Apostle is practically untranslatable. This is necessarily so for it expresses something unparalleled and incapable of being paralleled in created experience. The vulgate term ‘instaurare’ gives the result of the accomplishment of God’s mysterious designs but does not describe the mode of that accomplishment. The idea that, in the mind of Saint Paul, is struggling to find expression is

<sup>2</sup> Ephes. I, 3-10.

not merely that Christ restored order in creation out of the chaos created by the Fall. Nor is it that Jesus summarizes or synthesizes all creation in Himself. His thought is much more profound. It is that God, in order to reward Christ for having laid down His life to expiate the sins of humanity, made Him to be a new Head for Humanity. Humanity supernaturally slain, or, to use a metaphor, de-capitated by the disobedience of Adam, is "re-capitated" or "re-headed" by the obedience of Christ.<sup>3</sup> The Saviour is Himself the New vital and vitalizing head of the body of mankind, through whose veins flows the vivifying life blood of Sanctifying Grace. What is the import of the mystery revealed in this strange word?

To understand it, the parallel between Eden and Golgotha must be closely studied. The garden of delight and the hill of shame, both witnessed a radiant dawn for humanity. In Eden that dawn was clear and cloudless. On Calvary it was tinged with red. The first dawn did not grow to its promise of a glorious noon. Its day ended in the darkness of eclipse. The second advances from brightness to brightness, and its sun will never know a setting. Of it will be verified the words: "Thy sun shall go down no more, and thy moon shall not decrease."<sup>4</sup> As Eden witnessed the birth of humanity and was the cradle of

<sup>3</sup> E. Mersch, S. J., in his work, *Le Corps Mystique du Christ*, Vol. I, p. 152, points out that though the Greek verb ἀνακεφαλαιώσασθαι employed by St. Paul is etymologically derived from a term κεφάλαιον meaning head in the sense of summary or completion, yet the context demands the notion of κεφαλή or head simply. This word κεφαλή or head occurs frequently throughout this epistle to the Ephesians.

<sup>4</sup> Is. LX, 20.

its brief life, so Calvary in its turn sees a birth of humanity which is a rebirth. The Cross is the cradle of the "New Creature." The convulsions and throes which nature underwent at the death of the Son of God symbolized the birth-throes of the new-born humanity. Many sensitive souls are shocked by the attachment of the attribute "good" to that dark day on which Christ suffered so shameful and so cruel a death. The adjective "bitter" might seem more appropriate. Yet the term which has sprung from Christian instincts is perfectly apt. In spite of the material darkness which blotted out the heavens, that Friday saw a glorious dawn. It was good as was that day good in which Adam issued forth from the creative hands of God, not only in the full perfection of humanity, but pulsating with the divine vigor of a supernatural life. To the vision of Saint Paul the horrors of Calvary dissolve and its blood-stained slopes become transfigured. He sees God at work, with a working which recalled the sixth day of creation. On that sixth day He made man to the divine resemblance with the words: "Let Us make man to our own image and likeness."<sup>5</sup> On the sixth day of the week, He re-created man and fashioned him afresh to His own image and likeness, but in a still more marvellous way. He did it by casting man into the mold of the Humanity of the Son of God. "For whom He foreknew, He also predestinated to be made conformable to the image of His Son."<sup>6</sup> In Eden there was a creation. On Calvary there was a

<sup>5</sup> Gen. I, 26.

<sup>6</sup> Rom. VIII, 29.

re-creation. Through Christ's death humanity came to life. "And Christ died for all: that they also who live, may not now live to themselves but unto Him, who died for them and rose again. . . . If then any be *in Christ a new creature*, (i.e., a being created afresh) the old things are passed away. Behold all things are made new." <sup>7</sup>

The first creation was a work of great power and goodness, in that God took humanity and, infusing into it a breath of His own life, made it, by sanctifying grace, His adopted child and heir to His riches. The second creation was a work not only of power and goodness: it was also one of incomprehensible magnanimity and surpassing mercy. Of a surety the Lord's "tender mercies surpass all his works." <sup>8</sup> Man had traversed God's designs for his happiness. He had rejected the Creator's divine gifts and forfeited the great preternatural privileges bestowed on him. He had proved himself ungrateful, senseless and rebellious. He had plunged himself in ruin. Adam had made the earth a valley of death, strewn with the scattered members of humanity, supernaturally dead. It would have been much had God confined Himself to giving back the supernatural life which had been forfeited. He did more. He gave much more than was bestowed in the first instance. He restored more than had been lost and at an incredible cost to Himself. He loved man so extravagantly "as to give His only Begotten Son, that whosoever believeth in Him, may not perish but may have life everlasting."

<sup>7</sup> II Cor. V, 15-17.

<sup>8</sup> Ps. 144, 9.

ing." <sup>9</sup> When sin was destroyed through the awful holocaust of the Son of God, the floods of divine grace, pent up in the Sacred Humanity, were free to pour themselves forth over all mankind. "But now in Christ Jesus, you who some time were afar off, are made nigh by the blood of Christ. For He is our peace, who hath made both one, and breaking down the middle wall of partition, the enmities in his flesh . . . that he might make the two in himself into *one new man*, making peace, and might reconcile both to God in one body by the cross, killing the enmities in himself." <sup>10</sup>

The death-throes of Christ were the birth-throes of the "new-man," of whom Saint Paul speaks. The All Merciful God and Father of Jesus came into the valley of death, to the hill "of the skull," and breathing on the lifeless and scattered limbs of humanity, He revived them and re-fashioned them into a living organic unit, animated by the same supernatural life. Under God's breath there arises a "new man," <sup>11</sup> the Mystical Body of Christ. It was not only Jesus came forth from the tomb in the garden, it was humanity re-born, re-vivified, "re-headed," in Him. On Holy Saturday in the morning office, Holy Church used to instruct her catechumens in the great mystery of re-birth, which they themselves were about to undergo in the waters of baptism. In the seventh prophecy the inspired Seer relates: "In those days the hand of the Lord was upon me, and brought me forth in the

<sup>9</sup> St. John III, 16.

<sup>10</sup> Eph. II, 13-16.

<sup>11</sup> II Cor. V, 17.

spirit of the Lord, and set me down in the midst of a plain that was full of bones,—and there were very many up the face of the plain and they were exceedingly dry. And he said to me: Son of man dost thou think these bones shall live? And I answered: O Lord God, thou knowest: And he said to me. Prophecy concerning these bones, and say to them: Ye dry bones, hear the word of the Lord. Thus saith the Lord God to these bones: *Behold I will send spirit into you and you shall live . . .* and you shall know that I am the Lord. And I prophesied as he had commanded me: and as I prophesied there was a voice and behold a commotion, and the bones came together each one to its joint . . . but there was no spirit in them. And he said to me: Prophecy to the spirit, prophecy O Son of man and say to the spirit: Thus saith the Lord God: *Come spirit* from the four winds, and *blow upon those slain* and let them live again. And I prophesied as he had commanded me, and the spirit came into them and they lived, and they stood upon their feet, an exceeding great army. And he said to me: Son of Man, all these bones are the house of Israel.”<sup>12</sup>

In this splendid allegory is set forth what was wrought by the redeeming death of Christ. The valley is an image of the world strewn with the bones of dead humanity, slain by the crime of Adam. Through the merits of the Sacrifice of Christ, came the spirit into the wide spaces of death. The Fathers of the Church, using a striking figure, speak of the Mystical Body as having sprung from the open side of

<sup>12</sup> Ezechiel, c. XXXVII, 1-11.

the Saviour on the Cross. This expresses that the re-creation of humanity through the formation of the Mystical Body was the reward of Christ's obedience unto death. “If he shall lay down his life for sin, he shall see a long-lived seed.”<sup>13</sup>

God, in creating, had planned to secure his glory through the deification of rational creatures. Deification consists in the knowledge and love of God, in that knowledge and that love, which constituted God's own life and happiness. From the clear knowledge of God, praise pours forth spontaneously. This is the very definition of glory—*clara notitia cum laude*—undimmed knowledge issuing in praise. The glory of God was meant to be coincident with the happiness of man. God's purpose was checked by the revolt of the first Head of mankind. But the divine purpose remained unchanged and was forwarded on its way to fulfilment, by the obedience unto death of the Second Head of mankind. “Christ Jesus . . . humbled Himself becoming obedient unto death, even unto the death of the Cross. For which cause God also hath exalted him and given him a name which is above all names.”<sup>14</sup> The reward given to

<sup>13</sup> Is. LIII, 10. Cf. the following pages from *La Théologie de Saint Paul*, Vol. I, p. 266, Prat, S. J. Saint Paul says, “we are immersed in the death of Christ, that is in the dying Christ. In truth, we become associated with Christ and are formed to be His members at the exact moment when He becomes Saviour. This moment coincides with the moment of the death of Christ. Thereafter all becomes common between us and Jesus. We are crucified with Him, buried with Him, raised from the death with Him. We share His death and His new life, His glory, His reign, His inheritance. This is a union that defies expression. It is likened by Saint Paul to the process of grafting, which comingles two lives, until they become undistinguishable and the life of the graft is lost in the life of the living tree.”

<sup>14</sup> Philipp. II, 8, 9.



Christ for His heroic obedience was His being constituted the new life-giving Head of the race. . . . He merited that humanity should be re-created in Him, or, to give the full force of the term used by Saint Paul, to which reference has already been made, Christ merited that humanity should be "re-headed" in Him. For humanity to be headed once more is equivalent to its being constituted a body—that is, a living body. For a dead body is but a body in appearance. It is an aggregate of elements amidst which reigns no unity. It is not an organism. As regards supernatural life such was humanity as a result of Adam's sin. If the scattered members of dead humanity be given a head, by a merciful intervention of God, it means they once more become one living thing, in which the different members are held together by, and share in, a common life. Mankind recovers organic unity through Christ. This is the mystery which Saint Paul felt he had a special mission to reveal to men. "Let us," he writes, "grow up in him, who is the Head, even Christ: from whom the whole body, being compacted and fitly jointed together, by what every joint supplieth, according to the operation in the measure of every part, maketh increase of the body unto the edifying of itself in charity."<sup>15</sup> This position as Head of the Mystical Body which was to come into being through this very Headship, with all the consequent glorification for Himself and His members, was the splendid perspective that, set before the mental gaze of Jesus, strengthened Him to sustain the Cross. "Who having joy set

<sup>15</sup> Eph. IV, 15-16.



before him, endured the Cross, despising the shame, and now sitteth at the right hand of the throne of God." <sup>16</sup>

The members of the Mystical Body are called to share the same glorification as the Head. This is in virtue of their union with Him. They reach that glory by the same path. The Apostle bids them find courage to face the hardships of this path, through "looking on Jesus, the Author and Finisher of faith." <sup>17</sup> The good pleasure of God was to re-supernaturalize the human race by forming it into a Mystical Body through Jesus Christ, its Head and the source of its life. This good pleasure of God was to Jesus, because of the love He bore His Heavenly Father, as a law. Out of regard for it He braved His passion. The Church was the reward God held out for that great trial. Christ not only loved His Father, He also "loved the Church and delivered Himself for it, that he might sanctify it, cleansing it by the laver of water in the word of life, that he might present it to Himself a glorious Church, not having spot or wrinkle, or any such thing, but that it should be holy and without blemish." <sup>18</sup>

Many Christians contrasting the condition that was theirs in the First Creation in Adam, with the condition that is actually theirs in their re-creation in Christ, judge themselves to be at a serious disadvantage. The loss of integrity, science and immortality that had been enjoyed by the First Adam, casts,

<sup>16</sup> Heb. XII, 2.

<sup>17</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>18</sup> Eph. V, 25-27.

for them, a dark shadow on their restoration in Christ. At times forgetful of their huge indebtedness to God, they permit themselves to be querulous with Him and to consider that He was unduly exacting, and ungenerous in the terms of peace He granted to fallen humanity. This is an extremely superficial view of things and betrays a lamentable want of understanding of the "Great Mystery" of Christianity. It is not possible for us to explore all the reasons why the preternatural gifts were not given back with the supernatural, in the re-habilitation of mankind.<sup>19</sup> But from the knowledge of God's heart that is gained through revelation, it can be safely asserted that the reasons that moved God in this matter regard man's interests. They certainly did not spring from any narrowness on the part of God or any reluctance to grant unreserved pardon. He, who in the interests of man's salvation, did not hesitate to surrender His own Divine Son to death, is certainly prepared to bestow on redeemed men, with limitless generosity, whatever in the order of divine wisdom is possible. That is, in order to procure man's eternal welfare, He gives all that in the nature of things is possible. Saint Paul writes: "He that spared not even His own Son, but delivered him up for us all, how hath he not, with Him, given us all things."<sup>20</sup>

<sup>19</sup> St. Thomas amongst other reasons gives the following: Man's perfection and happiness essentially consists in his love for God. Hence Our Heavenly Father willed that baptism should restore grace "unaccompanied by the preternatural gifts, lest man should be moved to desire baptism through self-regarding love of integrity and immortality rather than through a real desire of God."—S. Th. III, P. Q. 69, a. 3.

<sup>20</sup> Rom. VIII, 32.

The reasons why redeemed man is shorn of the preternatural gifts are certainly bound up with those for which the all-wise God decreed the passion as the mode of redemption. There was a mysterious moral necessity for the sufferings and death of the Son of Man, as He Himself revealed to His disciples on the evening of the Resurrection. “*Ought not Christ,*” He said to them, “to have suffered these things and so to enter into his glory?”<sup>21</sup> The members must, perforce, share the passibility of the Head. It would be an utter incongruity, were this not so. As it was fitting, in accordance with the plan of God’s wisdom, that He should reach His glory through pain, so it is fitting that His members should tread the same path in order to be glorified along with Him. “The spirit himself giveth testimony to our spirit that we are the sons of God, and if sons, heirs also: heirs indeed of God, and joint heirs with Christ; *yet so*, if we suffer with Him, that we may also be glorified with Him.”<sup>22</sup> Saint Thomas writes in this connection: “The satisfactions of Christ have their effect in us *in as much as* we are incorporated with Him, as members with their Head. But the members must be conformable to the Head. And just as Christ had grace in His soul, whilst at the same time having a body subject to mortality, and had, therefore, to attain the glory of immortality through the Passion, so we, who are His members, are indeed freed from all the obligations as regards chastisement, by

<sup>21</sup> St. Luke XXIV, 26. Cf. St. Thomas III, P. Q. XLVI, a. 1.

<sup>22</sup> Rom. VIII, 16-17.

Christ's passion. But this is in *such wise* that we first receive the spirit of adoption of children (which destines us to everlasting glory) whilst still having a body subject to mortality and suffering. It is only later, when we shall have been conformed to the sufferings of Christ<sup>23</sup> that we are conducted to a glorious immortality."<sup>24</sup> Did we possess the preternatural gifts, this fellowship with Christ, in His human experience, would not be possible for us.

Hence the mystery of our redeemed state is intimately bound up with the mystery of the Mystical Body. These disabilities under which redeemed mankind labors are not due to any vindictiveness on the part of God nor any desire to make the human race smart for its great betrayal. The truth is that, in spite of these disabilities, the status of those redeemed in Christ is incomparably superior to that status that would have been theirs, were they children of an un-fallen Adam. To be "graced" in a sinless Christ confers a far greater dignity than to be graced in a sinless Adam. To be united supernaturally with Christ's Humanity is a much more royal privilege than to be united supernaturally with Adam's humanity. Adam, even when raised by grace to be the adopted child of God, was not united personally with God. He remained, even in his eminence, a human person. The Humanity of Christ is substantially united to the Word of God. And we return to God's favor by being mystically incorporated in the Sacred Humanity

<sup>23</sup> Philipp. III, V. 10.

<sup>24</sup> St. Th. III, P. Q49. a. 3. ad. 3.

which is so intimately united to the Godhead. It is through being one with the Humanity of Christ that we effect contact with the Divinity—a contact of Faith and Love.<sup>25</sup>

United with the Sacred Humanity, we participate in all Its privileges and graces. To the Sacred Humanity itself all these privileges and graces come from the Word, to Whom the Human Nature of Christ is hypostatically united. The lustre and distinction of the Divinity of the Word are shed in us when we are made one with Christ. Saint Thomas states, that in somewhat the same way as the merits of a person in grace belong to that person, so the merits of Christ belong to Him and to His members. Christ's graces become ours when we are bound to Him by Faith and Love. "Christ," he says, "received grace not only in His individual capacity, but also as Head of the Church, so that grace should stream from Him to His members. For that reason, the

<sup>25</sup> Cf. the following from the *Ecrits Spirituels* of the Venerable Libermann, C.S.Sp., p. 51: "The Word assumed the Sacred Humanity to render to the Father the duties of the creature. He, thereby, attached an infinite value to these duties. God henceforth sees all human nature as forming one with His Son. This manifests that the nature of man is raised to a more eminent dignity, since the sins of man have been atoned for, than it enjoyed prior to the Fall. Before Adam fell man did not have such intimate relations with the Creator as he has now. His union with God was less perfect than now, because since the Redemption, he, in a certain measure, by his union with the Sacred Humanity of Jesus, Head of the Mystical Body, is brought into the economy of the Hypostatic Union. In the days of innocence God's communications of Himself to His creatures were limited. Now God imparts His spirit without measure. Formerly the glory rendered by man to God was finite, now it is infinite. In the first days sanctity was a pure gift of God, now it is something merited by Christ, the Head of the race. In the beginning man was a servant and the divine adoption extended to him was of a very restricted kind: now he is a child of God, having Christ for his elder brother."

(meritorious) actions of Jesus have the same relation to Him and to His members, that the actions of an ordinary individual have to that individual himself.”<sup>26</sup> It is the realization of this mysterious truth that provokes the cry, so daring and so paradoxical that bursts from the lips of the Mystical Spouse of Christ on the morning of Holy Saturday. “Truly fortunate is the sin which procured for us a Redeemer, so great and of so exalted a nature.” We are of more noble birth when born of Jesus Christ, than we would have been, even were we able to trace our lineage to a sinless Adam. To be stamped with the image of a Divine Christ is a title to glory far more exalted than the glory due to us were we to bear the image of a purely human head, even though a sinless one. When God pardoned, He pardoned magnificently. So far was He from being grudging in His concessions to submissive humanity, He loaded it with favors. He gave with a divine generosity. He did not content Himself with restoring what had been forfeited, he added superabundantly to His first gifts. God’s incredible magnanimity brought it about that man instead of losing all by the Fall, can profit exceedingly by it, if only he is willing to utilize all that has been won for him and placed at his disposal by the Great Sacrifice of Jesus on the Cross. It is no wonder that the Church exclaims, “O Felix Culpa, quae talem ac tantum meruit habere Redemptorem.” Of this exclamation Saint Paul’s words in his Epistle to the Romans are an apt commentary:

<sup>26</sup> St. Th. III, P. Q.48, a. 1.

“For if by one man’s offence death reigned through one: much more they who receive abundance of grace, and of the gift, and of Justice, shall reign in life through one Jesus Christ.”<sup>27</sup>

<sup>27</sup> Rom. V, 17.

### CHAPTER III

## THE SACRED SIGN OF CALVARY

*"But that the world may know that I love the Father, and as The Father hath given me commandment, so do I. Arise, let us go hence."—St. Jo. XIV, 31.*

CALVARY ushered in a new era in the destinies of humanity. With it came to an end that long night of gloom that had enveloped the world since the Fall. That night had not been one of utter darkness. It had been faintly illumined by the dim light of the primeval promise. God allowed no time for despair to take possession of the heart of man. Satan's triumph was short lived. He had but consummated his act of malice when he heard the words: "I will put enmities between thee and the woman: . . . she shall crush thy head and thou shall lie in wait for her heel." <sup>1</sup> Golgotha witnessed the verification of these words. In the garden beneath its shadow, Humanity rose with Christ from the tomb in which it had lain for long ages. It had been the refusal of sacrifice that had plunged mankind into spiritual death. It was the offering of sacrifice that restored mankind to spiritual life.

A sacrifice is a sacred drama. Its object is to portray externally and in the most eloquent and impressive manner the creature's complete and willing depend-

<sup>1</sup> Gen. III, 15.



ence on the Creator. In the supernatural order, the creature without abdicating its creaturehood is raised to the exalted condition of child of God. Because of this, Man's sacrifice becomes a joyous, dutiful and filial, recognition of God's supreme but paternal Sovereignty and a loving acquiescence in all the consequences that flow from that Sovereignty. Man belongs utterly to God and because of that "belongingness" must use the life, natural and supernatural, bestowed on him by his Heavenly Father in accordance with that Father's will. God's law is the sole rule of human action. Man was created to possess and to grow in possession of the Divinity, through living his life on earth in the manner traced for him by his Maker. To go counter to the will of the Creator is to sever relations with Him. Union cannot exist when two wills are at variance. When man sets his will in opposition to the divine will, he ruptures the union between himself and God: the union being broken, he renders himself powerless to receive and possess the divinity. He frustrates the purpose of his creation: he thwarts God's generous designs: he sinks back into the native nothingness of the creature.

Man can achieve his destiny and the infinite happiness it implies, that is, he can compass his divinization, only if he harmonizes his will with the will of his Heavenly Father. The more perfect the conformity the more complete will be the divinization. Man must not be content with finding in himself this whole-hearted acceptance of God's ruling. His nature demands that he should express outwardly by words and acts the inner dispositions of his soul. When there

is a question of a vital and fundamental disposition on which man's eternal destiny turns, it is natural that the external manifestation should take a dramatic and expressive form. The sign must be apt to signify the willing surrender of the soul to its God: it must, as well, be recognized amongst the members of society as being a ceremonial set apart to manifest man's proper attitude towards his Lord. The sign must be a "sacred" sign: sacred, meaning reserved or set apart for the service of the Almighty. It is only authority that can impose this character of "sacredness" upon things in themselves indifferent; if the sacred character of the sign is to be recognized as such by the members of a social body, authority must ordain it so. Supernatural religion and the whole economy of the relation it establishes between the creature and the Creator is of positive divine institution. Hence it is God's authority that ordains the "signs" expressive of these relations. Sacraments are the visible symbols of the Supernatural action of God on the soul,—sacrifice is the expressive dramatic action appointed for man to express outwardly the readiness of his soul to meet the advances of his Maker and to allow the divine purposes to be fulfilled in himself.

The holocaust, or the whole burnt offering, was the most characteristic of the sacred signs. It typified most aptly the devout soul's recognition of God's absolute dominion over it, of its utter dependence on Him for all it was and all it possessed, and of its duty to use its life, its faculties and its activities, wholly in accordance with the divine will. It dramatized in

most expressive fashion the complete surrender of the human soul to God's designs in its regard.

The full meaning of the notion of sacrifice is not exhausted in the element of homage. The subjection of the soul to God, by the very nature of supernatural religion, looks to something beyond itself. The soul is made to be united with God and in this union to find the consummation of its being and its full contentment. Hence it is that the submission of will expressed by a true sacrifice has implicitly contained in its very nature a yearning after the divine intimacy, a *longing for the assimilation to the divine*. The soul bows in order to be united to God. By sacrifice man acknowledges God as the author of his being and as the unique source of his beatitude; that is, as his first principle and his last end.

That man be in a position to offer a holy sacrifice, pleasing to God, implies that he has already received from the giver of all good gifts some earnest, some partial bestowal of the Final Good that is to be his. From what the soul has already received it can have a firm confidence that its longings after the eternal will be gratified. Its devout attitude before its Maker is penetrated through and through with a spirit of gratitude.

A filial and joyous conformity with the divine will, a joyous recognition of God's paternal Sovereignty, an aspiration after an ever more perfect union with Him and gratitude for the pledges of that ultimate union already accorded—these are the essential notes of sacrifice. These are the inward dispositions of soul, or the interior sacrifice that the sacred sign, composed

of words and gestures, is instituted to symbolize and to manifest. It is what God waits for on the part of man in order to pour out on him the divine life of grace. Sacrifice operates by way of prayer and impetration.

*The factors of expiation and penal satisfaction are not essential to the notion of sacrifice.* They enter into it only contingently. If there had been no sin there would have been no sacrifices of expiation and satisfaction. Had Early Protestantism clearly distinguished between what belongs to sacrifice essentially and what attaches to it incidentally, they would have found their arguments against the Sacrifice of the Mass wanting in cogency.<sup>2</sup> When man by his sin had revolted against the Lord, it was decreed that he would be restored to favor only on condition of sin being expiated and satisfaction made for the dishonor inflicted on the divine majesty. It is the guilt of man that introduces the elements of expiation, satisfaction and propitiation into the sacred sign by which the creature testifies to his submission to his Lord and his desire to enjoy once more the divine friendship. Whilst the sentiments of adoration and of desire to unite with the divinity are present in all true sacrifices, there can be diversity according as emphasis is laid on the aspects of propitiation or impetration or thanksgiving. In the Old Law the ritual of sacrifice was multiple in its forms in order to express the different moods of soul that in fallen men can be found conjoined to the fundamental disposition of complete and willing subjection to the Crea-

<sup>2</sup> Cf. Billot, S. J., *De Sacramentis*, Vol. 1, Ed. V, p. 583.

tor. There was one set of ceremonies for the Holo-caust, another for the sacrifice for sin, and still another for the sacrifice of peace offerings.<sup>3</sup>

Now all these acts of public worship were true sacrifices. They were appointed by God Himself. They were arranged in their details by Him, in order to prefigure the multiple aspects of the one great Sacrifice, which, combining all formalities in itself, was finally to reconcile mankind to its God. The sacrifices of the Old Law were holy. They conferred a legal sanctification. On those who offered them in the *proper disposition* were bestowed actual graces of faith, hope, and attrition leading to justification. But these great central acts of Jewish religion ceased to be an occasion of grace and became an occasion of spiritual blindness, when the worshippers lost sight of the real significance of the sacrificial act. This happened when, their religion having degenerated into formalism, they ceased to advert to sacrifice as being primarily and essentially a sacred sign.

“In the oblation of slaughtered victims offered by the Patriarchs of old to Almighty God,” writes St. Augustine, “we are to see figures or symbolic representations of what is wrought in the interior of the soul with a view to effecting contact with God. The outward visible immolation reveals the inward invisible immolation of the soul.”<sup>4</sup> The soul must die to everything that is not God, in order to be united with God. The external rite typifies the inward disposition of moral death or annihilation before God.

<sup>3</sup> Levit., Chaps. 6, 7. St. Th. I-II. Q. 102, a. 3, ad. 8.

<sup>4</sup> De Civitat. Dei., Bk. X, C. 5.

Now amongst men there is a fatal tendency to materialize all observances which they constantly employ. Rites and ceremonial acts, that in the beginning are rich with meaning and reality, become, in process of time emptied of all significance and reduced to meaningless formalities. Yet men will cling tenaciously to practices long after they have lost a sense of the signification of these practices. This can be seen in many of the social customs and forms of address which men make use of in their mutual relations. The same tendency manifests itself in those institutional observances that are originally arranged to dramatize the proper attitude of soul that is due from the creature to the Creator. The sacrifices of the Old Law were planned by God to be sacred signs whose function should be to reveal, and make visible, man's sense of sin; his regret for it; his readiness to renounce it; his willingness to expiate it, and his belief in the efficacy of the Great Sacrifice of the Redeemer to come. The multiplication of sacrifices was a humble avowal of the powerlessness of man's own efforts to purge away his sins by his personal expiations. But the faithful practice of sacrifice was an attestation of his firm hope that the satisfaction to be made by the Redeemer to come would supply for the insufficiency of his own efforts. But when the worship in spirit and in truth declined, the chosen people came to attach value to the sign as divorced from the thing signified. Reducing God to their own measure, they thought to win the favor of the Almighty, as they would that of their fellow men, by the persuasive eloquence of their gifts. The Lord of heaven,

through the lips of the Psalmist pours scorn on their absurd formalism. "Hear O Israel, and I will testify to thee: I am God, thy God: I will not take calves out of thy house, nor he goats out of thy flocks. For all the beasts of the world are mine, the cattle on the hills and the oxen. If I should be hungry I should not tell thee: for the world is mine, and the fullness thereof. Shall I eat the flesh of bullocks? Or shall I drink the blood of goats?"<sup>5</sup> Jesus, in his own day, stigmatized a like perversion of real religion common amongst the devout of his race. "Woe to you, Scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites, because you tithe mint, and anise and cummin, and have left the weightier things of the law, judgment and mercy and faith. These things you ought to have done, and not to leave these undone."<sup>6</sup>

It is not that God finds fault with the slaughter of animals in His honor, for He Himself ordained these rites. His ordinances make them sacred. What He condemns is that men, losing sight of the essential character of these slaughterings as signs, should come to think that the material offerings themselves were looked for by God and were acceptable to Him. The figurative use of the term "gift" in reference to the things offered in sacrifice gradually produced a misconception in men's minds. They came to understand it literally. Obviously between creature and Creator there can be no transference of ownership, such as is implied in the proper sense of the word gift. God is owner of all things before they are

<sup>5</sup> Ps. 49, V 7-13.

<sup>6</sup> St. Matt. XXIII, 23.



offered to Him in sacrifice. He bestows on man a dependent ownership of these things. Man can dispossess himself of this ownership; he can renounce this power of using things for his own needs; he can make them sacred (*sacrum facere*) by means of a ritual through which it becomes unlawful to turn them to profane uses. A real or symbolical destruction of the offerings carried out according to the forms prescribed by God, does not confer the ownership of them on God; but it can symbolize man's inner willingness to recognize that he depends wholly on God for what he is, for what he possesses and for what he aspires to. Gift is but a figurative expression. What man deprives himself of, by making it the material of his sacrifice (the victim), is no advantage to God. It gratifies Him inasmuch as it symbolizes an obligatory inward disposition of soul on the part of the offerer.

There is no reason for departing from this view when there is question of the sanguinary and dolorous drama of Mount Calvary. The Passion of Christ, *as a sacrifice*, remains a "sacred sign." Jesus, about to take the road that led to His death, proclaimed it to be such. "*In order that the world may know that I love the Father, . . . arise let us go hence.*"<sup>7</sup> He averred, in these words, that His immolation on the Cross would manifest in the eyes of all men His inward disposition of unflinching loyalty and submission to God, cost what it might. He revealed that He meant it to be above all else a sacred sign. It is true that every act in the life of the Saviour was a manifesta-

<sup>7</sup> St. John XIV, 31.



tion of unswerving obedience to the will of God. But these acts were not expressly appointed by divine authority to wear this formal character. It was not their *raison d'être* to be sacred signs. It was otherwise with the Passion. From all eternity God had demanded, as the condition of man's salvation, that the Head of Humanity should *surrender* His life on Calvary in token of Humanity's willing *subjection* to God. The Almighty meant the great action of Good Friday to stand apart in all the obedient doings and endurements of Christ's life, and to be primarily significant of mankind's utter subjection to the Divine Will, regardless of consequences. It was on behalf of His fellowmen, and, as their representative, that Christ made this magnificent gesture of submission and loyalty to the Most High.

The drama that took place on Calvary was singularly apt to signify man's utter submission to God. The exterior annihilation willingly undergone was a most appropriate representation of the inner annihilation of the created nature before the Majesty of God. The dispositions of the soul of Christ did not falsify the signification. Consecrated priest by the Hypostatic Union, the New Adam took His wounds, His Blood, His agony and His death, to bear eloquent testimony to His obedience unto death in response to the demands of the Divine Will. Christ did not cling to His life following the promptings of His will yielding to its natural inclination (*voluntas ut natura*). His life was surrendered to serve God's divine purposes. "I came down from heaven," He said, "not to do My own will but the will of Him that sent

Me.”<sup>8</sup> Calvary verified these words in most convincing fashion. “It is comparatively easy” says St. Gregory, “to sacrifice what one has; to sacrifice oneself is a matter of extreme difficulty.” In the old sacrifices men gave of their flocks and herds, but they themselves did not experience the death-throes of the victims. The priest on the Cross had not a substitute victim. He did not sacrifice Himself by deputy. He was Himself the victim that suffered and died.

In all sacrifices the more intimately the victim was bound up with the life’s interests and needs of the sacrificer, the more perfect was the sacrifice. The readiness of a man to spend his dearest possessions in the worship of his Maker was proof of profound love, devotedness and obedience. The perfection of Abraham’s obedience was displayed in his promptitude to immolate his son Isaac at the bidding of God. But sacrifice reached absolute perfection as a sacred sign when there was complete identity between the priest and the victim. This identity was realized on Calvary. The immolation of Christ resumes in itself all the aspects and all the formalities divided amongst the multiple sacrifices of the theocratic law. It is as the pure white light that virtually contains the varied colors revealed by the prism. It is a holocaust, for the victim is utterly consumed. As such it was an act of profound adoration by which was freely acknowledged God’s supreme dominion over men and their utter dependence on Him. It is a sacrifice for sin, for it washes away all the guilt of sinful humanity. It is a peace offering for it unites men to God. It is a pro-

<sup>8</sup> St. John VI, 38.

pitiatory and atoning sacrifice for it repairs the outrage done to God's honor, giving Him a glory and satisfaction that outweighs that insult and displeasure caused the Divine Majesty by the sin of man. Finally, as impetratory, it wins from the Sovereign Lord, "all things of His divine power which appertain to life and goodness." <sup>9</sup>

The mere fact of Christ's dying, and even dying a most painful death, did not, of itself, make the terrible drama enacted on Mount Calvary to be a sacrifice. The Martyrs died amidst fearful torments and died because of their fidelity to the law of God, yet their death was a sacrifice only in a moral not in a ritual or "latreutic" sense. The death of a being is not necessarily charged with any other significance beyond that which belongs to it as an historical event. Under the Old Law, as now, animals were slaughtered for domestic purposes. Their death had no significance other than that of being a necessary preparation for their use as human food. But when the slaughter was carried out according to fixed rite: when it was attended by words and actions on the part of a priest in the actual exercise of his sacerdotal character, then the death was charged with an ulterior significance. It was invested with the formality of a sign. It was constituted a symbol of a spiritual thing.

So it is with the death of Christ. Considered in itself it was but the normal consequence of the violence and hatred of His enemies. It was the death of a martyr. It was that, but it was far more than that. The words and actions of Christ before and during

<sup>9</sup> II St. Peter I, 3.

the dreadful scenes on Calvary show this clearly. He takes particular care beforehand to point out that, in spite of appearances, His life will not be wrested from Him against His will. It will be a voluntary surrender. "I *lay down My life* . . . no man taketh it from Me."<sup>10</sup> He, according as it had been divinely arranged, allows His enemies to work their evil will on Him. Then He deliberately takes the result of their work, that is His sufferings and His death, and invests them with a particular significance. He calls upon them to attest in the face of heaven and of earth His loving obedience to the Lord of Heaven. "I *lay down My life of Myself*," He said, "(for) this *commandment* have I received of My Father."<sup>11</sup> The Father's will was not only that He should die, but that His death should be that of a victim for sin. In other words God had decreed that Christ's death should be sacrificial, should be invested with ritual form. It was preordained to be a death, that, satisfying for sin, should render God propitious to, and therefore more accessible to, man. As victim, Christ should be subjected to death; but as priest, He should dominate that death. It should be something, as it were, which He should hold in His hands and which He should make the matter of a sacred action exercised by Himself.

At the Last Supper, Christ, by His words, warned the apostles that on the morrow He would not merely be victim but priest as well. He enacted before them, in sacramental form, what was to take place some

<sup>10</sup> St. John X, 17, 18.

<sup>11</sup> St. John X, 18.

hours later on Calvary in a physical form. Mystically effecting the separation of His Sacred Blood from His Sacred Body, He said: "This is My body which *is given* for you: This is My Blood which *shall be shed* for many *unto the remission of sins.*"<sup>12</sup> In these terms He showed that He would assume the death to be inflicted on Him by His enemies, and with the authority of a Supreme High Priest, clothe it with a sacrificial character. He would make it to be an expiatory and propitiatory death. It had been appointed by God to be such. He had been made a priest, consecrated by the Hypostatic Union, to carry out that ritual. On Calvary the central and the Chief Actor in the Sacred Drama was Christ Himself. The executioners were but the attendants. The Saviour in stating that He was laying down His life voluntarily, that He was doing so on the appointment of His Father, and that the surrender of His life was to work for the expiation of sins and the reconciliation of man to God, implicitly asserted the sacrificial character of the death on the Cross.

To leave no doubt of the matter in the minds of His hearers, He chose, at the Last Supper, those words which should clearly link up the actual ritual with the sacrifices of the Old Law. The sacrificial character of the type plainly indicated the sacrificial character of the Anti-type. The death on Golgotha was the consummation of all figures. It was sacred as nothing that preceded it was sacred. For God had set it apart in all the events of Christ's life, to bear a particular significance. It was the "Sign of signs."

<sup>12</sup> St. Matt. XXVI, 26-28.

For it was the most perfect possible outward demonstration of the inward invisible sacrifice of the soul of Christ to His heavenly Father. Christ accomplished this Sacred sign as Head, and Priest, and Representative of the human race. This profound act of adoration on the part of the Head of Humanity had as its result the restoration of mankind to grace, and, as its tendency, to dispose mankind, so restored, for close union with God.

## CHAPTER IV

# THE SACRED SIGN OF THE CHRISTIAN ALTAR

*"I beseech you, brethren, that you present your bodies, a living sacrifice, pleasing unto God."—Rom. XII, 1.*

JESUS died on the Cross but lives in the Church. His natural life on earth yields place to His mystical life. His rôle with regard to God and with regard to men undergoes no change. He is everlasting Mediator. By the Hypostatic Union, it is essential to Him to be a priest. The death on the Cross did not destroy His sacerdotal character. In His new life, He lives as a priest. "Whereby He is able also to save for ever them that come to God by Him: *always living to make intercession for us.*"<sup>1</sup> Priests subject to mortality succeeded one another at the altar of God. Their ministrations passed away with themselves. They but prepared the way for One, who, not subject to corruption, was preordained to abide a priest for ever. "This (man), for that He continueth for ever, hath an everlasting priesthood."<sup>2</sup>

Priesthood and sacrifice are correlative terms. A perpetual priest calls for a perpetual sacrifice.<sup>3</sup> Since

<sup>1</sup> I Heb. VII, 25.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.*, 24.

<sup>3</sup> 'Perpetual'—as referring to sacrifice—is to be taken in a relative sense, and meaning, 'for all time.' There is no heavenly sacri-

Christ's life subsequent to Calvary is a mystical one, the active exercise of His priesthood will be marked by the character of His state. The sacrifice He offers will be a mystic one. Whilst mystic in its mode, it must remain for ever the same as that which was offered on Calvary. The remission of sins as a necessary preliminary to union with God is one of the main objectives aimed at by man, in the solemn rite of sacrifice. His sacrifices could be diversified as long as sin remained un-forgiven. The transgression of mankind, however, being washed away by the great immolation on Calvary, there can be no new sacrifice of atonement. But mankind though redeemed remains sinful. The cleansing from sin, therefore, is to continue for all time. In other words the sacrifice of Calvary must be perpetuated and applied. It cannot be replaced by another. Because "we are sanctified by the oblation of Jesus Christ once."<sup>4</sup> The unique oblation of Golgotha is not replaced by, but perpetuated and applied in, the Mass. The Mass annihilates temporal sequence and, in its divinely invented mode, presents the drama of Calvary to the eyes of all generations. At the Christian altar Christ stands before God in the perpetual exercise of the function He acquitted on Mount Calvary. He performs the very same act of worship, though the form that act takes is different.

On the Cross Christ took the death inflicted on Him by His enemies, and made it testify before God

fice, in any proper sense of the term. Cf. Prat, S. J., *Théologie de Saint Paul*, Vol. 1, p. 456.

<sup>4</sup> Heb. X, 10.



His profound submission to the Divine Will. At the altar acting as the instrument of God He changes bread into His body and wine into His blood. God is the principal agent of Trans-substantiation, by which there is effected a sacramental separation of Christ's Body from His Blood. God is the Principal Author of this Mystical Death. Christ is but an instrument in effecting it. But once it has taken place, then, the Redeemer, as man and as great High Priest, assumes this Mystical Death, wrought by the Divine Power, and makes it testify to His unchanged, willing submission to the Divine Will—a submission unto death. The interior sacrifice of the altar is the very same as the interior sacrifice of the Cross. The outward expression of it differs. But the mystic death on the altar testifies as eloquently as does the real death on the cross, to Christ's preparedness to fulfil the will of His Heavenly Father, even though the fulfilment involves death.

The Great Sacrifice of the Christian religion presents a mystery, which is an exact parallel to that presented by the Great Sacrament of the Altar. Calvary is multiplied in the Mass but ever remains identical with itself. In the Blessed Eucharist the presence of the Body of Christ on earth is multiplied indefinitely and yet there is but One Unique Body identical with Itself in all these places. So the Mass is not a sacrifice other than that of the Cross. There is not in it a Victim different in kind or even numerically different. There is not a diverse signification. There is not a different priest. It is Christ offered on the Cross: it is Christ offered on the Altar. The

same victim dies on both tables of sacrifice; on the Cross, physically, on the altar, mystically. The death in each mode symbolizes the very same reality. On the altar as on the Cross is *signified* the inner annihilation of Christ, as Head of Humanity, before Humanity's Sovereign Lord. It is Jesus and Jesus alone, acting in His sacerdotal character, that invests the death on the Cross and the death in the altar with its sacrificial character.

Far different is the relation that the sacrifices of the Old Law bear to the immolation on Calvary from that which is borne to it, by the Sacrifice of the New Law. The Jewish rites were but unsubstantial shadows or reflections of Calvary. The Mass is, in its turn, an image of the Cross—but an image, which contains the full reality of that which it represents. As subsequent logically to the death of the Christ, it reflects in itself however such modification in the Priesthood and Victimhood of Christ, as was brought about by that death. Saint Paul tells his hearers that they are brought down into a mysterious “vivifying death” by the dying Redeemer. His death is for them a life-giving bath. They are in that death molded into a unity with Him. They become members of His body in the plane of the supernatural. At the instant that He becomes Saviour, they become His members. That instant coincides with the consummation of the sacrifice on the Cross.<sup>5</sup> Hence when Christ comes forth triumphant from the shadows of the tomb, He comes forth the same and yet marvellously changed. He is in a sense a “new creature,” for He has ac-

<sup>5</sup> Cf. Père Prat, S. J., *Théologie de Saint Paul*, Vol. 1, p. 266.

quired to Himself a new body. Regenerated Humanity forms one body with Him. Being one with Him, it participates intimately in what is essentially His, as Redeemer of the race. It shares in His Priesthood and in His Victimhood. On the cross, Jesus officiated as Sinless Head of Sinful Humanity, to be redeemed by His offering. At the altar, He, the same Person, officiates as Sinless Head of Humanity redeemed and made one body with Him. The oblation on Calvary took place in circumstances of blood, and pain, and horror. There the expiation of sin had to be worked out in bitter suffering. The oblation at the altar is surrounded by conditions that breathe calm, and peace, and thanksgiving. For at the Sacrifice of the Mass there is but made the application of the atonement that of old has been accomplished once for all. Mankind has been sanctified "by the oblation of the Body of Jesus Christ once." <sup>6</sup>

On the Cross Christ was alone in offering. No one, but He, of all the children of Adam, was fitted to offer to God a sacrifice truly, and not merely in figure, acceptable. For He alone of the sons of men was sinless and pure. But in that offering He delivered Himself up (for the Church), "that He might sanctify it, cleansing it by the labor of water in the word of life." <sup>7</sup> Thus it was His purpose that He should not be alone henceforward in the perpetual acquitting of His functions as priest. The members He has formed to Himself are drawn into His priesthood. The "Total Christ" is, in a very real sense,

<sup>6</sup> Heb. X, 10.

<sup>7</sup> Eph. V, 26.

offering the sacrifice of the Mass. The oblation is made principally by the Redeemer as the Unique High Priest of the whole society of the faithful. The members of the Christian body who have been elevated to Holy Orders, offer sacrifice as instruments of Christ, acting in His name and in His Person. Finally sacrifice is offered by all the faithful, on whose behalf the priest performs his sacerdotal office. Jesus and His members are welded together into one, in the great, solemn act of religion. The mystic death effected by the sacramental separation of the Body and Blood of the Saviour, symbolizes the readiness of the Mystical Body of Christ to die rather than go counter to God's will. On the Cross The Great High Priest was alone in his grand gesture of submission: at the altar, the faithful are drawn into this sublime act and profess their acquiescence in it. The participation of the faithful in the Holy Sacrifice implies their "oneness" with Christ in that interior oblation made on the cross and perpetually re-enacted at the altar. This "oneness" is aptly typified by the bread and wine, the remote materials of the oblation. The host is formed of many grains of corn ground into one substance. So too Christ, His ministers and the faithful are kneaded together into One Thing, the Mystical Body. In his encyclical on Reparation, our Holy Father, Pope Pius XI insists on this fundamental truth. He writes: "Those whom our High Priest Jesus Christ uses as His ministers to offer to God a clean oblation in every place from the rising of the sun even to the going down, they, indeed, are partakers of that sacred priesthood in that office of offer-

ing satisfaction and sacrifice. *But not they alone:* the whole body of Christians, rightly called by the Prince of the Apostles, 'a chosen generation, a kingly priesthood,' must offer sacrifice for sin both for themselves and for the whole human race, just as every priest, 'taken from among men is ordained for men in the things that appertain to God.' "

This doctrine has its basis in the nature of religious worship. The priest, in the most solemn act of divine cult, officiates as a public person, as a representative of the people, as one who expresses to God their filial devotedness to His Sovereign Majesty. Hence it is that at the Mass Christ *assumes* the mystical death of the Consecration and makes it to be the solemn protestation of the absolute submission to God, of Himself and of Regenerated Humanity. This is what the oblation primarily attests: it, of course, comprehends in its signification all the other religious sentiments that enter into the notion of sacrifice. The rôle of co-offerer with Christ is fulfilled by the faithful in varying degrees of perfection. Baptism, incorporating the neophyte in Christ, stamps him with a *character*, which bestows a participation in the priesthood of Christ. This participation becomes more intimate through the rite of Confirmation. Holy Orders confers the priestly character in a specific manner and empowers the recipient to act as Christ's conscious instrument in offering the holy Sacrifice of the Mass. The Bishop possessing, along with the power of officiating at the Christian altar, the faculty of ordaining others to the sacred ministry, is invested with the priesthood of

Christ in an eminent manner. In each case it is the sacramental "character" that imparts the conformity with the priesthood of the Redeemer. By it they are deputed to exercise in union with Christ, as Chief Priest, the acts that pertain to the divine cult.<sup>8</sup>

Sharing in the priesthood of Christ, the faithful necessarily are united with Him in His Victimhood. Being co-offerers, they are co-offered. For in Christ's perfect and unique sacrifice there is complete identification of priest and victim. Saint Augustine, after Saint Paul, the most eloquent exponent of this Mystery of faith writes: "The whole society of the redeemed, is a universal sacrifice offered to God by the Great High Priest, who offered Himself in the Passion on our behalf. He offered this sacrifice to make us one with His Humanity. It is His Humanity that He offered to God. It is as man that He makes the offering. For it is as man that He is the Mediator, Priest and Victim. Because of this, the Apostle exhorts us to make of our bodies a living sacrifice holy, pleasing to God. . . . That is the sacrifice of the Christian Church. That is the mystery that is perpetually enacted at the altar. The faithful are taught that in making the oblation, it is themselves they sacrifice to God. For all together form one body in the Church." ■ A little further on, in the same context, he gives even clearer expression to the same truth. "Jesus Christ," he says, "as God, is with His Father, the Being to whom sacrifice is offered. Yet, taking the nature of man, He chose to be Himself

■ Cf. Billot, S. J., *De Sacramentis*, Vol. 1, p. 164, Ed. V.

<sup>9</sup> St. Aug., *De Civitate Dei*, Bk. X, c, 6.

the thing sacrificed, instead of being the recipient of the sacrifice. He is the priest, who offers, He is the victim offered. He willed that this mystery should be perpetuated in the daily sacrifice of the Church. The Church being the body, of which He is the Head, offers itself in union with Him."<sup>10</sup>

In the Old Law, he who made the oblation to God, placed his hand on the head of the victim, to testify that he made himself one with it and devoted himself with it to the Almighty. This too is the significance of the act of the priest extending his hands over the bread and wine prior to the Consecration. He, with the worshippers on whose behalf, and in whose name, he acts, devotes himself to God. This "oneness" of priest and people in disposition of soul is manifested by the words of the prayer he pronounces as he makes the sacred gesture. He says: "We therefore beseech Thee, O Lord, graciously to accept this offering of our servitude and also of Thy whole family."<sup>11</sup> A little earlier before entering into the Canon of the Mass, he had said: "Pray, my brethren, that my sacrifice and yours may be acceptable to God, the Father Almighty."<sup>12</sup> The ancient custom according to which each one brought forward, at the Offertory, his own portion of bread and wine to be made the material of sacrifice, showed in the faithful their deep sense of their unity with the priest and, through him, with Christ, in the great act of sacrifice. There was another element of symbolism involved in this.

<sup>10</sup> *Ibid.*, c. 20.

<sup>11</sup> This is the prayer "Hanc igitur oblationem."

<sup>12</sup> The prayer "Orate Fratres."



Bread and wine sustain human life. To offer to God that which nourishes human life, is to express that man holds his life natural and supernatural from God and is prepared to spend it in His service, and according to His will.

Hence the victim of the sacrifice of the Mass is primarily Christ Himself as Head of the Mystical Body and subordinately to Him, the faithful, as members of that same Mystical Body. The sacrifice is always acceptable as regards the Head. It is not always so on the part of some of the Members. Purity is required of them, if they are to be intimately united with the victimhood of Christ. Their aptitude to be co-victims with Christ is commensurate with the degree in which they share His sentiments. This explains what, in the prayers of the Mass, is, for some, difficult to understand. The Sacrifice of the Mass is essentially holy. It is impossible that it should not be so. Yet the celebrant beseeches the Almighty, to regard his sacrifice as acceptable, to look upon it with the same favorable countenance that, in former days He cast on the offerings of Abel, Abraham and Melchisedech. God is asked to allow the oblation to be borne by His angel, before the throne of His Majesty. These petitions are inexplicable as referring to the Victim Jesus Christ. They are comprehensible when referred to the faithful who according to their personal holiness can be more or less acceptable to God. The Christian's worthiness as a victim is in proportion to his holiness.

For those who assist devoutly at the Holy Sacrifice the prayers said win from God those actual graces



which aid the soul to conform itself to Christ. The more fully the faithful strive to co-operate with this divine aid the more effective it will prove. The minimum measure of co-operation is found in the member of the Church, who, though enmeshed in the toils of sin yet, has a firm faith in the redemptive sacrifice of Christ. The sinner who assists at Mass, with some initial desire of turning from sin, and with a hope of obtaining salvation through the merits of the Redeemer, is moved by the Holy Spirit to turn from evil and to seek reconciliation with God. Those who are in sanctifying grace are, by the fact, acceptable in the eyes of God. United to Christ by divine charity, they form an intimate part of the pure oblation. Those who, not content with avoiding mortal sin, shrink from offending the Lord by deliberate venial sin, are drawn more closely still into the Victimhood of Christ. According as souls approximate to heroic sanctity, they are not satisfied with eliminating faults from their conduct: they study God's good pleasure and strive to anticipate it. Their ambition is not to avoid displeasing God, but to please Him in every way possible. These members of the Mystical Body share in an eminent manner in the life of their Head, and, because of that, enter more fully into His dispositions as Victim.

The Mass is the implicit protestation on the part of the Christian of his resolve to tend towards adopting the most characteristic disposition of the soul of Christ. This disposition is one of uncalculating submission to the will of God. Such a protestation implies the resolve to renounce all that is in oppo-

sition to the divine will. It is, or, at least, aims at being a renouncement of making one's own will the ruling principle of one's life, and to substitute for it the holy will of God. This is being a victim. The more perfect the submission to the will of God, on the part of the Christian, the more truth there is in the Mass as far as he, personally, is concerned. Saint Gregory writes: "We must, when we offer the sacrifice immolate ourselves to God, by contrition of heart, because in celebrating the Lord's passion we ought to imitate what we do. Then *truly* shall there be a victim offered to God, when we make ourselves the victim."<sup>13</sup> Victimhood and the abnegation of self in the interests of God, are one and the same thing. If the creature is to be continually disposed to receive the effectively sanctifying influence of God, he must abide permanently in the disposition of sacrifice. To be sanctified daily demands that one be daily a victim; that is, the practice of self abnegation must be constant. This is the significance underlying the words of Jesus. "If any man will come after me, let him *deny himself* and take up his cross daily and follow Me."<sup>14</sup> The words of our present Holy Father in his Encyclical on Reparation enforce this truth. He says: "The more perfectly *our oblation* and *our sacrifice* corresponds to the sacrifice of Christ, in other words, the more we sacrifice *our self love* and *our passions*, and crucify our flesh with the mystical crucifixion of which the Apostle speaks, the more abundant will be the fruits of propitiation and ex-

<sup>13</sup> St. Greg., *Dialog.*, Bk. IV, c. 59.

<sup>14</sup> St. Luke IX, 23.

piation, that we shall receive for ourselves and others."

The notion of victim is intimately bound up with the notion of suffering. Pain seems very alien to the tranquil drama enacted at the Christian altar. The violent death of the Victim is an event long past. Christ being glorified is impassible. Yet, it remains true that without "the shedding of blood there is no remission of sins."<sup>15</sup> The effusion of blood on the altar is mystical and would seem to be, therefore, painless. It is not wholly so. Pain is in some form or other an element of sacrifice since the fall. It is not absent in the Mass. It is true that Christ cannot now suffer, in His own person. He retains contact, however, with passibility, through His Mystic Members. He can suffer in, and through, their sacrifice. He cannot suffer in His physical body: He can suffer in his Mystic Body. "Christ suffers still on the earth, not in His own flesh, but in mine which endures pain still in this world. . . . If, in fact, Christ Himself did not suffer in His Members, that is in the faithful, He could not have said: 'Saul why persecutest thou Me'." <sup>16</sup>

The consequence that flows from this is of great importance. It contains one of the very consoling truths of the Christian Faith. The man who steadfastly adheres, day by day, to the law of God, in the ruling of his life will have much to endure from his own revolted nature, from his fellow men, and from circumstances. "All that will live godly in Jesus

<sup>15</sup> Heb. IX, 22.

<sup>16</sup> Augus. ad. Ps., 142, 143.

Christ shall suffer persecution.”<sup>17</sup> All these pains he should accept when at mass and endure in union with the sufferings of Christ on the Cross. This contact of faith being established, the Christian’s trials are lifted above the terrestrial plane. They are wholly transmuted by being thus mingled with what Christ underwent on Calvary. Christ’s passion is now ours and ours becomes His. Saint Thomas asserts this: “Christ’s passion” he says, “is as truly ours, as if we ourselves had suffered it.”<sup>18</sup> The satisfaction made for sin by Jesus, belongs to all the faithful, as to His Members.

Through this inter-communication of the sufferings of Christ and of the Christian, all that the latter is called upon to endure, through his carrying God’s will into effect, becomes endowed with a marvellous efficacy in expiating personal sin, in meriting actual and habitual grace, and above all in producing a profoundly purifying effect in the soul. The daily passion of the Christian, who is united to Christ by faith and charity, wears to God the aspect of the Passion of His only Begotten Son. This consoling thought sheds a new light on the baffling problem of human pain. The holy souls who recognize Christ suffering in, and through, themselves, learn to attach positive value to what human nature shrinks from as a great evil. The heroic souls who, rising above the patient endurance of pain, positively look for it, in order that their assimilation to Christ may be made more perfect, do more than sanctify themselves by their

<sup>17</sup> II Tim. III, 12.

<sup>18</sup> St. Th. III, Q.69, a. 2.

sufferings. They take an effective part in redeeming the human race. They co-operate subordinately to Christ, in the work of redemption. Saint Paul was a Christian of this stamp. Hence he cried out: "I Paul, who now rejoice in my sufferings *for you*, and *fill up those things that are wanting* of the sufferings of Christ, in my flesh *for His body which is the Church.*"<sup>19</sup>

In participating in the Great Central Act of the divine cult, the Christian has represented to him visibly, the mysterious reality which underlies sacrifice and of which it is the apt expression. The fulfilment of this public duty, tends to call forth in him sentiments of adoration, love and generous donation of self. Christ, by His cruel sufferings on the Cross, wished to signify exteriorly the complete dedication of His soul to God. It is to be expected then that the drama of the altar which re-enacts the One Supreme Sacrifice, should have a special efficacy in calling forth in the soul a strong development of the virtues of religion. The Mass excites to acts of that virtue. "But to participate in the sacrifice of Christ is not merely to assist at the expressive drama in order to acquire thereby a renewal of interior devotion. It is above all to unite our intention with that of Christ in the very act of offering. It is to offer with Him in a mysterious Oneness: which enables us to share in the infinite merits which are the fruit of the offering on Calvary."<sup>20</sup>

<sup>19</sup> Coloss. I, 23, 24.

<sup>20</sup> Mennessier, O. P., *Revue des Sciences Phil. et Théol.*, 1931, p. 284.

## CHAPTER V

# THE PRINCIPLE OF UNITY IN THE MYSTICAL BODY

*"I pray . . . that they all may be one, as thou, Father, in me and I in thee; that they also may be one in us."—St. John XVII, 20-21.*

THE mass is the golden key which unlocks the rich treasury of Christ's merits. It admits the faithful and allows them to draw lavishly for their needs. Those endowed with spiritual discernment have always understood this, and look confidently to the mass in all their necessities. They look to draw from the Eucharistic Sacrifice strength, to overcome their temptations, to conquer themselves, and to keep their pride in check. They see in the mass the source not only of healing graces, but of those also that foster growth in prayer and contemplation. Assistance at the Holy Sacrifice strengthens, in the devout and well-disposed, the divine virtues of Faith, Hope and Charity.

But, though the Christian altar is such a rich fountain of benefits, temporal as well as spiritual, it is not, for all that, practically effective of sanctification. It always remains a practical sign of man's submission to, and his yearning for union with, his Maker. But by no effort of his own can man give to

himself the divinity.<sup>1</sup> The bestowal of that gift remains with God. Where the true sacrificial attitude of soul exists on the part of the creature God gives Himself freely. By His gifts He raises man to an intimate participation in the divinity. The Sacrament is the instrument He employs for this purpose.

Like the Sacrifice the Sacrament is a sacred sign. Unlike the Sacrifice it, of itself, is effective of sanctification. In God's hands it is an instrument which conveys to the soul the divine operation and produces there the effect which it symbolizes. As a sign it reveals outwardly, in a figurative fashion, what it effects inwardly. A sacrifice reveals a holy disposition which exists: a sacrament reveals a holy thing which is being effected. Sacrifice is the channel of the creature's approach to God. The sacrament is the Creator's way of approach to man. The one naturally calls for the other. Sacrifice would be inconclusive were it not followed by sacrament. Man's attempts to establish union with the divine would be as pathetic and ineffectual as the helpless gropings of the infant, did not God stoop and take His creature to Himself.

To symbolize these mutual relations between creature and Creator, the offering of the sacrifice usually ended in a sacred banquet. What had been made sacred to God was eaten at this ritual meal, as token of the "oneness" effected between the worshippers and the worshipped. "Are not they that eat of the sacrifices partakers of the altar?"<sup>2</sup> The most intimate

<sup>1</sup> But, once the soul is in possession of the divine life of grace, man can, of course, increase his spiritual life by meritorious acts.

<sup>2</sup> I Cor. X, 18.



communications between man and God are invested with a social character. Supernatural life permeates a social organism. This is one of the reasons why the invisible action of God should be made manifest in some fashion. It is brought to the perception of men gathered in an assembly. The work done by the Lord remains hidden as its nature requires, but it is not secret. Men can apprehend, through the sacred rites, what is being wrought in themselves. God condescends to man's natural need of material images for his apprehension of spiritual realities. Such images are a help to the will not less than to the mind. They aid man to abide in a disposition of humility. They constantly remind him of his affinities with matter. He sinned in the beginning and, as a consequence of his sin, strove to find his happiness in material things. It chastens him to be obliged to use the humble things of earth, in order to make his way back to the spiritual.

But there is a more exalted reason why the mysterious operations of God in the depths of the soul should be invested with a material clothing. It is in the plan of the Redemption that all contact of fallen mankind with its Creator must be established through the Sacred Humanity of the Incarnate God. Had there been no fall, it is most likely that grace would be communicated to souls directly without the instrumentality of the sacraments. As things are now, it comes to men through the Humanity of Jesus. The Sacred Humanity is an instrument of the divine in the deification of the human soul. The sacraments are the prolongation, as it were, of the Sacred Hu-



manity. They are the material elements used instrumentally in the communication of the divine. This efficacy belongs to them because they contain the merits of the passion and death of Jesus. As the Body and Blood of the Redeemer is the matter of the sacrifice by which man propitiates his outraged God, so the Body and Blood of Christ is matter of the sacrament through which God effects His intent of divinizing man. The sacred liturgy of the mass ordains that at the completion of the sacrifice a salutation of peace is to be exchanged between the faithful, priest and people. This is a gracious sign that man, as a consequence of the Holy Sacrifice, is admitted to the banquet table of God, and so, invited to share the intimacy of the divine household.

The Holy Eucharist is a communion or sacrament of union between God and the faithful, and of the faithful with one another. It is the instrument for effecting the union for which Christ prayed with such insistence at the Last Supper. "I pray . . . that they may be one, as Thou, Father, in me and I in thee; that they also may be one in us. . . . The glory which thou hast given me, I have given to them, that they may be one as we also are one, I in them and thou in me, that they may be made perfect in one . . . that the world may know that thou hast loved them, as thou hast loved me." <sup>3</sup> The life divine which is the cementing force in this union is repaired, developed, and invigorated by the Sacrament of the altar. It is true that this Sacrament does not bestow the divine life in the first instance. That

<sup>3</sup> St. John XVII, 20-23.

rôle devolves on Baptism, which, for that reason, is termed the Sacrament of regeneration. By it the soul is born to the life of God. The other five sacraments, too, have, each its part to play in the process of sanctification. But in the Sacramental system the pride of place belongs to the Blessed Eucharist.

The life divine is the Supreme Good. God loves men so much that He sacrificed His own Son in order to impart to them that Great Good. The appeal of the Absolute is so strong that it is felt by man even in his aberrations. The groping for union with the divinity is at the heart of all the false philosophies which delude men by holding out to them the hope that they can reach the Infinite by their own efforts. What the false philosophies vainly promise, that, the Holy Eucharist fulfils. Its whole *raison d'être* is to give man the life of God and to give it ever more abundantly. By it man is deified without ceasing to be man, and without God losing His transcendence. Through it the Divinity, whilst continuing to "dwell in light inaccessible,"<sup>4</sup> is made accessible to humanity. If the Sacrifice of the Eucharist presents a mystery in the presence of which human reason stands abashed, the Sacrament of the Eucharist offers a mystery before which it falters, such sublime possibilities does it put in the reach of human nature. By it God forges His own likeness more and more thoroughly on the soul. Happily for man, the operation is carried on hidden from him behind the veils of faith. Were these drawn aside, the vision would prove too blinding. It is only when finally

<sup>4</sup> I Tim. VI, 16.

bathed in the light of God that the soul can contemplate steadfastly God at work. "For with Thee," says the Psalmist, "is the fountain of life, and in thy light we shall see light."<sup>5</sup>

Occasionally the Saints are vouchsafed some faint glimpse of what the Blessed Sacrament effects on the soul. The radiant beauty of the souls of God's chosen friends is revealed in their ravishments, in their ecstasies, and in the glory,<sup>6</sup> that occasionally radiates from their persons. What takes place in the souls of heroic Saints is but a very excellent degree of what passes in the interior of ordinary Christians who are in the state of grace. The most perfect shadowing forth of those splendors of the divine life, as participated in by the created spirit, is related in the pages of the Gospel. It was accorded to the three chosen Apostles on the summit of Thabor. It took place when Jesus, allowing the light within Him to show through the obscuring medium of His Humanity, became, before the eyes of His ecstatic beholders, a glowing center of glory.<sup>7</sup> This "transparency" of the divine life in Jesus, becoming visible through its earthly envelope, is the exemplar of what every Christian soul is called to. For union with God is effected not by God's becoming like to man, but by man's becoming like to God. God cannot ally Himself except to what is like to Himself. Jesus Christ is His perfect image on earth, "the radiation of His glory and the 'character' of His substance."<sup>8</sup> Other

<sup>5</sup> Ps. XXXV, 10.

<sup>6</sup> A favorite term with St. Teresa of Avila.

<sup>7</sup> St. Mark IX, 5.

<sup>8</sup> Heb. I, 3.

men are prepared for the divine union by being wrought to resemblance with the Man-God. The Blessed Sacrament is the instrument with which this transformation is effected.

The Eucharist, alone amongst all the sacraments, has for its direct, immediate and specific effect the spiritual changing of man into the likeness of Christ. This change it produces by the operation of the virtue of Charity. Charity is a unifying force: it transforms to the character of that with which the union is effected. It is true that the other sacraments, in conferring sanctifying grace, impart charity. But this takes place, as it were, by concomitance. They give charity if it does not already exist or increase it if it be already in the soul. This, however, is not their special function; it is not the specific end for which they were instituted. The rôle of Baptism is to bring the soul to birth, by cleansing it of original sin and incorporating it with Christ. Confirmation stamps the living soul with spiritual manhood and imposes on the Christian the responsibility of professing and defending the faith with the courage of a man who has been made a soldier of Jesus Christ. It imparts the spiritual force required to fulfil this obligation. Holy Orders establishes the rulers in the Christian society, endowing them with the power to govern, to teach, to consecrate, and to offer sacrifice. Matrimony is the sacred union through which the membership of the Mystical Body of Christ is maintained and increased. Penance plays the same part in the supernatural life, that medicine plays in the life of the body. It combats the disease of sin. Extreme

Unction is hygienic in its action in as much as its function is to expel from the spiritual system the languor left in it by the sickness of sin. All these sacraments are at the service of, and converge on, the Blessed Eucharist. This is at the apex of the Sacramental system. It binds man closer to God by molding him to the likeness of Jesus, Son of God.

The effectivity of the Sacrament of the altar is profoundly mysterious. It produces its effect, *ex opere operato*—to use the ordinary theological term. This means, that where the dispositions of the soul do not present any obstacle to the operation of grace, the Blessed Sacrament, under the agency of God, infallibly does its divinizing work. As the block of marble, under the action of the chisel in the hands of the artist, loses its shapelessness and takes form and contour, so the soul, under the action of the sacrament in the hands of God, begins to assume ever more definitely the spiritual traits of Jesus Christ.

The mode of this assimilation is far different from that outlined in the opening chapter. The process, as described there, was mainly psychological. It was shown how, by loving meditation on the life, the states and actions of Jesus, the devout Christian falls under the spell of His human character and is gradually changed by it. Admiration leads to imitation. The soul, by constant meditation, acquiring an admiration for the Christ, insensibly tends to adopt His ways and His outlook. But the Blessed Sacrament implies a direct application of the divine action to the soul. This action is, of itself, a transforming one. In the case of mental prayer, the intellectual

and voluntary activities of the human person in cooperation with grace, play their part in modifying the soul's dispositions for the better. The Sacrament, to achieve the effect it aims at, demands nothing except the absence of attachment to mortal sin, actual or habitual. Such an attachment is of its nature incompatible with the action of divine grace.

It goes without saying that the actual results obtained through the operation of the Most Holy Sacrament are not always and in each case the same. The measure in which the likeness of Jesus is produced in the soul depends on the soul's dispositions. It devolves on prayer, in the case of the adult, to promote the requisite dispositions. The more perfectly the mind is conformed to the mind of Christ; the more thoroughly the will is disciplined to submission to the divine will, the more firmly and distinctly will the sacrament trace the lineaments of Christ in the Christian soul. As the iron when softened by fire is made apt to receive the form the modeller wishes to give it, so the soul made plastic by the constant denial of self, is prepared to receive the shape the Divine Artist wills to impress on it.

The sacramental species present the Saviour to the eyes of the faithful in the "insignia" of His Passion, for in the act of constituting the sacrament, the Body is mystically separated from the Blood. "The Sacred Host," says St. Thomas, contains "*Christum Passum*,"<sup>9</sup> that is, Christ in the Passion. It is for this reason that the transubstantiated bread is termed, the host, that is, the *hostia* or victim. The Eucharist,

<sup>9</sup> St. Th. III, 73, a. 6, and 75, a. 1.

as it were, seizes and fixes the Christ in the most characteristic attitude of His earthly career. This attitude was one of profound submission unto death, to His Heavenly Father. It is consonant with the sacramental symbolism that the divinizing or transforming effect of the Sacrament should be proportioned to the degree in which the soul has in itself this fundamental attitude of the Soul of Christ. The chief object of mental prayer is to guide one towards the acquisition of the spirit of sacrifice, which distinguished Christ. Prayer prepares the way for the spirit of sacrifice. The spirit of sacrifice disposes the soul for the action of the Sacrament. This is the order in which are linked together, the morning mental prayer, the morning sacrifice of the Mass, and the reception of the Blessed Eucharist.

Although the transformation effected by the Sacrament takes place in a very mysterious manner, and though it must always remain incomprehensible for us, as long as we move in the realm of faith, yet theology can show, to some extent, in what the operation consists. All the sacraments have been instituted in view of bringing a remedy to the many wounds caused to human nature by the Fall. They are all, partly medicinal in character. The Blessed Eucharist is no exception. Since it is the chief aliment of the supernatural life, it is to be expected that it should be the most potent antidote against the greatest poison of that life. In fact the Eucharist, of its nature, works powerfully to counteract and to paralyze the virulent 'egoism' by which a man clings inordinately to himself, to his own natural well-



being, to his own will, and to his own judgments. The most pernicious effect of original sin was that it left in man a pronounced tendency to center all his life in himself. Fallen man is an intense individualist. Sin is a disruptive force. It is a dissolvent of unity. It broke up humanity into a multitude of isolated units. It 'atomized' the human race. Even after original sin has been taken away by Baptism, there continues in man this inclination to move away from his fellows and to fall back on himself. The world is a sad picture of these antagonisms, in which nation sets itself against nation, class against class, party against party, and individual against individual. The virus of sin is seen at work in these dissensions. The Blessed Sacrament is a unifying force. It combats the explosive tendency of sin. It was instituted by Christ to bind together all the fragments of humanity, whether these fragments consist of tribes or of nations, of groups or of individual persons. It is God's instrument in restoring that organic unity of the race which was destroyed by original sin.

The Blessed Sacrament is the effective sign of the vital unity binding in one the Head and Members of the Mystical Body. Members that live through being united to the same Head, the source of their life, cannot be divided one from the other. Such division tends to drain away their supernatural vitality. For division between the members brings with it, for those who cause that division, division from the Head. The Sacred Host is an image of the whole universe as restored to harmony according to the original design of God. Owing to the perversity of



men that design is but to a partial extent realized. The dissensions of Christians militate against God's purposes. Once the symbolism of the Sacrament has been grasped, there is a flood of light thrown on the Saviour's pressing exhortations to unity amongst His disciples. This is the burden of a great part of His discourse at the Last Supper. "A new commandment I give unto you, that you love one another as I have loved you, that you also love one another. By this shall men know that you are my disciples, if you have love one for another."<sup>10</sup> Saint John in later years makes himself the echo of His Divine Master. "Dearly beloved," he writes, "let us love one another, for charity is of God. And everyone that loveth is born of God and knoweth God. He that loveth not, knoweth not God for God is charity."<sup>11</sup>

Egoism is the source of all disunion: and class, or group, or national egoism can be just as harmful to the soul as personal egoism. The absence of egoism does not entail a colorless, featureless, sameness. The union symbolized by, and effected through, the Eucharist admits wide diversity in the vast field of things non-vital from a supernatural point of view. Men may differ in their political, economic, aesthetic, and other theories and remain united as Christians. All that is demanded is that these theories contain nothing subversive of, or hostile to, the divine life of grace. The unity so much stressed by the Saviour is a unity on the supernatural and not, necessarily, on the natural plane. It is a unity formed in a combined

<sup>10</sup> St. John XIII, 34-35.

<sup>11</sup> I St. John IV, 7, 8.

effort to contribute to the life of the Mystical Body. This contribution is made by each member disposing itself to receive as fully as possible the life transmitted to it by the Head. To the Saviour's mind, all sharing the same divine life, should be animated by the same lofty aspirations and tend harmoniously to the same, everlasting goal. A common hope should inspire them. They should be one in evaluating things in the light of eternity. Since the light that illuminates their intelligences as Christians, streams from the same Luminous Word, all should have the same approach to reality, when fundamental issues are at stake.

But it is above all else a harmony of will, that the Saviour looks for in His followers. Members forming, each, a part of the same Mystical Body should be knit together in the bonds of a true supernatural affection. Each should will to procure, as far as is possible, for him, the spiritual and temporal good of the other. Selfishness is a great evil. It is the enemy of Catholicity of view and interest. The Eucharist makes for a true universalism. It is the avowed aim of men today to establish world wide solidarity and fraternity without the aid of Christ. All such attempts are doomed to failure. Violence, and ruthlessness, and a total disregard for the rights of personality, may succeed in establishing an external, and purely material, conformity, but such a conformity will be secured only at the sacrifice of human liberty and human dignity. The supra-national unity aimed at by the enemies of Christ degrades individuals and nations. The supra-national unity that God, through

the Blessed Sacrament, works for, elevates and spiritualizes both men and nations. It sublimates but does not destroy nationality. It harmonizes the particular and the universal. It makes for a oneness which leaves intact human personality and is tolerant of racial and hierarchical diversity. It is a oneness which is secured by the nullifying of that pernicious and radically corrupting egoism which all anti-Christian theories foster instead of destroying.

## CHAPTER VI

# THE BREAD OF LIFE

*"I am the living bread, which came down from heaven. If any man eat of this bread, he shall live for ever."—St. John VI, 51, 52.*

THE action of the Blessed Sacrament is not limited to neutralizing the ingrained egoism of fallen human nature: it exercises a positive action in transforming the Christian and making him like to Christ. The supernatural love which springs from the sacrament, as heat from the fire, is the force which effects this change. Love acts as a dissolvent on self-centeredness. It liberates a man's soul from the narrow limits of his own world, and enlarges its range and its interests. When a man clings to himself his own individual concerns form the center around which revolves the universe of his thoughts, his imaginings and his affections. When he loves, there is created for him a new center of interest, of life and of movement. He espouses the interests of the well-beloved as warmly as if they were his own. The Blessed Eucharist tends to cause this transference of interest in the Christian's life. Under its influence he is moved to become less "egocentric" and to become more "Christ-centric." This sacrament impels a man to go out of himself, in order to find himself in Jesus. He loses his life in order to recover it en-

larged and enriched. The concerns of the Lord become the concerns of the communicant. What pleases Jesus becomes the great preoccupation of the soul that yields itself freely to the influence of the Most Holy Sacrament.

Naturally this effect is but slight when tendencies adverse to the spirit of the Eucharist are allowed to take root in the soul. But when mortal sin is absent there is always produced some effect of this kind. As long as health is not completely undermined food taken as nourishment acts as a restorative and invigorates, though the vital energy that results may not be very noticeable and may speedily fade through the action of noxious germs in the blood stream. The symbolism of each sacrament reveals what is produced in the soul. The material elements of the Sacrament of the altar, are bread and wine. These serve for human nourishment. The physical well-being caused by food will vary with the condition of the system. Healthy food can be harmful when introduced into a body suffering from a virulent fever. But when a person is in normal health, even though not robust, he will be benefitted physically by suitable food. The Blessed Sacrament is the heaven-sent food which maintains and develops the supernatural life of the soul. What ordinary food does for the body, that the Eucharist does for the soul. It vivifies and invigorates it.

The vitality of the Christian soul is proportioned to the supernatural love it bears to Christ. The Blessed Sacrament confers this love not only in a habitual, but in an actual manner. This means that

it not only imparts to the soul a supernatural disposition, but also stirs it up to eliciting positive acts of charity, at the time of communion. This is observable in the attitude of even very ordinary souls as they approach the Holy Table. For some time before and after receiving Holy Communion even the imperfect will make special efforts to avoid any words or actions displeasing to the Saviour. They feel instinctively at such a moment a glaring incongruity in unworthy things.

But when the Blessed Sacrament finds souls well-disposed for its action, as it does in the case of saints, marvellous are the transports of love it is capable of calling forth. The charity which the Sacrament stirs up in the heart of saints is ardent, enthusiastic, and self-sacrificing to an extraordinary degree. The saint quits himself in the strength of the affection which possesses him. He becomes ecstatic in the literal sense of the word. He identifies himself with, or rather sinks himself in, the Divine Master. The transforming effect produced can attain a degree, that can be fitly symbolized by an exchange of hearts. Wonders of this kind are frequent in the lives of God's heroic servants. In them, the words, found in the sixth chapter of Saint John's Gospel are in a high sense verified. "He that eateth my flesh and drinketh my blood abideth in me and I in him." <sup>1</sup>

The reason that similar experiences, at least, in a minor degree, are not more general amongst Christians, and why an ardent, utterly self-forgetting attachment to the Divine Master is the prerogative of

<sup>1</sup> St. John VI, 57.

the few, is not due to any deliberate delimitation of the energy of the Sacrament on the part of God. It is due to the negligence on the part of Christians to develop in themselves those spiritual dispositions which favor the operation of the Eucharist.

Going to Communion, as the very term implies, intimates a desire to enter into *union* with Christ. This union with the Saviour is of two kinds, distinct, but not meant to be separable. One must reinforce the other. The union effected, *ex opere operato*, by the sacraments, though not positively passive, may be considered passive relatively to the second kind of union which is an act of the soul aided by grace. The Baptized infant even though, as yet, not capable of any responsible act, is sanctified and incorporated mystically in Christ. The operation is quasi-passive. It is not quite so. For the sponsor acts in the child's name and petitions, on its behalf, for grace and faith. But in all cases, whether it is a question of infants or adults, the sacrament, by its own virtue, confers sanctification, when there is not present in the soul a disposition in radical opposition to the love of God. Such a disposition is what the theologians call an "obex," or an obstacle to the operation of the sacrament: it completely holds up the operation, as regards the bestowal of sanctifying grace. Granted the desire of the sacrament and the absence of an 'obex,' sacramental grace is produced immediately and in the production of this grace, the recipient does not co-operate by way of cause. He simply receives what he professes his willingness to receive. Moreover we know from the theology of the sacraments that the

measure of the grace thus produced by the Eucharist depends on the perfection of the dispositions of the recipient.

But the process of the sanctification of the soul, and of its transformation into the likeness of Christ is not wholly accomplished by the mere reception of the Sacrament. If the Christian is to progress and become more and more Christlike, he must utilize the grace received, and aim at developing *active* union with God. He must aim at cultivating in his soul those sentiments and dispositions which win the approval of the Lord. Active union with Christ means an endeavor to practice, in one's conduct, the virtues of Christ. It means a constant effort to be pure like Him, to be spiritual like Him, to love God like Him, and to be kind and unselfish after His example. All Christ's acts sprang from, and were inspired by, grace. They had God as their ultimate objective, even though the immediate purpose was the alleviation of some human distress. If the Christian is to profit, as he ought, by the reception of the Blessed Sacrament he must strive after the ideal of Christian perfection. He must live habitually in a spirit of Faith and must aim at pleasing God, and not merely at not displeasing Him. To "grow divinely," "to advance in wisdom, and age, and grace before God and man" one must live according to a divine spirit. Life is dynamic. We cannot grow intimate with God by merely going mechanically and passively through a series of observances. This is the case even though these observances as instituted by Christ are, of themselves, sanctifying. If a man wishes



his soul to grow in divine life through the reception of the Blessed Eucharist, he must supplement that reception, by the earnest endeavor to shape his conduct after the principles traced by Christ. He must, in a word, aim at being an upright and a true man in life's conflict. Active union with Christ means the effort to live like Christ. To hope for spiritual growth through the mere reception of the Eucharist, unaccompanied by any serious attempt to change one's character for the better, is to hope for the impossible.

In God's design every deliberate act of each day in the life of the adult Christian is meant to work towards perfecting in the soul of the Christian the image of His Divine Son. Life is not, for him, something to be lived through; it ought to be a perfecting process. The Christian religion is not a system for perfecting a man automatically. In the plan of redemption, development in divine character attends on a growth in the human character. The seeds of such development are planted in the soul at the first infusion of sanctifying grace. The life given by grace ought to increase continually. That such increase take place, the soul must not content itself with occasional acts of union with God. It must be disciplined to act habitually in the spirit of the union with Christ, effected by the sacraments.

The grace of the Most Holy Sacrament gives to the soul a tendency to act as Jesus would act. True it does not bestow on it an ease in doing this. A regular sequence of actual grace is, in fact, required to impart such facility. But these are always given for

Holy Communion entitles one to receive them. If, however, the soul fails to co-operate with these divine aids, the union with Jesus remains undeveloped. Instead of acting according to the instincts of grace, the soul will act according to the promptings of nature.<sup>2</sup> Because of this, egoism will regularly supply the energy for action. The movement will not be upwards towards God, but backwards on self. The Venerable Libermann writes in this connection: "The more a soul gives itself to the practice of active union with Jesus, the more closely it binds itself to Him. If it does not do this, it remains without progress unless it acquires some perfection through the sacraments of the living. But the souls who neglect cultivating active union with God, cannot enter into closer contact with Him by the mere frequentation of the sacraments. The reason is that the sacraments, in order to produce their proper effects, require suitable dispositions in the soul. If the two kinds of union, active and passive, are combined, great progress is made. But if the active union is neglected there is a risk of losing the other. Those who live, following habitually the inclinations of nature, are prone to succumb to their perverse inclinations. It is true that the observance of the commandments keeps them clear of sin, but it is difficult to keep to this observance, if free reign is given to the inclinations of nature."<sup>3</sup>

The loving contemplation of the Sacred Humanity, accompanied by the earnest desire to acquire its

<sup>2</sup> Cf., *Imitation of Christ*, Bk. III, c. 54.

<sup>3</sup> Ven. Libermann, C.S.Sp., *Ecrits Spirituels*, p. 66.

virtues, disposes the soul effectively for the operation of the Blessed Eucharist. Contemplation leads to imitation. The sacrament powerfully aids this tendency to imitation. Its influence gradually makes itself felt throughout the whole of the Christian's daily life. The spirit of Faith and of Charity penetrates insensibly into the regularly recurring round of duties. The sense of continual dependence on the Saviour steadily grows. Enterprises engaged in by a person living in close union with Christ cease to be regarded exclusively from the point of view of the material advantages they promise. They are considered in their bearing on the eternal welfare of the Christian himself and of his fellows. Supernatural replaces natural prudence. As the spirit of Faith deepens, there is developed a great simplicity, straightforwardness, and directness, in conduct and character. The man who deliberately guides himself, in his actions, by the light which comes from the mind of Jesus, cannot but acquire a touch of that limpidity of character which marked the Saviour. Hope grows with Faith. With increase of the virtue of Hope comes a readiness to view all human issues in their eternal aspect and to set value only on what affects favorably one's spiritual life. Hope nerves the soul to fix its gaze on the horizons to which the Redeemer points. It is a great grace to be able to aspire earnestly and confidently towards divine things, and to look with longing towards eternal horizons. Narrow, circumscribed and earthly interests, are a great obstacle to divine growth. The "connatural" effect of the Blessed Sacrament is to stir up these lofty aspira-

tions—this taste for heavenly things, when the soul disposes itself for these effects, by strenuous efforts to combat evil in itself and to aim at conformity with Christ in its dealings with men and circumstances.

The man “whose ambition is God” finds it comparatively easy to preserve his calm of soul in the midst of present difficulties and temptations. Trying circumstances cannot upset his trust in the Saviour: he is able, without anxiety, to abandon himself to the divine ruling for all that touches his earthly and temporal concerns. Love of God, both as a disposition and as an activity,—a love of God such as inspired the human life of Christ—, is the connatural effect of the Sacrament of love. Love is, above all things, operative. Supernatural love shows itself in an enthusiastic and affectionate submission to the Holy Will of God in all things. It proves itself in a brave acceptance of the cross as coming from the kind hands of Our Heavenly Father. According as the active contemplation of prayer favorably disposes the soul for the energy of the sacrament, the union with God becomes practical and constant. It gradually extends its influence over the whole range of one’s activities. In the Christian who lives in a sustained manner this life of practical union with Christ, the traits of the Man-God begin to reveal themselves in an unmistakable manner. God is then able to say of him, as He said of Jesus: “This is my beloved Son in whom I am well pleased.”<sup>4</sup>

The immediate consequence of this growing resemblance to Christ, is an abundant communication

<sup>4</sup> St. Matt. XVII, 5.

of the divine to the soul. The Sacred Humanity is the channel of this communication. This is the life which Jesus came to earn for men. It is this He promised to them. The "good news" He announced was that this life was placed by Him within the reach of all men, provided they were ready to take it on His terms. "I have come," He said, "that they may have life and may have it more abundantly."<sup>5</sup> Jesus is an inexhaustible reservoir of real life, because in Him the Word resides, in substantial union with the Humanity. All who are united with that Sacred Humanity—and the Eucharist is, par excellence, the bond of union—have access to the boundless ocean of the Divine Life of the Word of God.

The Saviour lived His life on earth as Head of Humanity. It was a meritorious life. Its merit was of infinite value, because it was the human life of a Divine Person. These merits are at the disposal of the Members of His Mystical Body. Incorporated in Him, their souls receive an influx of divine grace. Entering into His mysteries they find ready to their hands, all that they need to traverse the ascending degrees of sanctity. Passing through all the stages of human existence from infancy to manhood, He has won for men, a title to the peculiar graces for each stage. By these graces, it is possible for the child as for the man, to reproduce the veritable sanctity of Jesus.<sup>6</sup> Recent times have witnessed the appearance of a number of child saints, who are all, as authen-

<sup>5</sup> St. John X, 10.

<sup>6</sup> Cf. Irenaeus, *Adv. H.*, II 4, P. G. VII, 783, cited by E. Mersch, S. J., *Le Corps Mystique du Christ*, Vol. 1, p. 325.

tically stamped with the likeness of Jesus, as the adult heroes of sanctity. The Saviour lived through the daily routine of the average man and the merits of that exteriorly commonplace existence make it possible for His followers to realize the perfection of sanctity in the most ordinary of life's tasks. The virtue of the Blessed Sacrament aids each Christian to achieve the perfection proper to his state,—a perfection that satisfies the requirements of the exacting standards set up by Christ. This is possible because it is the virtue of Christ Himself in the Christian, that makes him act so perfectly. Infancy, youth and full manhood can each be true to its own characteristics and yet faithfully portray the Saviour. From the Eucharist the child derives the grace to play his rôle with the graciousness of the Child of Nazareth. From it the adult draws the strength to reproduce the fortitude that marked the career of the Divine Master. The Sacrament enables the ruler to govern with the prudence, justice, and mercy of the King of men. It enables the worker to toil with the dignity and nobility that distinguished the Carpenter of Nazareth. The Holy Eucharist, if its effects are not impeded, aids each one, in every sphere of life, every condition, every age, every rank and every occupation, to express a life that is truly Christlike. Whatever one may be from a worldly point of view, rich or poor, old or young, lowly or distinguished, of noble birth or of humble condition, one can, through the graces merited by Jesus and communicated through the Sacrament reproduce in oneself the spiritual beauty of the Saviour.

Manifold are the graces received through the Sacrament of the Body and Blood of Christ. It gives a rich communication of the life of God, called habitual or sanctifying grace. This bestows on the soul the power to exercise a vital energy which is a participation of that which distinguishes the inner life of the Blessed Trinity. It deposits in the created spirit a germ which, in its full development, flowers in the Beatific Vision. The grace of the Sacrament vitally uniting the soul to Jesus, causes His influence to extend itself to its deliberate activities.

It depends on the soul that this influence should be operative. Philosophers distinguish between acts that are of man and acts that are human. The latter are of moral value, the former are not. So it is possible for a soul, even in the state of grace, to elicit acts that are not inspired by grace. Such acts belong only materially to the soul, *as united* with the Saviour. They are what ascetical writers call *natural* acts, and being such, are not meritorious of supernatural life. Christ's merits do not enter into acts of this kind.

In addition to sanctifying grace the Blessed Sacrament gives a soul a right to those actual graces it needs, in order to produce acts which Jesus can claim as His own. Actual grace enables the Christian to accomplish his various obligations in the spirit of Jesus. By it the intelligence is illuminated so as to be able to see clearly what line of action to adopt, when a decision is to be taken. Such an illumination is always in the interests of action which shall be supernaturally prudent. Then the will is, by divine



impulse, stirred up to adopt the particular course of action which has been shown to be good. Finally in the very execution of one's deliberate decisions help is bestowed so that the act should be done rightly according to God. The actual graces to which the Blessed Sacrament entitles the soul, serve in this manner, to strengthen and to develop in the Christian, the participated divine life of the Word. Every action done in, and through, grace, is to this inner life as dried wood heaped on a fire. In this manner grace is given fuel and so, glows, expands and tends to take more and more complete possession of the soul, its faculties, and its activities. Whereas, on the other hand, acts that spring from impulse, passion, or merely worldly prudence cause the fire of charity to burn low. They diminish fervor.

When the soul corresponds to the actual graces received, sanctifying grace, following the inborn tendency of all vital things, waxes strong. Sanctity is directly measured by the amplitude that divine grace has reached and the degree in which it influences the faculties in their operations. As grace expands, there is a proportionate weakening of evil habits and evil inclinations; there is, as well, a steady elimination of faults and imperfections. The most effective way to overcome one's defects is to increase one's grace. It happens, too, that as habitual grace develops, actual graces find less obstacles to their efficacy and hence, operating more freely, produce effects of more intense charity. As the soul increases in charity, it becomes more and more agreeable to God. The favor of God obtains for it more abundant and more



special lights for the intelligence and stronger impulses for the will. A little good done with great charity, is much more valuable in the eyes of God, than a great achievement carried through with less love. The merits of our actions consist neither in the force of the actual graces given, nor in the greatness of the work done, but in this only, namely, "that our will, moved by actual grace, acts through the principles of sanctification deposited in the soul. "These principles are normally the effect of the Eucharist. Actual grace but enables the soul to strip itself of its own (natural) life and of its own (natural) action, so that the natural life be replaced by the life of Jesus. The more the life of Jesus is developed in the soul, the more perfect that soul is. The more the sanctifying grace, which He gives, becomes the life and soul of actions, the greater the merit of these actions." <sup>7</sup>

Our merit does not increase because we have more to suffer, or greater obstacles to encounter in the Christian life. A saint whose love of God is greater than that of another saint, might have much less to suffer than the latter and might have a much less toilsome life and yet his sanctity would be greater and his life more meritorious. The great saint is the one who is great in love, not necessarily the one who is great in endurance and achievement. It goes without saying that, normally, the life of Jesus in the Christian does not attain to any considerable devel-

<sup>7</sup> Ven. Fr. Libermann, *Ecrits Spirituels*, p. 78. From the same context are taken the points developed in the concluding paragraphs of this chapter.

opment, without great trials and difficulties being endured. For in the soul that is faithful, sufferings break down the obstacles to the growth of the divine life. Sufferings, rightly borne, win great graces for action and foster fidelity to the promptings of the Divine Spirit. Difficulties, to meet and overcome, excite alertness and other dispositions favorable to progress. They force the soul to cling more closely to the strength of the Saviour. God, too, is very liberal in the help He gives to those who remain loyal to Him in trial and stress.

Furthermore, it is useless to put forth a great *natural* activity to practice the Christian virtues. Natural activity has no merit. The best way, in fact the only way, to promote the growth of the theological and infused moral virtues is to have continual recourse to the Saviour, to desire to act in union with Him, and to look to the Blessed Eucharist for the grace to act in the spirit of this union. The more our actions are accomplished with peace and calm, under the interior movement and impulse of grace, the holier they are. The more there is of feverish activity put into them, the more imperfect they are. Finally, in order to arrive at Christlike Sanctity, we have but to remove the obstacles to it, and, at the same time, abandon ourselves to the interior tendency that our Divine Saviour gives us towards Himself. Our great object should be to favor the expansion of sanctifying grace, by striving to free ourselves of the obstacles opposed to its growth. These obstacles are a passion for earthly things, defects of

character, affections that are not approved by God, and ways of thought and conduct that are purely natural. The Blessed Sacrament is the most perfect antidote to all these evils.

## CHAPTER VII

# THE QUALITY OF TRUE PRAYER

*"I have said unto the Lord, Thou art my God; Thou art my unique good."—Ps. XV, 2.*

WHAT air and light are to the living body, that prayer is to the soul living with a supernatural life. Without air, food cannot be transformed into a life giving element. In a similar way, for the adult Christian, prayer, in some real form, is needed if the "Sacrament of life" is to produce its vitalizing effect. No soul can attain to divinization except through God's action on it. If man denies his dependence on God, for his beatitude, or, if, whilst acknowledging that dependence, he does not ask God to operate the divine transformation in his soul, salvation is impossible. Eternal death will be inevitable. All prayer that is true prayer is a practical recognition that God is the only source of our real good.<sup>1</sup> As the development of man's life is meant to be an unbroken progress towards his final happiness, he ought to be continually receiving what gradually prepares his soul for this consummation. In other words he must be in constant receipt of what God is prepared to give. God will not force His gifts on man, out of respect

<sup>1</sup> St. Thomas writes: By prayer man displays reverence towards God, in as much as in praying he subjects himself to the Lord and professes that he needs God as the source of all that which constitutes a good for him.—S. Th. II. II. Q 83, a 3.

for man's freedom. These gifts will not be bestowed unless they are desired and unless the desire for them is expressed. The moment man ceases positively to desire what contributes to his ultimate union with God, that moment he is outside the way of salvation. Man cannot afford to wander into the paths of perdition. It is, for him, a disaster of the first magnitude. Hence, constant, unremitting prayer, at least in the form of real desire, is an absolute necessity for him.

Man cannot progress steadily towards the goal of life without a willed dependence on God at each stage of that progress. Prayer is the expression of that willed dependence. It is, therefore, an essential means to salvation: if it is wanting all other means are inefficacious. It is of the utmost importance for all, as well for those whose great anxiety is to secure themselves against eternal loss, as for those who aim at a vigorous spiritual life, to have a clear and accurate notion of what real prayer is. For one cannot fulfil the essential obligation of praying at all times, unless one has learned the art of praying rightly. It is not feasible to set about acquiring the art, unless one is equipped with accurate notions of the nature, the rôle, and the subject of prayer.

Prayer is nothing else but the expression of a desire. Saint Thomas says that "it is, in some sort, an interpretation of our desire before God."<sup>2</sup> It is something that arises from us in presence of a felt want for something which we feel ourselves powerless to procure out of our own resources. The fact of our

<sup>2</sup> St. Th. II. II. Q. 83, a 9.

addressing a prayer to a person implies that we recognize such a one as being in a position to grant us what we desire. A person may be in a position to grant our petitions but yet not willing to do so. God has given us the assurance that this is not the case with Him. He can be trusted to bestow on us all that we need for the attainment of life's purpose. Having created us for a supernatural destiny, that is, for the happiness proper to Himself, He, by the very fact, undertakes to give us all that is required for gaining that happiness. In His generosity He, usually, does not content Himself with giving what is sufficient by way of means: very often He gives superabundantly. But it is not to be expected that He will give ear to our requests when these do not bear on what makes for a good life, as God understands a good life. His help is extended to us *to have a good life*, but not certainly *to have a good time*. God will supply our *needs*, but not our *wants*.

Our needs are fixed by the goal of our existence. What is necessary to reach that goal, *that* comprises all our *needs*. Wants and longings may arise in us and have no essential connection with what is required to attain to our final end. It is possible for our *wants* to extend far beyond our *needs*. Our desires may be out of relation with our real interests or even in conflict with them. God consults our interests always. He does not indulge our fancies. He wills our good, that is, our happiness. He would be in contradiction with Himself, and with His love of us, were He to accord us what militates against our good. He will not, therefore, have us pray to Him

except for the real needs, not the artificial desires, of our being. "These things only," says Saint Thomas, "do we rightly petition for, in prayer, which we can justly look for." <sup>3</sup>

God alone knows what will work in favor of our sanctification and what will prove adverse to it. We are but poor judges in the matter. As a kind and loving Father He is deeply interested in seeing that our life should have a successful issue. He is eager to give us every assistance to make it so. But it too frequently happens that His views and ours of what constitutes success in life, do not coincide. The ambition of the average Christian is to secure "the prize of life" (in the worldly sense of the phrase) and at the same time to retain such a measure of faith and devout practice as will insure him against eternal perdition. The faithful recognize that God's will is that they should secure sanctification through the life process, but they regard sanctification as a strand or thread of existence interwoven with other strands of a different quality, in forming life's pattern. They give but an uneasy and restive attention to Saint Paul's words: "*All whatsoever you do in word or in work, all things, do ye in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ, giving thanks to God and the Father by Him.*" <sup>4</sup> The necessity of unremitting, practical dependence on God, a dependence of every moment and in every act, is a thing against which every instinct in fallen human nature chafes. Routine Christians may have faith enough to know and to

<sup>3</sup> St. Thomas II. II. Q. 83, a. 6.

<sup>4</sup> I Coloss. III, 17.

acknowledge that life is meant to be a pursuit of God, but they would make Him one among many pursuits. The values they hold command their desires. The desires inspire their prayers. Desire of what has no relation to one's spiritual interests betokens an "un-faithful" outlook. But the Lord cannot be expected to adjust Himself to their outlook. He will not be persuaded to go half way to meet them, because of a certain tribute they are prepared to offer Him. They err as regards the true values of life, and Subsistent Truth cannot compromise with error. To the Divine Mind, God to be discovered ever more perfectly, and to be possessed ever more fully, is the one purpose that should be aimed at through the immediate objects of life's activities. That is His philosophy of existence, and on it is based the whole economy of His dealings with men.

Undeniably God is always disposed to give His creatures what makes them good. Man is truly good when he has developed into what he ought to be. Everything that aids man to attain this completion of himself—this perfection is, by the very fact, a good thing. Man, urged by what seems to him wisdom, but what is seen by God to be folly, will look for things which do not lead him on towards the final excellence of his nature. It would be cruel to him to accede to his desires. Thinking he is clamoring for wholesome fish, he will be really reaching out for a venomous serpent.<sup>5</sup> His Heavenly Father is too kind to offer him a dangerous reptile. God alone is good. He is His own good. He deigns to be man's good

<sup>5</sup> St. Matt. VII, 10.



too, seeing that He has called man to share His own happiness. He cannot prize the things on which men set their hearts. It is true that He is not indifferent to the things of human life; they are valued by Him, however, only in so far as they serve man in his progress towards eternal life.

A man who holds practically the Christian philosophy of life, will appreciate the things of this world, wealth, station, social position, physical well-being and the rest, according to the measure in which they help or hinder the successful prosecution of life's enterprise. This is one of the basic principles in the system of Saint Ignatius. "A man guided by faith and reason," he says, "should be so disposed as not to wish for health more than for sickness, for wealth more than for poverty, for honor more than for dishonor, for a long life more than a short one, and so in all other things; desiring and choosing only that which may lead us more securely to the end for which we were created." <sup>6</sup> A prayer to be true prayer must arise from a soul that is in the truth. Real prayer cannot have its source in error. A man is in the truth when he regards creatures in the light of the principle just quoted.

A difficulty here presents itself. If a man, ignorant, as he must generally be, of the bearing of indifferent things on his eternal welfare, ought not to desire one thing rather than another, what is he to pray for, since there seems nothing relating to the ordinary affairs of life, left to him legitimately to desire? Saint Thomas puts himself the question and answers it,

<sup>6</sup> Exercises of Saint Ignatius: Principle and Foundation.

with his customary lucidity. There are certain things which cannot possibly turn to our disadvantage and for these we should pray without any reservation and with full confidence. Such things are "all those by which we are beatified, and by which we merit our beatifications." <sup>7</sup> For the other things, which, of their nature, can prove a help or a hindrance according to the usage made of them, we may petition, but only conditionally. The Saint advances another reason why, in practice, we are not, through our ignorance of what may prove to our spiritual advantage, restricted to praying in merely general terms. "It is true," he says, quoting the words of St. Paul, that 'that we do not know what we should pray for as we ought,' but we are not abandoned to our own darkness and uncertainty in this vital matter. For the Holy Spirit comes to our aid in our helplessness, and breathing into us holy desires, makes us ask of God what we ought to ask of Him." <sup>8</sup>

The soul, therefore, can address itself to God about created things, in a way that is acceptable to the Divine Majesty, but only on condition that in framing its petitions, it allows itself to be docile to the guidance of the Holy Spirit, "Who, Himself, in such cases, asketh for us with unspeakable groanings." <sup>9</sup> How few there are, who, in petitioning for temporal favors, are careful to adjust their attitude in these things, to that of the Holy Spirit! And yet, if their prayers are to be instinct with the force of

<sup>7</sup> St. Th. II. II. Q. 83, a. 5.

<sup>8</sup> St. Th. II. II. Q. 83, a. 5, ad. 1.

<sup>9</sup> Rom. VIII, 26.

His inspirations this adjustment of attitude is needful. If many of our prayers were analyzed closely, the analysis would reveal that we are rather striving to conform God's will to ours, than ours to His. Men first desire a thing ardently: then they will it vehemently; then finding themselves powerless to attain it by their own efforts, they labor to interest God in it. They think it permissible to strive to win over the Creator to share the creature's views. It is not astonishing that the Lord, often, to the great chagrin and disappointment of His clients, turns a deaf ear to their clamors. Some, in their disappointment, find consolation in the assurance that no prayer is really without effect, and that, failing that which they are seeking, they are sure to obtain some other favor, equally good. This principle is a sound one, but needs to be understood. God never turns a deaf ear to prayer, *provided it is prayer*. Every request formulated by Christians is not necessarily such. Prayer is a supernatural act and must, therefore, have its origin in grace and not in natural inclination. Very frequently our approach to God is dictated by our desire to persuade Him to remove a reasonable disability against which we chafe, or to banish a discomfort which we should endure with patience. Prayer, that is real prayer, is always prompted by the Holy Spirit: being prompted by Him it will in all cases interpret before God the soul's true needs.

But, nevertheless, even when our desires do not spring from egoistic motives, and what we ask of God is undeniably good, as for instance, a virtue to acquire or a vice to overcome, it is a common experi-

ence to find that our prayers are not heard. If it be said that when our requests are not granted, it is due to our being wanting in the proper dispositions, namely, humility, perseverance, and constancy, the reply is not convincing. For very often the pious Christian cannot reproach himself with the absence of these dispositions in cases where his prayers have proved ineffectual. How reconcile this experience with the Lord's solemn assurance: "I say to you, ask and it shall be given to you: seek and you shall find: knock and it shall be opened to you. For every one that asketh, receiveth: and he that seeketh findeth: and to him that knocketh it shall be opened. And which of you if he ask his father, bread, will he give him a stone? . . . If you being evil, know how to give good gifts to your children, how much more will your Father from Heaven *give the good spirit to them that ask Him.*"<sup>10</sup> These words are very reassuring. But they must be read in the light of the instruction given elsewhere by Our Lord, on the same theme.<sup>11</sup> The Saviour says that we are heard not quite for the asking, but when we ask for certain things. Importunity is praised when that for which we importune God is worthy of commendation. The words italicised in the text just cited, give the key to the whole problem of prayer. In this question of the success of our pleading with God, the emphasis should not be laid on the dispositions in which we make our petitions. Attention should be directed also to the theme with which they deal. What is

<sup>10</sup> St. Luke XI, 9-13.

<sup>11</sup> St. Matt. VI, 9.

commonly the matter with our prayers, when they prove unavailing, is nothing else but the matter of our prayers.<sup>12</sup>

The truth lies in this, that what renders our petitions to God efficacious is not something external to them. It is obvious that the Lord cannot be propiti-ous to us unless we present ourselves before Him humbly and devoutly. But this is not sufficient. It is the object of our desires that is the all important thing. We pray because we find ourselves in need. To pray successfully we must have a clear idea of what we *need*, as distinct from what we *want*. Our wants are artificial and mainly of our own creation. Our needs are natural and of God's creation. He made us incomplete in such a way that we can find our completion only in Him. Our sense of our native indigence drives us outside ourselves in quest of what will complete our being. But in judging what that thing is we prefer to consult our own fancies rather than God's directions. Hence it is we so frequently importune God for what He sees to be mere futilities, as far as the perfecting of our personality is concerned. Balked of our desires, because God will not accord us what makes for our harm, we give way, like children, to petulance and ill-temper. "There are persons," says St. John of the Cross, "who act rather with a view to imposing their desires on God than honoring Him. They know full well that a wish is granted if it pleases God and not otherwise; yet they do not, for all that, resist the attraction for

<sup>12</sup> Cf. St. Aug.: "Nos mali, mala male petimus": In our perversity we ask for wrong things in an unbecoming way.

the vanity that pleases them, and remain obstinately attached to their own will redoubling their prayers to be heard. . . . The desire of salvation is what especially pleases God and there is no better means of obtaining the satisfactions of the longings of our heart, than to turn the force of our prayers on what is most agreeable to God.”<sup>13</sup> God made us to achieve a true supernatural personality through the stress and strain of human life. He would have us importune Him for what is needful for this end, and for nothing else but that.

Man has but one need, and that need is God. Nothing but a participation of the divine can complete his being. It is the nature of the super-nature, which man acquires at Baptism to *need*, and therefore, to *desire* God. The purpose of human existence, as envisaged by God, is that man should use it to draw the waters of divine life, from Jesus Christ, in whom they are found in an inexhaustible quantity. “All our prayers,” says St. Thomas, “ought to be directed to the obtaining of grace and glory.”<sup>14</sup> To reach these we need the bread that nourishes divine life. Our Heavenly Father will not offer us a stone, instead. To be perfectly human we must become, in a sense, divine. It is God, then, that we must petition for, since it is God alone that God, consistently with His love for us, can grant us. It is repugnant to His Wisdom and His Goodness that He should give us what is not Himself, or, what does not lead to Himself. The supernatural life in us will

<sup>13</sup> *Ascent of Mt. Carmel*, Vol. II, p. 116, Ed. Hoornaert.

<sup>14</sup> S. Th. II. II. Q. 83, a. 4.

always call for the supernatural life outside of us. "Deep calleth to deep,"<sup>15</sup> Grace calls to God, "for the Spirit Himself asketh for us with unspeakable groanings."<sup>16</sup> It is only when the Holy Spirit prompts our petitions that our prayers are true prayers. Unless we actually ask what God wishes to give, The Holy Spirit does not inspire our requests. Hence the Church prays: "Let the ears of thy mercy O Lord, be open to the prayers of thy suppliants; and that thou mayest grant the desires of those who seek, make them ask what is pleasing to Thee."<sup>17</sup> If the appeal which arises from our hearts does not come from the Holy Spirit, it will be prompted by disorderly self-love. It will not be prayer though having all the semblance of it. "Every prayer," writes the Venerable Libermann, "which is not that of Jesus, remains unanswered, whereas that which is offered in and by Jesus is always heard; according to His own words: 'I know that thou hearest Me always.' (St. John. XI. 47) *That which in our prayers is not heard is what proceeds from ourselves.* This source is always tainted and cannot issue in a supernatural effect."<sup>18</sup> Jesus acting in us will never ask what He has condemned as worthless and what has no purpose but to flatter or gratify our fallen nature.

We may desire only God, and "that alone we may petition for in prayer, which we may lawfully desire."<sup>19</sup> We must walk, not intermittenly, but at

<sup>15</sup> Ps. XLI, 8.

<sup>16</sup> Rom. VIII, 26.

<sup>17</sup> Prayer at Vespers on the Wednesday after the Fourth Sunday in Lent.

<sup>18</sup> *Comm. on St. John*, p. 671, by Ven. Liberman C. S. Sp.

<sup>19</sup> S. Th. II. II. Q. 83, a. 7.



all times, as beings created to possess God. "The cause of our prayer," says St. Thomas, "ought to be the longing desire for divine love, and it is from it that our prayer should proceed. The longing should be in us without intermission, either actually or virtually. It abides virtually in everything we do for the love of God. 'In every thing,' as the Apostle writes to the Corinthians, 'we ought to act in view of our procuring the Glory of God.' It is in this way that our prayers must be unremitting." <sup>20</sup>

In this context the great theologian lays down the four conditions required to make our prayers efficacious. We must address ourselves to God, with piety, perseverance, on our own behalf, and for what is necessary for salvation.<sup>21</sup> Three of these conditions we fulfil readily enough. The fourth presents a difficulty. We desire more ardently what makes for our gratification, than what makes for our salvation. It is not the desire of binding closer the bonds of love between us and God, the *desiderium charitatis*, but the longing for what will make our existence on earth more agreeable and comfortable, that moves us to fling ourselves, in petition, at the feet of Our Lord. And yet if into whatever we seek there does not penetrate the desire to find God, the principal condition of successful prayer is wanting. The desire of the divine should be made to run like a 'bourdon note' through all our petitions to the Creator. It is undeniable that temporal needs may form the theme of our communications with the Lord; but if they

<sup>20</sup> *Ibid.*, II. II. Q. 83, a. 14.

<sup>21</sup> *Ibid.*, II. II. Q. 83, a. 15.



do they must have a connection with the obtaining of grace and glory. It is quite legitimate to ask the Lord for all that is required in order to be able to lead a truly human life. It is only when the necessities of existence are easily secured that man can have proper scope to attend to the development of the higher life and serve his God in peace. The Sacred Writer justifies the desire of a sufficient measure of temporal well-being. The wise man prays "Give me neither beggary nor riches, give me only the necessities of life, lest perhaps, being filled, I should be tempted to deny and say; who is the Lord? or being compelled by poverty I should steal and foreswear the name of my God." <sup>22</sup>

Having too much or having too little may prove an occasion of sin. But we must beware of seeking temporal things for themselves, for the unique reason of self-gratification. They must be sought only as a means to the good life. "Temporal things," says St. Thomas, "we may ask God to grant us in so far as they are expedient to our salvation." <sup>23</sup> It is to be noted that the Angelic Doctor does not say that it is lawful to look to God for temporal favors provided they do not militate against our spiritual welfare. There are some who carelessly frame the doctrine of prayer in this incorrect fashion. God undertakes to bestow on us temporal blessings not merely if they do not prove a hindrance but only if they are a positive help to our salvation. We cannot expect God to aid us to enjoy human life in a way that He never

<sup>22</sup> Prov. XXX, 8, 9.

<sup>23</sup> St. Th. II. II. Q. 83, a. 6.

purposed that we should enjoy it. He means us to extract a blissful eternity, not a "good time" out of our existence on this earth. A musical instrument is designed to yield harmonious sounds. A music teacher would be faithless to his charge were he to encourage his pupil to extract discord from it. Life is an instrument from which man may draw divine harmonies. God will give His instruction and His aid to man, only in view of putting this heavenly rhythm into his life's activities.

An attentive study of the prayer taught by the Saviour will reveal that this doctrine is implicitly contained in it. In responding to the Apostles' wish that He should instruct them how to pray, Jesus taught them not merely *a* prayer, but prayer itself. He showed them not only *how* to pray, that is, in what dispositions they should make their petitions: He disclosed to them *what* they should pray for, if they hoped to find their Heavenly Father propitious, to them. In His instruction He set forth clearly the things we should look for from God, the order in which to make our requests, and the due subordination and relative importance of the different needs of human life, which we can count on God to supply. The object to desire in the first place is the essential need of man. God is our end. To possess God here and hereafter, is happiness. The way to possession is the way of childlike trust and affection. 'Our Father, who art in Heaven.' The loving child is eager for the Father's interests. His honor is its primary concern. So the child of God prays 'Hallowed by thy name.' Love seeks intimate union, hence we say: 'Thy

Kingdom come.' In this we desire not only that God should subjugate more and more human hearts to His sway, but also, and more especially, that He should reign ever more fully over our own wills. We go towards a blissful eternity by fulfilling the will of God daily. Hence we ask Him to aid us to accomplish His Holy Will in all things. The life in heaven is an exemplar of perfect union between Creator and creature. If the same unison existed on earth, this world would become a paradise. Therefore we pray: 'Thy will be done on earth as it is in heaven.' It is by living his human life as he ought that man conforms himself to God's will. For a complete life he needs good for soul and body. He may, therefore, look to God to supply him with both: 'Give us this day our daily bread.' Sin throws itself between the soul and God: temptation is an ever present menace to the friendship between creature and Creator. Hence we say to the Lord: 'Forgive us our trespasses as we forgive them who trespass against us, and lead us not into temptation.' Finally we beseech Him not to permit us to give way, and prove faithless under the heavy crosses of life, saying: 'but deliver us from evil.'

It is quite easy to recite the formula of the Lord's prayer: it is a different matter to permeate our petitions with its spirit. For even when our desires wear a spiritual complexion, our earnestness is stirred by the fear of sin and its consequences, rather than by a longing for God. Our ambition is more for moral rectitude than for 'deiformity' of soul. A certain kind of righteousness can coexist with a clinging to self-

life: real spirituality demands its abandonment. A philosopher can love moral virtue. But the disposition of heart which exercises a constraining force on God, is a readiness to quit self and leave the soul open for the invasion of God. Unfortunately we, too frequently, limit our spiritual ambitions to immunity from the assault of degrading vice. We have enough of faith to avoid what will bring us into violent conflict with the moral law, through fear of the sanctions which inevitably follow. It is true that the fear of everlasting punishment is a true, supernatural motive for avoiding sin. But the Lord's spirit is not that His followers should limit their efforts to escaping disaster in the great adventure of life, but rather that they should bend all their energies to bringing it to a triumphant issue. He wills that Christians should make the best out of life and not merely escape the worst.

The true Christian should make his spiritual effort consist in cultivating the desire of God and gradually eliminating all desires which are not of Him, or for things pertaining to Him. It is an unworthy thing to aim merely at moral security. Our prayer should have running through it, as its *leit-motif*, a longing that God should replace self in us, and substitute His life for our own. We are very anxious to feel safe, but we dislike the sense of continual and necessary dependence on God, in each detail of our life. But this felt security cannot belong to us as creatures. For, because of our fallen state, we are perpetually suspended over an appalling abyss of sin. Nothing can prevent our falling into it but the continual grace

of God. We must incessantly ask for it, incessantly feeling our need of it.

For those who are beginners in the spiritual career, the struggle against manifestly perverse tendencies and habits imposes itself. To undo the effects of a life which has been habitually spent in gratifying every whim, there is required the action of those graces which are an antidote to moral perversity. Prayer to God for aid in this struggle against what is corrupt in them is a necessity for beginners. But those who are progressing, or are eager to make progress, ought to devote their attention to securing not only that their actions should be morally correct, but that they should be as fully as possible, animated by divine charity. They should solicit God to make their life and their actions each day more full of grace: and they should ask God to accord them temporal things only in so far as they favor growth in the divine life. God must be little honored by a vast number of the petitions that mount to His throne. How few of those petitions manifest an interest in Him! how many manifest a strong interest in the creatures themselves, from whom the prayers come! God cannot stoop to gratify desires prompted by self-love, self-esteem and worldly ambition. God cannot be pleased with, or propitious to, a desire, which does not contain in it, at least implicitly, a longing for the Supernatural, that is, for Himself.

It is scarcely necessary to add that prayer is not necessarily an affair of words. It is, as inspired by the Holy Ghost, fundamentally *an active attitude of the soul*. It is an attitude of eager expectancy and of

longing for grace. It is a humble and trustful unfolding of the soul's real needs before God, a pleading with Him to satisfy those needs, and a disposition to welcome the gifts of God. It implies a readiness on our part to abandon what in us is incompatible with what is bestowed by God. True prayer means the sincere will to exchange the life according to nature for the life according to God, and to set a childlike dependence on the Creator above self-satisfied righteousness of conduct.

Prayer of this kind is a key to happiness, for through it there grows a personal intimacy with God. The official and the conventional disappear in the relations of the soul with its Creator. The Lord communicates Himself freely and makes His character more and more understood by His favored creature. "The joys of prayer," says St. Teresa, "resemble those of heaven. The blessed see only what the Lord, according to their merits, offers to their contemplation. But as they know well that they have done but little to obtain this measure of bliss, each is content with the place that is his. There is a great difference between the varying degrees of happiness in heaven and this difference is much greater than that which exists between the varying degrees that belong to this life. In truth when a soul begins to taste the divine favors in prayer, it appears to it that it has nothing further to desire. It regards itself as well paid for all it has done for the glory of God. It is perfectly right in so judging. . . . What treasure can be more precious than the assurance that one is pleasing to

God.”<sup>24</sup> We are created to be happy. And yet men are, in great numbers, unhappy. The true cause of their unhappiness lies in that their longings are not for God, but for things other than God. They do not “seek first the kingdom of God and His justice,” but are wholly intent on the “all else that would be added to them.”<sup>25</sup> When men seek “all these things” with no care or thought for God, the complexity introduced into life by the Fall always thwarts their longings. Balked of their desires they experience misery. Were God the primary pursuit of their lives, their aspirations would not suffer disappointment. God is more eager to give than men to receive. “Blessed are they that hunger and thirst after justice for they shall have their fill.”<sup>26</sup>

<sup>24</sup> St. Teresa of Avila, *Autobiography*, Chap. X.

<sup>25</sup> St. Matt. VI, 33.

<sup>26</sup> St. Matt. V, 6.

## CHAPTER VIII

### LIVING THE LIFE OF FAITH

*"I am not ashamed of the Gospel. For it is the power of God unto salvation to every one that believeth . . . The justice of God is revealed therein from faith unto faith; as it is written; The just man liveth by faith."—Rom. I, 17.*

IT is possible to profess the truths of Christianity and yet not possess the Christian spirit. There is no hint in the narratives of the Evangelists that the apostles ever questioned any statement of the Divine Master. The evidence is all the other way. They embraced His teaching with eagerness and without demur. This was the case even when the doctrine taught was, in itself, repugnant to their rooted instincts and prejudices. Their docility of mind was put to a severe test on the day that followed the first multiplication of the loaves. Jesus spoke at great length on the necessity of eating His flesh and drinking His blood. He had laid down this as the condition of gaining the life it was His commission to give to men, on the part of God. This banquet was to be the very core of the new Religion. Such a teaching revolted the great majority of the Jews; it staggered the allegiance of the apostles. Yet, their fidelity withstood the shock to all their feelings. They would not abandon Him in spite of what seemed to them the exacting conditions which He imposed on His adher-



ents. Many of those who listened to the Saviour's discourse on the "bread of life," are reported as murmuring: "This saying is hard and who can bear it?" Their actions followed their thoughts. For "after this, many of His disciples went back, and walked no more with Him. Then Jesus said to the twelve: Will you also go away? Peter, shaken but blindly loyal, said in words that betrayed a severe internal struggle, "Lord to whom shall we go? Thou hast the words of eternal life." <sup>1</sup>

The same apostle some time afterwards experienced another sharp agony of soul, when faced with a Christian truth that conflicted with his cherished views and ambitions. Like many men he dreamed of power and security from physical hardship as constituting the ideal of life. Into the middle of these golden dreams, shattering them ruthlessly, came the revelation of the Cross, as Christ's theory of the ideal life. Peter was dismayed at the future that this teaching outlined for him, the chosen leader in Christ's kingdom. He wrestled against his fate: he had to be sharply rebuked: but he accepted finally, this the bitterest truth of all for his self-seeking and self-loving nature.<sup>2</sup>

What is true of Peter, is true of all the other apostles, with perhaps the exception of Judas. It is to be doubted if he, his mind darkened by sordid greed, accepted the teachings of the Saviour. With regard to the others there can be no doubt of the docility of their minds. And yet though holding unreservedly

<sup>1</sup> St. John VI, 61-69.

<sup>2</sup> St. Matt. XVI, 21-23.

all the separate items of the truth that Jesus patiently taught them, they, nevertheless, failed to imbibe His spirit. And this was the case after many months of diligent and loving discipleship. When the Redeemer was on His last journey to Jerusalem an incident happened which revealed, in a very striking fashion, the difference of view that existed between Him and His most intimate followers. The inhabitants of one of the towns of Samaria, noting that the apostolic band was making for Jerusalem, rudely shut their doors against them. The fiery sons of Zebedee were highly incensed at this churlish behavior. Listening to the promptings of their intemperate anger, and arrogantly relying on the power that was theirs as friends of Jesus, they would be satisfied with no vengeance short of calling down fire from heaven to consume the unfortunate Samaritans. The Lord was deeply pained at their attitude. It was not His way "to smash the bruised reed or to trample out the smoking flax."<sup>3</sup> He had no instinct to use His power to crush, without compunction, the resistance of human wills. He has too much respect for man's liberty, to use against it, His irresistible might. Saint Luke tells us that He turned to the disciples whom He loved dearly and "*rebuked* them, saying: You know not of what spirit you are."<sup>4</sup> This painful contrast between unquestioning acceptance of Jesus' teaching and an attitude utterly alien from His towards human concerns is constantly being presented in the lives of the followers of Christ. Yet, to

<sup>3</sup> St. Matt. XII, 20.

<sup>4</sup> St. Luke IX, 55.

profit adequately by adherence to His teaching, it is necessary to embrace it with all one's soul. This means that it does not suffice to assent to it with the intelligence: heart and will must both play their part in subscribing to the doctrines of Christ. It is an excellent thing to have the faith, that is, to accept on God's testimony, all revealed truth. It is a great grace to have the true religion. But it is a great misfortune to practice a right religion wrongly. This will inevitably happen unless with the letter, the soul imbibes the spirit of the Saviour's message. The integral Christian is the man who not only submits his judgment to the truths of faith, but strives, in addition, to have his whole life guided by the spirit of the faith. The spirit according to which a man lives is nothing else but an attitude of soul, which having its origin in acts of deliberate choice, has come to be almost as spontaneous as an instinct. It is nothing else than an instinctive manner of judging, weighing, estimating, and reacting to, life's issues. It is a disposition of mind and will which colors all a man's sympathies, decisions and acts. The spirit in which a man lives is a true test of the quality of a man's life. It determines that life to be noble or ignoble. The life of a Christian, since he is a member of Christ, must be a noble one. Otherwise he is unworthy of his high calling. The true Christian must live on a lofty plane. To do so consistently he must have the spirit of his Divine Master. He must, in short, live his life in the spirit of faith. His daily conduct must reveal in him a constant awareness of his dignity as member of the Mystical Body of

Christ. The Christian has a strict obligation to be worthy of Christ. "Followers of Jesus," says Saint Leo the Great, "fail not to be conscious of the dignity which is yours. Having been elevated to a participation of the Divine Nature, do not allow yourself to sink back into your former ignoble condition. Consider the Body of which you are a member and have constantly before you the thought of Jesus, Who is Head of that Body. You have been drawn from squalid obscurity and established in the splendor of the divine kingdom. Remember that Baptism has made of you a dwelling place for the Holy Spirit."<sup>5</sup> A stern demand is made on the Christian. He is asked to live the life of faith in a world where little is favorable to such a venture. His vocation demands that he should eliminate all division from his life of thought. It is all too common to find in Christians a cleavage between their professions and their practice. That is the outcome of human frailty and deserves commiseration. It is not altogether bad, for there is always hope of betterment as long as the profession condemns the practice. The evil is far more serious where it is a question of cleavage between two opposed sets of principles or maxims which are held simultaneously and applied to practice contemporaneously. There are many among the followers of Christ who section their life into religious and secular compartments. In the affairs of cult and specifically religious observance they apply the rulings of the Gospel. In the ordinary affairs and concerns of life, their decisions, evaluations, and conduct are

<sup>5</sup> St. Leo the Great, Sermon 21 on the Nativity.

governed by principles wholly at variance with those of the Gospel. This is a characteristic of human falsity and merits condemnation. It is this failure to regulate the whole of life, religious, intellectual, economic, social, and political, by the principles of the Gospel, that gives strength to the forces of evil and allows them almost without resistance, to sweep over and submerge, periodically, whole tracts of Christian civilization.

The Church at the present day finds itself in the midst of one of these perpetually recurrent crises. It is, therefore, a time for Christians to enter into themselves and institute a strict enquiry into the motives that habitually rule their conduct. For it is quite possible even for those who cannot accuse themselves of deliberately quarrelling with Christ, to be withdrawn, to some extent, in the direction of their lives, from the influence of His grace. At almost every degree in the practice of Christianity there is possible a process of conversion. This means a change which brings the soul more perfectly into conformity with the promptings of the spirit of Christ. A change of outlook, by which one's judgments of value are more fully informed by the viewpoint of faith, makes the member of Christ's body more receptive of the vital influence of the Head. A change such as this demands courage. There are very few in whom an enquiry frankly undertaken and resolutely pushed to its logically practical consequence, will not impose painful renouncement. This is the reason why men, as a rule, dread, and dreading, seek to evade the duty of thinking. Right thinking, it is instinctively

felt, will lead to conclusions, too exacting for self love, too tyrannical for unprincipled tolerance and too uncompromising for unjustifiable concessions to irrational tendencies. As long as the Gospel has not a virtual and all-pervading influence on the spirit that breathes through our lives and controls our every act, even though there may not be any serious swerving, in practice, from the path of fair dealing, there is need for change. A Christian should so order his existence, that, at any moment, the judgments he formulates, the opinions he advances and the views that he expresses could be found to harmonize with what is explicitly or implicitly contained in the ethical philosophy of Jesus Christ. We are "Christians" to the exact degree in which "faith" is the controlling motive in our thoughts, views, decisions, evaluations and actions. Hence it is that "Christian" and "faithful" are synonymous terms. The integrity of a man's Christianity is impaired when he allows the spirit of the world to usurp the spirit of faith in the control of his ordinary human concerns.

It is a great grace so to grasp the teachings of faith, as to have the mind completely subjugated to their truth and the will wholly captivated by their beauty. This is a grace that God is ready to bestow on all whom according to His intent, He efficaciously destines to be members of the Mystical Body of His Son. If the soul meets God's advances and by the practice of Christian self-denial disposes itself suitably for the action of divine grace, it is enabled not only to grasp firmly the particular dogmas of faith, but also to discern clearly the unity that pervades them and

the practical consequences for life, that flow from them. In a quasi-intuitive glance the soul that is truly "faithful," is endowed with the power to penetrate to the very heart of the Christian system. This clear apprehension of the Gospel truths whilst enlightening and charming the intellect, is not without its influence on the will. The action of that gift of the Holy Ghost which is called the gift of understanding (Latin *intellectus*) is very pronounced in these cases. So intense is the delight that follows on this penetrating view of the economy of God's relations with the human soul and of the destiny that awaits man as adopted child of God, that the obstacle presented to spiritual progress by the sluggishness of the will with regard to good is partially overcome. When there bursts upon the soul's vision the beauty of the Faith, and the wondrous life it offers, and the avenues it opens out away from the cramping miseries and limitations of poor human nature, strong convictions are easily formed and consistence is given to life.

But in the actual carrying out of the full Christian program over the whole range of life's concerns, man is not unhampered. He is not immune from the interference of opposing forces of thought. As human life works itself out in detail it is exposed to the play of numberless influences that have not their source in the Gospel. Though the Christian may resist the spirit of the world, he cannot easily turn a deaf ear to the spirit of the world. That spirit is active in himself and in the *milieu* in which he lives. It can be very insinuating when it urges what seems reasonable



or plausible or what readily falls in with his inclinations and prejudices. All men are to a certain psychological extent the product of early associations, social surroundings, education, and the inherited conventions of the class into which they are born. Whatever reflects the mentality that results from these combined forces, will readily recommend itself to their reason. This occurs all the more easily, when the suggestions of the world promise immediate advantages and do not conflict obviously with any specific precept. Doubtless the Christian that sincerely desires to shape his views and acts according to the faith he professes can scarcely ever yield to the spirit of the world, even in matters not positively wrong, without feeling in himself a certain vague disquiet. His memory is haunted by stray phrases from the instructions of the Saviour,—phrases such as speak of the necessity of cutting off one's right hand and plucking out one's right eye rather than endanger and only *endanger* one's spiritual interests. Success in the eyes of the world, fashion, the desire to appear up to date, all this allures to what may not be actually sinful, but what, nevertheless, is singularly unlike the courses of action recommended by the Teacher from God.

It is not easy to live in the world and to be not of the world. Even with the utmost good will it is extremely difficult for us to approach any judgment we have to form, any decision we have to come to, any enterprise we have to undertake in the pure and wholly dispassionate spirit of faith. Even a good man, anxious to regulate his life according to Christian ideals, will, frequently, feel no imperative call to



bring the light of faith to play upon his actions, except where these involve the deliberate choice between right and wrong, or, between the greater and the less good. One may not perhaps, definitely exclude the influence of faith. But this is not the same thing as bringing it actually into operation. Yet this is what should be done in every detail of life if a man is to bear himself consistently with his status as a Member of the Mystical Body of Christ. We are told by the Holy Ghost that the just man liveth *by* faith, not *with* faith. The Christian must be "faithful" not at specific times, but at all times and in all circumstances. Weighing everything according to the standard measures of the Gospel should become a habit. It is not enough for the Member of Christ to apply reason to his affairs. Habitually narrowing to this scope, one's efforts after good, would bring about, essentially, a weakening of the supernatural element in conduct. Christ's religion is far more than an excellent philosophy. Philosophy aims only at the excellence of nature. The ethics of Jesus are essentially supernatural. His teaching is not a code but a life. It will, in consequence, happen fairly frequently that faith will dictate something which reason cannot, indeed, condemn, but to which it will feel no obligation to aspire. The moral value of the acts of Christ's members is strictly valued by the measure of the supernatural that is in them. Their acts, to come up to the requirements of the Divine Master, must be reasonable, but more than reasonable. They must be "faith-full," or using an adjective that served in another connection, they must be

“grace-full.” For the faith in them must be “informed” by love of God. It is the principle in which they take their rise that determines the moral character of our acts. They are supernatural, only if they have their rise in faith; merely human, if they are dictated by reason only, and merely animal if they come from sensibility uncontrolled by reason.

It is scarcely necessary to remark that to act in all things consistently with the promptings of faith is not a program of life easy to fulfil. It is hard for man to remain, for a long period, docile even to reason. Feeling, passion and instinct, are constantly intervening to guide the course of a man’s actions. Their intervention is not always obvious. We are oftentimes certain that we are acting on reasons that are *logical*, whereas they happen to be purely *psychological*. These psychological reasons have their root in the historical circumstances of our lives, the outlook in which we have been brought up or which has been formed in us by circumstances, in the sympathies and antipathies that have developed in us, the attractions and repulsions to which we have been subjected, and in the tastes and tendencies that are the outcome of the particular type of education that has had the molding of our adolescent minds and wills. Strong emotions experienced in great crises come in their turn to color our mental habits. Events that seriously affect our existence or our ordinary way of life, stir us deeply and passionately. Even when the passions subside, their effects may remain in a certain permanent “set” given to our moral and intellectual temper. It is a matter of daily experience

that souls strongly stirred by emotion readily admit propositions which recommend themselves solely because they happen to fit in with the mood of the moment. Once admitted these judgments are prone to take root and to spring up in the form of ineradicable and utterly irrational prejudices. The conflicts in which men are involved, the associations into which they are thrown, the oppositions in which they are engaged, all these help to mold their views, determine their judgments and furnish them with principles of action. In the meantime life has to be lived, action has to be taken, decisions to be made. And the mind without question, seeks the inspiration of its decisions in the manifold influences just enumerated. In this manner by a process that is, in great part, unconscious, the natural, the psychological and the temperamental, replace the supernatural, the spiritual and the Christian, as the spring of conduct. In this way is generated the practical forgetfulness of the maxims of the Gospels. This forgetfulness destroys in its source much of the merit of works, that often, in themselves, are not without considerable elements of good. Insensibly there is developed in dealing with life in its practical aspect an excessive regard for the temporal and a balancing loss of regard for the eternal. This is the origin of the inconsistency presented all too frequently in the lives of Christian men. Striving to be faithful to Christ, and swayed at the same time by the spirit of the world, their conduct is uneven. Their appreciations veer with times and circumstances. It requires more than ordinary clear-sightedness and resolution

in men who have the faith, to rise superior to all these influences, and live in the spirit of faith.

A man in order to form a fairly accurate judgment of the way in which life's issues will show up in the light of faith, must strive to consider them as they appear to him, when his soul is withdrawn from the influence of the worldly spirit. In the heat and fever of action we judge far otherwise of the things of our existence than we do, when, in the course of a fervent retreat, we institute a strict enquiry of our conscience. As we judge then, should we judge always. Truths do not change with the change of our psychological environment. The appreciations made in times of recollection cannot abide unless they are taken up into, and form part of, our system of thought. It is of little use to hold these appreciations in a passing way to effect a passing good, if we retain molds of thought that are at variance with the spirit of the Gospel.

Constant vigilance of an intellectual kind is needed, if one is not to drift from the influence of the faith and fall under influences hostile to it. At times of "conversion," devout persons feel themselves firmly anchored to the principles of living inculcated by the Saviour. But having begun well, they find, after a while, they have, as it were, dragged their anchor. When, in recurrent periods of renewal, they pause to look about them and to take their bearings, they find that their eyes rest on horizons very different from those contemplated when the faith shone undimmed in the heavens of their mind. They discover that they have been, at times, moved to action,

by motives to which they had thought themselves grown insensible. In the periods of strong grace, they were convinced that henceforth they could be swayed by none but supernatural considerations and they now become aware that they have allowed themselves to be influenced by personal feeling, selfseeking, and expediency. The example of others, the dictates of worldly wisdom, the prospect of immediate advantage have gradually moved them from the view of faith in the management of their affairs. And yet "the just man liveth by faith." To be "just," he must do so habitually. The man who sincerely desires to lead a consistently supernatural life will regularly seek in his faith the inspiration of his earthly existence. The practical outlook on human affairs outlined in the Gospel will shape his system of thought. To the maxims, laws, and principles of the text book of Christianity he will refer for light on, and justification of, his proceedings. To such a man the writings of the Evangelists supply the standards by which every deliberate activity either of judgment or action, is tested. Faith is made to shed its light on every aspect of existence; its rays are not narrowed to the objects of purely religious experience. To deserve truly the title of "faithful" a man should "live the life of faith." This means that he should submit to its ruling the formation of his mental powers, and their exercise. To it he should look for his vision of things, and for his standards of value. The flesh and the world will always advance their plausible claims and plead for consideration to be given to courses of action not obviously wrong. The instincts

of fallen nature will argue for concessions, and will, with lawyer's skill, show good cause why their claims should be allowed. Resistance is not easy when the appeals flatter passion. It is only the man who has trained himself to independent habits of thought, to habitual self-discipline, to a tenacious grasp of right principles and to sustained adherence to these principles in their practical application,—it is only such a man that will be able to present a consistent pattern of life.

The difficulty of holding out against the spirit opposed to the spirit of faith is greater still where the struggle engages man, not as an individual, but in his corporate capacity. It is frequently much easier to set a more rigorous standard for ourselves when it is a question of regulating our personal conduct, than when we are acting as members of a social group. But the principles enunciated by Jesus have as rigid an application to nations as to individuals. Man cannot section himself in two. As man he is meant by nature to achieve his perfection through membership in society. The spirit of faith, therefore, must be operative not only in his personal but also in his social life. For an organic unity reigns through both. A human life is essentially a social life. Everything that proceeds from the Christian ought to bear the impress of the faith he professes, were it only the professional work by which he earns his living.

A life to have value must have unity and consistency. No unity is possible when the trend of our decisions is determined by the particular currents of thought, whose influence for the moment we may

happen to be undergoing. Faith also supplies the solid foundation of a unified life. It furnishes us with God's view of things, and that view suffers no change or alteration. His standard of values is unerring and unvarying. To have a practical faith is nothing else than to have a readiness to apply God's standards of value in the manifold details of life. It consists in a promptitude to justify an act or decision or counsel by something contained in the teaching of Jesus Christ. This implies a firm disposition to set His judgment and His views above the dictates of purely human prudence or worldly wisdom.

The man who lives in the spirit of faith does not run the risk of contracting God to his own measure. Those whose faith is weak because they do not regularly submit their lives to its ruling, easily come to regard the Lord through the distorting medium of their own petty human conceptions. At one time they will easily persuade themselves that what seems good to them seems good to Him, that He favors what they favor and that His displeasure is for what they find antipathetic. They assign to the Lord their own hardness and their own smallness of mind. They do not see Him in the magnanimity and love which are revealed in the history of Jesus. In their moments of success they are persuaded that they enjoy God's favor. When, however, they meet with reverses or grievous trials they as easily fall into discouragement and think that God turns from them in weariness and disgust. They measure God's loving kindness by their own powers of forbearance and affec-



tion and find it unequal to bearing the strain of the infidelities of which they may be conscious.

The absence of the spirit of faith in the councils of nations is one of the deep reasons of the irreconcilable divisions which separate men into deadly hostile camps. Even the alliances of those drawn together by fear or interest are ill cemented and always threaten rupture. If man were governed by the spirit of faith, how different things would be. Each would recognize in his neighbor what he would be alive to in himself. He would see in him a fellow member in the Mystical Body of Christ, living the same life and called to the same destiny. Hatred would become difficult if all were seen to form but one body, for no man hateth his own flesh. Yet, even those who lead what is considered a fairly Christian life, fall very far short of this ideal. Their tendency is to approve of those who please them, who are useful to them, and who fall in with their moods and caprices. On the other hand there is a proneness in us all to condemn those who stand in our light, who cause us inconvenience, and who, perhaps, from the best motives, may cause us pain. Very few are they who put themselves at the point of view of God in judging the lives and actions of their fellows. They judge them by the way these lives and actions affect themselves, approving what pleases and condemning what causes displeasure.<sup>6</sup>

The spirit of faith is the spirit of basing one's actions on considerations that embrace in their ambit the world of eternity as well as the world of time. It

<sup>6</sup> Cf. *La Vie Spirituelle*, Vol. 43, No. 2, pp. 138-150.



is opposed to that spirit of expediency and compromise which hesitates to face a present material disadvantage in pursuit of a spiritual good. It is faith that gives a man the strong conviction that, notwithstanding all appearances to the contrary, taking God's line will lead to ultimate good. The man who guides his life by faith and finds his vision of things in faith, is undisturbed by the failures that, at the moment, may befall his enterprises. He knows that when done in faith, these works of his have in them a principle of vitality which will eventually triumph over the obstacles presented by men and circumstances. Saint Paul invokes the history of his people in vindication of this truth. "By faith he that is called Abraham, obeyed to go out into a place which he was to receive for an inheritance, and he went out, not knowing whither he went. . . . For he looked for a city that hath foundations, whose builder and maker is God." <sup>7</sup>

God requires us, doubtless, to use our intelligence in dealing with the problems that life presents. But it is only to the extent that our processes of thought are controlled by faith, that they will be effective in creating works of permanent value. Undertakings even of good men when they do not have their inspiration in this spirit of faith are bound to prove sterile. All actions are wasted, if they have not God for their end, the spirit of Jesus for their principle, and the light of faith for their direction. Acting

<sup>7</sup> Heb. XI, 8-10. The whole of the chapter is a veritable hymn in praise of the spirit of faith and proof of its practical wisdom. It is shown as always justified by the event.

through human motives, or worse still, through self-interested considerations we lose not only the merit of our acts but also the enduring character that would be in them, were they done in a spirit of faith. Whereas if a man habitually seeks the inspiration of his life in the Gospel, he will find works of virtue gradually becoming easier of accomplishment and will discover in his soul a growing conformity of will between himself and the Divine Master. The surest road to perfection is to accomplish purely in Jesus Christ, without excessive eagerness, and according as they offer themselves, the daily duties of life. The true Christian will acquire the habit of pausing occasionally in the midst of his activity and asking himself in what way would the Lord act were He placed in the present situation. For one versed in the Gospel the question answers itself. There follows then the deliberate effort to infuse the spirit of Jesus into the doing of the task on hand.

The Christian who is guided by the principles of faith is necessarily high-minded and noble. The most ordinary of his actions is stamped with dignity as well as simplicity. In him is observable an instinctive aversion from the ways and views of the world. This instinct is quicker than reason and is unhesitatingly opposed to tendencies which, at first sight, appear legitimate, but, which, on being analyzed, reveal a certain opposition to the spirit of the Gospel. The judgment of the integral Christian is of high value, because it is free from the pettiness and narrowness that are characteristic of the views of those who allow themselves to be swayed by personal considerations.

Underneath a certain gentleness and restraint of manner there is the firmness that will prove itself inflexible in time of crisis. Those who live habitually according to the spirit of faith constitute the material out of which martyrs are made. Where weak-kneed Christians, habituated to divisions in their souls, palter with their consciences, the man of faith with his character hardened to consistency by constantly issuing in action based on principles that do not shift or vary, finds himself ever ready to sacrifice his life, rather than renounce any of these convictions which are a vital element in his habits of thought. Such a man having trained himself to live the faith, is ever ready, if needs be, to lay down his life for the faith.

## CHAPTER IX

# THE SUFFERINGS OF THE MYSTICAL CHRIST

*"I, Paul . . . who now rejoice in my sufferings for you, and fill up those things that are wanting of the sufferings of Christ, in my flesh, for his body which is the Church."—Coloss. I, 24.*

A STUDY of the Mystical Body of Christ cannot evade the consideration of the great problem presented by human pain. It is a truth, admitting of no dispute, that God created man for happiness. He did not create man to be happy only after having previously traversed a period of misery. All rational creatures were brought into being, simply, in order to have an existence of unchecked happiness. And yet, men, without exception, suffer: and the vast majority suffer intensely. For mankind there is no escape from pain. What is even more pitiful than the sight of human agony, is the passionate revolt in human hearts against its inevitableness. Many of those who have not the faith, and, at times, indeed, even some of those who have, not understanding why they should suffer, rebel against it and strive to persuade themselves that a proper organization of human resources could eliminate it from the life of men. Persuading themselves that it ought not to be, they become convinced that it need not be. A number of men who are considered leaders of

thought, hold this view. They make it the object of their lives to do away with human pain, or, at least, to reduce it to inconsiderable proportions. They are exasperated at the fruitlessness of their efforts, but not disillusioned. Their convictions are not shaken when they see that the progress of science and rationalization, so far from diminishing the volume of human distress, serves but to increase it. They turn in fury on the Church, for they have some secret instinct that she does not share their views with regard to pain. It is obvious to them that she does not look upon it as the great evil of mankind, nor thinks that human resources can ever bring it to an end. Her way of dealing with it is enigmatic to them. She does labor to mitigate it, but yet, far from regarding it with abhorrence, she approaches it with something akin to reverence. Her baffling attitude in this matter is not the least amongst the causes of the antagonism she is ever fated to arouse.

Christianity offers a number of paradoxes. A careless presentation of Christian truth can make these illuminating paradoxes appear repellent contradictions. The mood of the world of today demands special accuracy in treating the question of human suffering. Care must be taken to give no grounds for the accusation that, "the worship of sorrow is at the core of Christianity." It must be confessed that sacred orators and pious writers very often employ expressions, which, though taken from the writings of the Saints, yet, when repeated without adequate explanation, give occasion for this calumny. It is not true to say, without due qualification, "that suffering

is a blessed thing," or that "pain is an ennobling discipline." Yet, generally speaking, the due qualification is not supplied. It is true and borne out by history that suffering often "tends to warp and stunt and debase and demoralize an individual and a people." Perfervid eulogies of the value and beauty of suffering call for restraint in face of the obvious fact that the Church pours out its vast expenditure of energy and treasure in her efforts to alleviate the mental, moral, and physical agonies of humanity. Whole bodies of her most devoted children consecrate their lives unreservedly to this work, and win her warm approval for so doing. When orators dilate on the poverty of the Saviour, they should shade off their glowing pictures by pointing out that the Church has, in all ages, and often, with success, labored to aid the poor to better their lot and free themselves from the crippling effects of want. Warnings against the dangers of riches should be tempered by the thought that wealth and worldly resources, now as in the time of Saint Paul, are very necessary for the furthering of the Church's enterprises. The Bride of Christ can appear beautiful in poverty, but she does not hesitate, when the occasion offers, to deck herself out in glittering raiment and surround herself with glorious pageantry. And the most faithful of Christians need have no scruple in taking ordinary, legitimate means to increase their resources and enhance their position. Suffering is not necessarily a good, nor human well-being necessarily an evil.

All the anomalies and apparent contradictions in

Christian teaching concerning these questions are solved, if it be understood that the greatness and value of Christ's life on earth are based, not on the circumstances of that life, but on the spirit in which it was lived. "The worship of sorrow" is not at the "core" \* of the religion of Jesus Christ. It does not belong to it either in the heart or in the extremities. It is the loving and reverential worship of God the Father that is the center of the religion of Jesus Christ, and it is that same worship that He bequeathed to His Church. Suffering, like temporal well-being, is a thing that is indifferent in itself. It is true that it does often "tend to warp and stunt and debase and demoralize an individual and a people." Calvary offers a most striking illustration of the truth of this statement. There was one there whose wicked nature so far from being changed for the better by "crucifixion" was made, on the contrary, more vicious, vile and perverse. The tortures of the unrepentant thief drew horrible blasphemies from his lips and plunged him into a deeper damnation than was merited by the crimes for which he was executed. But it is utterly false to assert that suffering has necessarily this effect of debasing human character. There was a second malefactor crucified by the side of Christ. He endured the same horrible

\* The citations in inverted commas are from a modern writer who inveighs bitterly against what he considers to be the Christian teaching on this matter of suffering. That teaching as he understands it and rejects it is obviously contradicted by the normal human experience. He writes, "We advise other people to welcome each rebuff which turns earth's smoothness rough, but when one of these rebuffs comes to ourselves, our welcome seems somehow to lack effusiveness."

agonies as his companion. But in his case, his soul found greatness and astonishing elevation through patient endurance of his bitter lot.

The truth is that suffering can prove either a blessing or a curse. What is very important to note is that it does not contain in itself, nor, has it, of itself, that which can make it a blessing. But, that in certain conditions, it can produce most salutary effects on human characters, proves that it is not essentially an evil thing. The modern horror of suffering is as far removed from the spirit of Christianity as the fanatical cult of pain of the Indian fakirs. The decay of the Christian spirit in the modern world is marked by the growing tendency to look for a Messiah that is not crucified. Christ without the Cross would prove very acceptable. Christ on the Cross is a discomfort for many who profess His name, especially when it comes home to them that to be veritable followers of the Redeemer, they must take their place with Him in that position of pain and ignominy. "In our soft, self-indulgent age it is, shamefully, felt to be a greater difficulty in the way of belief in God that man should suffer than that man should sin. This timid pain-dreading temper is thoroughly un-Christian."<sup>1</sup> All religions and philosophies that set themselves up over against the teaching of Christ, show themselves utterly powerless to take pain and make it serve man to attain his destiny. In all of them, "there must be always a back-door of escape if the ills of life become too overpowering. Either defiant resistance or suicide, or complete detachment, is recommended. By

<sup>1</sup> Dean Inge as quoted by Arnold Lunn in *Now I See*, p. 74.



some means or other, the man himself must be rescued from circumstances; he must provide himself with a magic, impenetrable armor." ■

Now it was not Christ's theory that man himself, for his deification, must be rescued from circumstances and must, at all costs, provide himself with an "impenetrable armor." Jesus was neither morbid nor evasive. His human character was amazingly simple. Christ, if one is to speak accurately did not court hardships and trials. He simply accepted a human lot. As a consequence trials came His way. He did not go to meet them unless when the fulfilment of His mission demanded it. On many occasions He avoided difficulties and disagreeable situations, by changing the theater of His operations. He met and avoided what God would have Him meet and avoid. But when He was constrained to this latter course, it was ever in the interests of the work that was appointed Him to do, that He chose His line of action. It was not a pain-dreading shrinking from harsh circumstances. He bore unflinchingly what life's task imposed on Him. He was a man in the current sense of that phrase. His ideas of the function of life was a flat negation of the now so prevalent view,—that this world is a pleasure ground and existence in it is a pleasure hunt. The Beatitudes ring the changes in His uncompromising condemnation of this attitude. He does not confine Himself to condemning it. He warns men, in grave terms, of the disastrous results that must inevitably come of giving practical effect to their false theory of the meaning of human exist-

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.*

ence. Actual life, He tells them, will not respond to this theory. If a person, in spite of proper warnings, undertakes to manipulate a powerful and complex machine, in a manner that does not answer either to its structure or function, both the operator and the machine are bound to come to disaster. The attempt of man to deal with life in a way other than that intended by God, has brought the world to the pass in which it finds itself today.

Unfortunately the outward profession of Christianity does not necessarily imply the inward acceptance of Christ's attitude towards human circumstances. Numerous are the Christians who hold with the unbelievers that their business here below is to extract as much gratification as possible out of life. Before his final conversion Saint Peter might be taken as the type of the average good man. When the Divine Master, one day, after a series of unparalleled triumphs, hinted darkly at failure and appalling sufferings to come, the chief of the apostolic band found it impossible to fit such a prospect into his scheme of life. That the enterprise of Jesus should issue in success and glory and an existence of comfort and affluence for Himself and His followers, was Peter's confident expectation. Any other issue was unthinkable. Emboldened by His privileged position, the Apostle took the Lord to task for envisaging a future of such gloomy failure. He said: "Lord, be it far from thee, this shall not be unto thee."<sup>3</sup> In this rebuke Peter makes himself the spokesman of average humanity. Why should the Lord, considering the

<sup>3</sup> St. Matt. XVI, 22.

power He has, allow sorrow and pain to touch His own life and that of His followers? Why does He refuse to use His Omnipotence, His mastery over nature and death, to banish suffering from the earth? The response of the Master to the well-meaning observation of His follower was as unexpected as it was crushing. The Lord turning to Peter said: "Go behind me Satan; thou art a scandal unto me, because thou savorist not the things that are of God, but the things that are of man."<sup>4</sup> These sharp words are addressed not only to Peter but to all future pleasure-seeking Christians who look for a Christianity without the Cross. The protest of Peter and the reply to it can be universalized. Two diametrically opposed views of life are here in sharp conflict. On the one side is "the avoidance of suffering at all costs." Opposed to it is the philosophy, not of the eschewing of pleasure at all costs, as one might too hastily conclude, but, the fulfilment of God's will no matter what it should cost.

The Cross is the compendium of Christ's philosophy. But the Cross must be interpreted accurately. The lyrism of Christ's most intimate and heroic friends can easily mislead the ordinary man. There was not in Jesus any morbid love of suffering for its own sake, or for hardship, or of want. Suffering, though not, as has been said, an essentially evil thing, is, nevertheless a product of evil and carries with it the taint of its origin. It cannot be in itself a choiceworthy thing. One may occasionally read a rather inaccurate rendering of a statement of Saint

<sup>4</sup> *Ibid.*, 23.

Paul, a rendering which is apt to generate a false notion. The apostle of the Gentiles, writes: "Looking on Jesus, the author and finisher of faith, who, having joy set before Him, endured the Cross, despising the shame." <sup>5</sup> This is sometimes read, especially by sacred orators, as if it signified that the Saviour, having before Him the alternatives of glory and suffering, chose the latter. Endured is translated as equivalent to selected. This rendering is against the context. The idea is much more prosaic. The Saviour, in view of the glorification promised to Him and His members, braced Himself to endure the horrors of the Passion. Christ, in a sense did not choose the Cross. He bore it willingly. It was God the Father that chose and decreed the way of the Cross as the way of man's salvation. Christ accepted the choice. Therefore what He did freely elect, in the exercise of His freedom of will, was the fulfilment of God's will down to the least detail, and that, regardless of what it should cost in the way of suffering. That was the simple program of His earthly existence on His own showing on numberless occasions. "When he cometh into the world, he saith . . . in the head of the Book, it is written of me: that I should do thy will, O God." <sup>6</sup> At the age of twelve He said to His wondering parents: "Did you not know that I must be about my Father's business." <sup>7</sup> Later on at Jacob's well, he perplexed His apostles who were bringing Him food, remarking: "My meat is to do

<sup>5</sup> Heb. XII, 2.

<sup>6</sup> Heb. X, 5, 7.

<sup>7</sup> St. Luke II, 49.

the will of Him, that sent me, that I may perfect His work." <sup>8</sup> Vindicating Himself of the charge of arrogance and self-will, He said to the Pharisees: "My judgment is just, because I seek not my own will, but the will of Him that sent me." <sup>9</sup> This note runs like a refrain through the whole Gospel of Saint John.

If the allusions to the Passion be excluded, Jesus refers only on one occasion to the rude circumstances of His career. His tone on that occasion is not of one complacently regarding suffering, but of one looking upon it as an unpleasant necessity. To a prospective candidate for the Apostolic college He said: "The foxes have their lairs, and the birds of the air their nests, but the Son of Man hath not where to lay His head." <sup>10</sup> His homelessness was the outcome of the apostolic career He embraced, not the indulgence of a perverted taste. To do Almighty God's positive will and to submit bravely to what God should permit, that was the program of life Jesus traced for Himself. Suffering was necessarily incidental to that program, but it was not exactly a program of suffering. He would do and say what God enjoined on Him to do and say, and this program He would fulfil regardless of consequences. He would go whithersoever the Divine Will should lead Him, even though it were to bring Him into deadly conflict with the heads of the nation and direct Him up the blood-stained slopes of Calvary. This attitude

<sup>8</sup> St. John IV, 3.

<sup>9</sup> *Ibid.*, V, 30.

<sup>10</sup> St. Luke IX, 58.

towards life on the part of Christ is the key to the limpid simplicity of His character. The practical vindication of God's absolute sovereignty over man's life and actions was the consuming passion of the soul of Jesus. To be truly man one must submit to God's will in what it bids and what it permits, and that without question. A man who swerves from God's will, *unmans* himself. This the Saviour never did. He was the Truth: He was the living expression of true manliness. One cannot forge one's way to true manliness in a world disorganized by sin, without having to tread a path plentifully strewn with sufferings. Jesus trod that path. He was the way. It is by shaping one's course after the directions He gave and by bracing oneself to endure what must befall everyone who so shapes his course that true life is gained. That true life is in the Christ in its fullness. "For as the Father hath life in Himself, so hath He given to the Son to have life in Himself." <sup>11</sup> To dream of an approach to perfection of life which shall evade sorrow and pain, is to dream a vain dream. The Apostle warns men against such folly. "Beware lest any man cheat you by philosophy and vain deceit, according to the tradition of men, according to the elements of the world, and not according to Christ." <sup>12</sup>

This unquestioning acceptance of the Divine Will, regardless of cost was the secret of His power with God. "Who in the days of His flesh . . . was heard for his reverence, and whereas He was, indeed, the Son of God, He learned obedience by the things He

<sup>11</sup> St. John V, 26.

<sup>12</sup> Coloss. II, 8.

suffered.”<sup>13</sup> There is a deep human pathos in these final words. Christ had nothing to *learn*, but He had much to experience. He learned obedience, in that He had to experience what obedience should involve. It is easy to obey, when obedience does not cost. Hence one cannot be said to know what obedience is, until called upon to exercise it in circumstances of extreme trial. Christ learned in a hard school. His obedience led Him to the Cross. He did not seek the Passion. He sought those things which brought on Him, the Passion. God wished Jesus to engage in an apostolate which was foreseen to issue in the tragic denouement of Calvary. The hatred of the Pharisees, roused by the uncompromising and avowed opposition of Jesus to their principles, perpetrated the awful crime of deicide. God, and Christ, at God’s bidding allowed the hatred to pursue its wicked course. The Divine Wisdom turned the resultant sufferings, willingly borne by the Saviour, into an instrument for purifying the whole human race from sin. The martyrs understood the lesson of Christ’s fate. They did not court martyrdom. They avoided it if they could. But when torture or the violation of God’s law were the only alternatives that faced them, they unflinchingly chose torture. Christ Himself prayed in the Garden: “Father, if Thou wilt remove this chalice from me, but yet not my will but thine be done.”<sup>14</sup>

To imitate Christ, men are not asked to make suffering an object to seek. They are not required to

<sup>13</sup> Heb. V, 7, 8.

<sup>14</sup> St. Luke XXII, 42.



take on themselves the trying conditions of the Saviour's mortal life. They may remain in the circumstances into which they are born. It is legitimate for them to strive to improve these circumstances by all lawful means. But however they are placed they must subordinate their own interests to the ruling of God. They must obey His will in all things, no matter what difficulties this obedience presents. Un-deviating adherence to God's will necessarily entails suffering. It must be faced and accepted as a harsh necessity entering into the scheme of things. "All that will live godly in Christ Jesus shall suffer persecution."<sup>15</sup> The Cross which the Christian has to shoulder daily is such pain as he shall have to face in keeping faithful to the Divine Will. The Cross which awaits each loyal Christian is the Cross of Christ in miniature.

Does this hard law mean that pleasure is wholly ruled out of the Christian's life? This consequence does not follow. The friendship of God which follows on fidelity to Him carries with it its own intense satisfaction. Christ has given this promise. "He that hath my commandments, and keepeth them, he it is that loveth me. And he that loveth me shall be loved of my Father: and I will love him and manifest myself to him."<sup>16</sup> But besides these, there are many ordinary pleasures which are in God's plan for human life. God, in His loving care for His children, sees to it that they are not tried above their strength

<sup>15</sup> II Tim. III, 12.

<sup>16</sup> St. John XIV, 21.



and that the hardships of this life of exile are duly tempered with a certain measure of delectation.

The rôle of suffering is not restricted to its being, if patiently borne, a proof of loyalty to God and a source of merit. The Christian who accepts it as a harsh necessity inherent in the fulfilment of God's will in the actual order of things, has done much, but he has not done all. The goodness and power of God is shown in this, that he has taken what was a penal consequence of man's sin and transformed it into an instrument of the highest good. Pain, a negative thing in itself, is changed by God into something positive. Suffering left to its own proper action is in antagonism to the free and full expression of life. It is equivalent to all that is contrary to our will and inclination: it is everything that impedes, thwarts, and wounds our life, physical and moral. It was man's original revolt that introduced limitations into his life. In seeking to save his life he lost it. When God sent His Son into the world to redeem the world, He made the sufferings of His Only Begotten the instrument of redemption. He charged the physical and mental agonies of the Passion with a divine force to purge away all the guilt of humanity. "God," says Saint Paul, . . . "hath spoken to us by His Son, . . . who making purgation of sins, sitteth on the right hand of the majesty on high." <sup>17</sup> Saint John echoes the same thought, saying "The blood of Jesus Christ cleanseth us from sin." <sup>18</sup> "Blood" in this text is equivalent to "violent suffering and death." Those

<sup>17</sup> Heb. I, 2, 3.

<sup>18</sup> I St. John I, 7.

sufferings of the Sacred Humanity, used instrumentally by the Divinity, have efficacy to destroy in human souls all that is opposed to the ingress of the divine life. In this way the act is a powerful force of divinization. That force can be applied more or less potently to individual men. When a Christian suffers *and wills to suffer in union with Christ*, the divine energy of the Passion passes into the painful experiences of the member of Christ and these latter become a potent force in the purification and divinization of the soul.<sup>19</sup> Suffering of itself does not purify. But suffering borne in union with Christ is endowed with a marvellous efficacy to burn away the antidivine in man. The Saints understood well this spiritualizing effect of pain and sorrow borne in a Christian spirit. They saw how painful trials worked detachment from creatures and prepared the way for more intimate union with God. Valuing nothing but the possession of the divine, they hankered after sufferings, for the simple reason that they saw in them a powerful means to the object they coveted. As they progressed in holiness they necessarily entered more deeply into the mystery of the Passion. In the new light that came to them from the depth of that mystery, and in the immense love of Christ that they acquired from its contemplation, they became filled with an ardent desire to share His bitter experience. Their great love of Christ made them yearn to “*sympathize*” literally with Christ. The way to be assimilated to Him was to suffer like Him. This they

<sup>19</sup> Cf. E. Mersch, S. J., *Le Corps Mystique du Christ*, Vol. II, p. 191.

longed for. Their longings went even further as they climbed still greater heights of Sanctity. They aimed at co-operating with the Saviour, in the work of redemption, by willingly sharing in the agonies of the Passion. For the voluntary sufferings of chosen members of Christ, acting subordinately to the sufferings of the Saviour can, in a mysterious manner contribute to the strengthening and purifying and building up of the Mystical Body of the Redeemer. Saint Paul was one of those chosen souls. Hence he exclaimed: "I Paul rejoice in my sufferings for you, and fill up those things that are wanting of the sufferings of Christ, in my flesh, *for His body which is the Church.*"<sup>20</sup>

It is only those who suffer in a spirit of faith that understand the deep things of life. Sorrow and pain endured in union with Christ impart a wonderful clarity of spiritual vision. Hence although Christianity exalts the Cross, it is not a worship of sorrow. It sees in sorrow nothing but a means that may be rightly or wrongly used. The Christian Religion remains essentially a worship of God, expressing itself in love and sacrifice. It is man not God who has made this world a vale of tears. Our Heavenly Father, through His Divine Son, labors to make these bitter waters sweet and change them into waters of cleansing and salvation. Tears do not cease to flow for those who grieve along with Christ, but their grief is mingled with consolation and fructifies in a divine good.

<sup>20</sup> Coloss. I, 24.

## CHAPTER X

# THE COMMANDMENTS OF CHRIST

*"If you keep my commandments, you shall abide in my love."—  
St. John XV, 10.*

A MAN does not realize the Christian vocation, does not, in St. Paul's phrase, "walk worthy of the vocation in which he is called" <sup>1</sup> by leading a merely correct life. This is so, even though it were possible for a man, which it is not, to adhere consistently to the full moral code of human conduct, by the unaided exercise of his reason and his will. Being moral is not quite the same as being Christian, though one cannot be true to Christianity and false to the moral code. It does not profit a man to bear the name of Christian, unless he merits to bear the name of man. It is obligatory on the Christian, that he be just, using this term according to the sense it had in Scripture, where it is equivalent to moral completeness. This obligation to conform his conduct to the requirements of moral goodness, presses more exactly on the ordinary Christian than on the most fervid disciple of moral philosophy.

A Christian is defined as a follower of Christ. The full implications of this statement are easily missed because of the associations that have grouped them—

<sup>1</sup> Ephes. IV, 1.

selves around the term "follower." In the sphere of politics, of art, and of economics, or in any other sphere in which men form themselves into parties, a man's followers are those, who, from conviction, or from interest, accept his leadership and advocate his ideas. Technically that man is a Christian who is enrolled a member of the Church, submits to its authority and subscribes to its program. But one in whom is verified all that is implied by the term, "Christian" is something more than the member of a party. He is one who, not merely espouses a cause, but enters into a certain life. The man who is a Christian in the full truth of the name, not only subscribes to Christ's program: he lives, in a mysterious manner, Christ's life. Of no other leader, no matter how enthusiastically he be followed, can it be said that his own vital energy is in his supporters. No human group shows an adherence that resembles that by which the living branches of the tree are attached to the parent stock. This is the image used by Jesus to illustrate the relation that exists between Him and His. "I am," He said, "the vine, and you are the branches."<sup>2</sup> It must not be thought that this statement is true only of those who attain to an eminent degree in the Christian life. The words are justified, in some measure, in the case of all who practise the Christian faith. The Christian vocation is essentially an invitation to enter into, and develop in, a life that is found in its utmost expression in the Divine Master himself. It is not a call to a way of life, whose highest achievement would be a constant and

<sup>2</sup> St. John XV, 5.

exact conformity to the law of right conduct as traced by human reason.

The activities that being proper to, spring from, the Christian life are such as could never be exercised by human faculties left to their own resources. Nevertheless, in the case of all who have come to the age, at which they are responsible for their actions, human co-operation is demanded for the play of those activities that are specifically Christian. Christ Himself was true man as well as true God. Using His human nature He did those things which it falls within the province of the human will, the human intelligence, and the human executive faculties, to accomplish. Yet a divine virtue penetrated through all these doings. It is to be expected, then, that when a man begins to live his new life in Christ, there should be in the activities which constitute his deliberate existence, a certain vital contact between what is human and what is divine. What is more, this contact, because of the nature of God's plan for the redemption, would necessarily bear a distant resemblance to the unity of the divinity and humanity in the actions of the Saviour. All the operations of the Sacred Humanity of Christ, that is, all the actions elicited by the exercise of His human faculties, receive a special name in theology. They are called "theandric," that is human-divine.<sup>3</sup> There was much He did as God in which His human nature had no part. There was nothing He did as man in which the Divinity did not share. The deliberate actions of the member of

<sup>3</sup> Cf. Billot, *De Verbo Incarnato*, Thesis XXXI, Ed. V, pp. 325-328.

Christ are not theandric but they must have, in a certain sense, a human-divine quality. For into them should pass the energy of the divine life of the Word which resides in its fullness in the Humanity of the Redeemer. Action done in the spirit of that incorporation with Christ, which is effected by the sacraments, gives this wonderful elevation to the most ordinary of human doings.

The life proper to the Christian as such is a work of God. It is He alone can cause it to be. For the divine grace which imparts this life must come from God Himself. Even the Humanity of the Saviour can act but instrumentally in its production. Yet its development is conditioned by the activities of a life that is truly human.<sup>4</sup> It is its exercise, not its existence, that is thus conditioned; for it can exist in a man when he is an infant or asleep or unconscious. It cannot, however, grow except through a man's reception of the sacraments and especially of the Eucharist, and through human acts that are patterned on those of Christ.

It must not be thought that a person can contribute his co-operation to the development of the divine life in him by escaping from his life as man, from its obligations, and from its appeals. To grow in Christ he must play the man. Pilate, producing Jesus before the Jewish mob on Good Friday, said, pointing to Him, "Ecce Homo."—"Behold the man."<sup>5</sup> These words of the Roman Governor were

<sup>4</sup> Cf. Mersch, S. J., *Le Corps Mystique du Christ*, Introduction, p. xiv.

<sup>5</sup> St. John XIX, 5.

meant, of course, in their literal sense, to draw the attention of the pitiless crowd to the piteous state to which the object of their vindictive hate had been reduced. They have a significance of which Pilate was but dimly, if at all, aware. The Governor's whole bearing during the trial betrays on his part an uneasy suspicion that he was dealing with one who was his superior. He may have had some vague sense of a truth in his words that was deeper than the obvious truth. "Behold the man." Jesus was, in fact, "the man," *par excellence*. For the long years preceding He had proved Himself a man, in thoughts, judgments, emotions, decisions and acts. Never had child of Adam shown himself so manly as the Son of Mary of Nazareth. Pilate's words were a testimony, unconscious to himself, in the face of the whole world, that the person to whom he pointed, was one who realized in its fullest perfection, the ideal of manhood, as that ideal existed in the mind of the Creator of humanity. It is by shaping himself to the manliness of the Man-God that the Christian co-operates in the evolution of the divine life in his soul. Acting in the spirit in which the Son of Man would act, were He placed in the circumstances in which the Christian finds himself is the condition to be fulfilled in order that God may carry out His purpose of reproducing His own life in the soul of man, in an ever more perfect manner. As was noted in a former chapter, the reception of the Blessed Eucharist entitles the communicant to those graces of light and strength which he needs in order to reproduce the features of Christ's conduct in his own. When God



perceives this willed effort to express Jesus in one's life, He infuses a participation of His own Divine Life into the soul. Deification is God's work; we but dispose ourselves for it. St. Paul writing to the Ephesians gives expression to this truth: "For we," he says, "are his (i.e. God's) workmanship created in Christ Jesus in good works, which God hath prepared that we should walk in them." <sup>6</sup>

To co-operate in this workmanship of God, the Christian must labor to remove from himself what presents an obstacle to the divine action. A human life which in its principles and its acts is flatly in contradiction with the spirit of the human life of Jesus of Nazareth, effectively prevents the outpouring of the divine life in the soul. It has been said that the life that Jesus revealed in act under the eyes of His fellow-men was His teaching. Nevertheless He did not disdain to formulate His theory of existence in explicit formulae and even in some detail. His code of conduct is set forth in the fifth, sixth and seventh chapters of the Gospel of Saint Matthew and in the parallel passages in the Gospels of Saint Luke and Saint Mark. In the instructions developed in those chapters He taught men how they were to handle their daily life, if they wished the high purpose of the Almighty in their regard to be fulfilled here and hereafter. His own conduct day by day was a practical object lesson, illustrating His teaching. Those whom He drew to Himself were expected to adopt His theory and its practice. A manner of acting that would satisfy the exigencies

<sup>6</sup> Ephes. II, 10.

of philosophy would not be good enough for them. He himself did not learn His lessons of action in the school of the professors of human wisdom. These men were not to be the masters of His followers. They should have only one Master, and that was Himself. "Neither be ye called masters, for one is your master, Christ." <sup>7</sup>

It is not enough for Christians to practise an ethic transcending the ethic of the schools. It is required of them that they should exemplify in action the lofty moral principles of their Master, not out of respect for the dignity of their own human personality, not even out of mere regard for the beauty of the pure morality traced for them, but out of regard for Christ, their Lord. It is love for Him, and not mere love of what He taught, that should be the inspiration of their actions. They should do what He pointed out to them to do, because such was His teaching and because they were His, and of Him. The basis and the motive of Christian sanctity, according to the teaching of Saint Paul, is the oneness of the Christian with Christ. To act evilly for the Christian is to turn to evil use the members of the body of Christ. When on the other hand a man reduces the precepts of Jesus to practice, in a desire to be in harmony with Him, he can be said "to accomplish good works in Christ Jesus." <sup>8</sup>

Carrying into effect the commandments of Jesus but prepares the way for something else. It is the price or condition of that true life which it was the

<sup>7</sup> St. Matt. XXIII, 10.

<sup>8</sup> Eph. II, 10.

mission of Jesus to impart to men. The Christian life in the complete sense is a life that is given. It consists in the gradual divinization of the soul. The Christian incorporated in the Sacred Humanity and making his daily life more in rhythm with what was the daily life of Christ, is brought into intimate contact with the Word, dwelling in the Saviour corporally. Sustained contact with the Divinity, for the human person incorporated in Christ by the Sacraments, is conditioned by a life's activity in constant harmony with the life activity portrayed in the Gospels. Jesus, at the Last Supper, stressed this truth for His followers; "*He that hath my commandments, and keepeth them, he it is that loveth me. And he that loveth me shall be loved of my Father, and I will love him and manifest myself to him. . . . And my Father will love him, and we will come to Him and make our abode with him.*"<sup>9</sup> The life of filial intimacy with God His Father is Christ's real life. The same life of childlike intimacy with God is the Christian's real life. He will have it and enjoy it in the measure of his "oneness" with the human way of Jesus.

That "oneness" with the human way of Jesus is proportioned to the care the Christian takes to express in his dealings with God, his fellowmen and himself, the teaching of the Divine Master. The Saviour makes the test of love of Himself, and therefore "oneness" with Himself be the accomplishment of His commandments. "He that loveth my commandments and keepeth them, he it is that loveth

<sup>9</sup> St. John XIV, 21-23.

Me.”<sup>10</sup> The possessive adjective is to be noted. The commandments are not merely abstract rules of conduct which Jesus traces for men to follow. They are precepts coming from Him and to be observed as coming from Him. Observance is to be the expression of love and loyalty, otherwise it will not adapt the soul for close union with the divine. To act rightly “out of respect for the law” or “because the law harmonizes so perfectly with the purest human aspirations,” or out of love for humanity (with a capital H) or for any other such motive, does not lift human actions to the divine level. If, by an impossible supposition, we were to succeed in fulfilling every jot and tittle of the law enunciated by Christ, for one or other or a combination of all the purely human motives just enumerated, we could not for all that, be said to have fulfilled what Jesus called, “His commandments.” The workmanship of God in the soul is conditioned not by good works as such but by “good works in Christ Jesus.” Saint Paul wrote; “If I should distribute all my goods to feed the poor and deliver my body to be burnt and have not charity, it profiteth me nothing.”<sup>11</sup> The Christian must not content himself with aiming to live according to the law of Christ: he must strive to allow Christ, as it were, to express His life, through what the Christian himself does and suffers.

The commandments of Christ, on the first approach, present the appearance of a bewildering and distracting multiplicity. This is the impression made

<sup>10</sup> St. John XIV, 21.

<sup>11</sup> I Cor. XIII, 3.

on those who enter the Church from outside, that is, from the realms of heresy or infidelity. They are wont to contrast the simplicity of what they have left with the complexity of what they take up. Those who, born in the Catholic tradition, resolve, for the first time, to give themselves wholeheartedly to the pursuit of an integrally spiritual life, are affected much in the same way. Efforts seem necessary to be made at the same time in a great number of different directions. This multiplicity might easily strike them as being fundamentally opposed to the simplicity characteristic of the Saviour. It would be legitimate to expect that the teaching of Christ would reflect the simplicity of Christ. This expectation is, in reality, justified in the doctrine of the New Testament. The bewildering variety of prescriptions is more apparent than real.

An elaborate and detailed system of observance affecting the various aspects of individual and social life was suited to, and needed by, the "concrete-minded" people who lived under, and practised, the Old Law. Their strongly materialistic character required that their actions should be regulated with minute particularity. Their habitual modes of thought were accurately reflected in the detailed ordinances, with which their accredited teachers amplified and complicated the original theocratic code. This tendency to minute detail in regulating the most common actions of life, earned for the doctors of the law, the severe strictures of the Saviour. He said to them: "The Scribes and Pharisees have sitten in the chair of Moses. . . . They bind heavy

and insupportable burdens, and lay them on men's shoulders." <sup>12</sup> This artificial complexity was abhorrent to the essentially simple character of the Saviour. He reflects the simplicity of God. And, moreover, He is the living embodiment of His own doctrine. But He simplified the commandments of God, not by abrogating any of them, nor by abating their rigor, but by reducing them to the one fundamental principle of which they are but the varied expression. He epitomized the Law in one precept of "loving God." Jesus said to the Scribe, who asked Him what was the great fundamental precept of righteousness. "Thou shall love the Lord thy God with thy whole heart, and with thy whole soul and with thy whole mind. This is the greatest and first commandment. And the second is like to this: Thou shall love thy neighbor as thyself. On these two commandments dependeth the whole law and the prophets." <sup>13</sup> There is virtually only one precept because the second merges itself in the first. The only right love for our neighbor is that which is extended to him, through love for God. If a man incorporated in Christ practises this supernatural love of God and of His neighbor, the process of his divinization goes on apace.

This is certainly, extremely simple, but still there remains a difficulty. It is clear from the whole trend of the Saviour's exhortations that there is something which man can do, which he ought to do, and which God expects him to do, preparatory to having God's

<sup>12</sup> St. Matt. XXIII, 1-4. Cf. St. Luke XI, 46.

<sup>13</sup> St. Matt. XXII, 37-40.

generous designs fulfilled in him. But a salutary love of God is supernatural. It must be infused: it cannot be commanded. A purely philosophic love begotten of philosophic speculation or of the contemplation of nature avails nothing towards entering into that life of which Jesus speaks, saying: "I am come that they may have life and may have it more abundantly." <sup>14</sup> To be on the way to the Beatific Vision one must needs love God as He loves Himself. But this love, as has just been said, is beyond the powers of man to cultivate, of himself. Has then man nothing to do to co-operate in the process of his own divinization? There is a divine enigma here—an enigma, the solution of which involves the understanding of the action of the free will of the creature under the impulse of the Creator. On the one hand it is the Saviour's commandment to love God, placing on this the fulfillment of the whole law. On the other hand man is powerless of his own resources to have this love, for it is an infused divine virtue. How can he be bidden to do what he is powerless to do? Is the whole thing to be left to God, and is man to be purely passive in the matter? Saint Augustine warns us that though God created us without ourselves, He cannot save us without ourselves. The burden of God's exhortations addressed to men both under the Old Dispensation and the New, presupposes evidently that there is something men can do, aided, of course, by the grace of God. The note of "oughtness" runs through all the pressing injunctions of the Saviour to His hearers. The solution is that

<sup>14</sup> St. John X, 10.



though man cannot love God He can dispose himself for that love. It is always to be understood, of course, that he needs the actual grace of God to cultivate in himself these dispositions. Still it remains his own free act, attributable to himself. If he cannot of himself love God in a salutary way he can and ought, while co-operating with God's grace hate, and deny himself and so prepare his soul for the inflow of divine love through the Sacraments.

It is in man's power to cleave to, or reject whatever is found within the realm of nature. That has been appointed his kingdom from the beginning. He was to rule it, holding God as his suzerain. But still he was a ruler. One of the dire effects of original sin is that it has left in man a fatal tendency to cling in a disorderly fashion and independently of God, to that kingdom, given him in the beginning. He inclines to entrench himself within it and to repel all rivals, even his Liege-Lord, God Himself, from its borders. In this frontier guarded world self reigns. To this sovereign man gladly gives his allegiance, his service and his affection. The kingdom of self is in irreconcilable hostility to the supernatural. Loyalty to it is the most rooted instinct in fallen human nature, and the most difficult to be eradicated. It resists the action of God strongly. Man must will to destroy it and invite God's aid to accomplish this destruction. If this vile self-love is dethroned in the realm of man's soul, the divine charity can invade it and in its train the other virtues. As a man can love self, so too may he, with the actual help of God, hate self. The moral teaching of Christ simpli-



fies itself down to this—deny thyself. The injunction to this self-denial is the theme of the ascetic exhortations of the Gospel. If a man practises self-abnegation he does what is required of him. It is always supposed that he does this, urged to it by the desire of possessing God. These two movements of soul must go together. When man fulfils his part, God does the rest. When love of self is banished the desired love of God finds entrance. By the Passion the justice and the divine life of Christ became ours 'de jure.' They become ours 'de facto' if we deny ourselves and to the extent to which we deny ourselves. With every variety of phrase and figure, with an astonishing fertility of thought and imagination, the Saviour urges this truth on his hearers. He advises them to give all to purchase the 'pearl of great price.'<sup>15</sup> All has not been given as long as one retains hold of 'self.' "To renounce what one has," Saint Gregory tells us, "is comparatively easy: to renounce what one is that is a task of exceeding difficulty."<sup>16</sup> Losing one's life, selling all that one has, taking up the daily cross and other similar expressions are phrases that but ring the changes in the same theme. They all inculcate self-abnegation. Let but the love of self be removed by constant self-denial, then, just as when, at the raising of the sluice gates, waters pour into the channel prepared for them, so streams of divine grace flow into the soul.

<sup>15</sup> St. Matt. XIII, 46.

<sup>16</sup> St. Gregory, Hom. 3, in Evang.

## CHAPTER XI

# THE FUNDAMENTAL PRINCIPLE OF CHRISTIAN ASCETICISM

*"And he said to all: If any man will come after me, let him deny himself and take up his cross daily, and follow me."—St. Luke IX, 23.*

WHAT is self-denial? A definition of it presents some difficulty. It is almost as subtle and elusive as its opposite, self-love. It is not to be taken as synonymous with mortification. It is something which strikes much deeper. The etymology of the word serves as a good guide in the analysis of what the word stands for. To "deny self" is the contrary of, "to assert self" or "to put self forward." Self-seeking in all its forms is an evil tendency surviving in men as an effect of original sin. Under its prompting man aims at making himself the center of all things, and the measure of all things. The honor that is due from a dependent being, to the being on whom he depends, is given by fallen man not to God but to himself. Instead of glorifying God, he has an inveterate inclination to glorify himself. This "self" which claims man's fealty is but another name for what St. Paul calls the "old man" or the fallen Adam in each human being.<sup>1</sup> It is the rival of the spirit of God. Man cannot serve it and serve God at the same time,

<sup>1</sup> Cf. St. Paul, Coloss. III, 9; Eph. IV, 22; Rom. VI, 6.

though he may seem to do so. "No man," says Christ, "can serve two masters, for either he will hate the one and love the other: or he will sustain the one and despise the other."<sup>2</sup>

If man is to enter into the secure, tranquil, and joyous possession of the promised land prepared for him by God, he must wage a war of extermination against self-love. The "promised land," in this sense, is the spiritual life in which the relations between the soul and God are characterized by a close intimacy and mutual understanding. The apostle tells us that what happened to the Israelites of old was a figure of spiritual things. "Now all these things were done in figure of us, that we should not covet evil things, as they also coveted. . . . Now all these things happened in figure, and they are written for our correction."<sup>3</sup> God warned His chosen people, before they entered the land He had prepared for them, that they were to have no pact with its inhabitants. They were bidden to wage an implacable war against them. This was the necessary condition of their holding their inheritance in undisturbed tranquillity and of their abiding in allegiance to their God. They disobeyed. The result was as had been predicted. Their hold on the land of Canaan was precarious and uneasy. They were continually harassed by enemy attacks. They enjoyed but brief periods of peace. Their relations with God were disturbed. They resisted the prophets. Finally they lost the land of their inheritance and the friendship

<sup>2</sup> St. Matt. VI, 24; cf. St. Luke XVI, 13.

<sup>3</sup> I Cor. X, 6-11.

of their God. This is a figure of the Christian warfare. If the soul is to have a firm hold on God, and to be freed from harassing anxiety as to its spiritual condition, it must wage a war of extermination on Self. Compromise leads but to constantly recurring and always indecisive combats. The course of the warfare is, moreover, punctuated by serious infidelities to God. Doubtless it is a costly and tedious warfare. There are daily conflicts. Self-love is ever on the alert to take advantage of any lack of vigilance on the part of the defender of God's citadel. The "crossing" or "thwarting" of the insidious efforts of self-love is the daily cross that the soldier of Christ is bidden to carry. The Divine Leader Himself in His own life set a magnificent example of successful fighting. In a short but pregnant phrase, Saint Paul reveals Christ's unfailing heroicity and perfect mastery in the spiritual conflict. "Christ," he says, "did not please himself."<sup>4</sup> To this negative description of the life of Christ, must be added the positive one given by the Leader Himself. "I do always what is pleasing to Him, that is, God."<sup>5</sup> One is the obverse of the other. When there is whole-hearted denial of self there will be whole-hearted devotedness to God.

This whole-heartedness in the vindication of God's interests was inculcated by the Saviour on His disciples, in a statement, startling in its expression and almost terrifying in its demands. One day He said: "If any man come to me and hate not his father

<sup>4</sup> Rom. XV, 3.

<sup>5</sup> St. John VIII, 29.

and mother and wife and children and brethren and sisters, *yea, and his own life also, he cannot be my disciple.*"<sup>6</sup> That one noted for His universal human sympathy and His particular devotedness to His Mother, should counsel hate of one's dearest relatives, seems very startling to our ears. Even when due allowance has been made for the Hebrew idiom, it is nevertheless true that this mode of expression is of an arresting character. Jesus meant to startle. It was a device He often employed to arouse earnest attention and to stir deep questioning. The context in which the words were spoken must, of course, have made it clear to the audience that the words were not meant to be taken in their literal sense. They readily grasped, from tone and gesture, that some mysterious truth of a spiritual kind was being conveyed through this enigmatic saying.

Many of those who heard these strange words fall from the lips of the Saviour, thought that they were already following Him. "And there went great multitudes with Him," Saint Luke tells us. They thronged about Him wherever He made His appearance. They hung on His words; they were interested in what He said: they assimilated something of it. They were busy fitting in His assertions into their already constructed systems of thought. But this did not constitute a discipleship of Christ. To be truly of the school of Jesus, it does not suffice simply to attach oneself to His Person and be one amongst the gathering that followed Him in His journeys. To be a disciple means sharing His life and contenting one-

<sup>6</sup> St. Luke XIV, 26.

self with the conditions that He has chosen for Himself: it means conforming oneself to His thoughts, His preferences and His will. It is not enough to admire Jesus. It is necessary to understand Him. Understanding will be naturally followed by election of what He stands for. A man's religion gives a man's life its specific character. To live after the manner of Jesus, demands having a religion the same as that of Jesus. For the Saviour the function of all the prayers, ceremonies and practices of religion was to effect in man that disposition of mind and heart, through which the words, "Abba, Father" would fall spontaneously from his lips. These words fall readily and lovingly from the Saviour's own lips. He would have His followers like Himself in this attitude towards His Heavenly Father. "God sent His son," says St. Paul, ". . . that we might receive the adoption of sons. And because you are sons, God hath sent the spirit of His Son into your hearts, saying: 'Abba, Father.'" <sup>7</sup> Obstacles stood in the way of man's rising to this ideal. The earnest desire of the Saviour was to point out what these obstacles were and the most effective way to sweep them aside. The mysterious words referring to the necessary holy hatred of home, of family, and even of one's own life, hinted at the ascetic discipline to be faced, if the ideal were to be attained. The Saviour's listeners too busy in their minds at the task of inventing a formula of faith showing how to gratify themselves without alienating God, were, at the moment, somewhat unprepared

<sup>7</sup> Gal. IV, 4-6; cf. Rom. VIII, 15.

for more than a veiled tracing of the Redeemer's program.

The Divine Master had the supreme gift of compressing His teaching into a few words. He could vary the expression indefinitely. But one of these pregnant sentences fully explored in all its implications, will be found to throw light on wide areas of spiritual effort. The text that is being analyzed is typical. Its apparent sense is clearly not the real meaning. Jesus does not teach hate of anything, except, indeed, of what is evil. Neither are His words to be taken as equivalent to an invitation to embrace the counsels of perfection, that is, to exchange life in the world for a life of evangelical poverty and chastity. If they meant that, they would be addressed only to the few. It is clear they are directed to the many. As religious are not the only disciples of Christ, the hatred commanded is the condition of discipleship for the many.

The thought of the Saviour bore on that inner divine life which it was His mission to impart to all who would receive Him. His words traced the stages of the gradual cleansing process necessary for the soul, if it were to be made apt to participate more and more in this communication of God's life. The purifying process is nothing else than self-abnegation eating its relentless way into more and more profound depths of man's spiritual being. It works like an acid. Each successive renouncement that the soul generously makes but opens up still further possibilities of self-denial. The process reaches its term when man's asceticism reaches the climax, marked

by the words, "and hate, yea, his own life also." At that point he relinquishes wholly his grasp on the life of self and allows himself to be invaded without further opposition by the life of God.

"Everything which men do not purely for God, they do for self-love, and in anything they do for others, they never lose sight of themselves!"<sup>8</sup> Each deliberate activity of men is disputed by nature and by grace.<sup>9</sup> Self-centered activities issue in the deterioration of the soul's true life and in the disintegration of personality. When man finds self he finds nothingness, for man withdrawn from God is nothing. In the pursuit of self he moves towards spiritual eclipse. Scripture expresses this, saying: "He that findeth his life shall lose it."<sup>10</sup> Finding one's life and seeking one's self are the same thing. On the other hand, abandoning self-seeking, man secures his real life. "He that shall lose his life for my sake shall save it."<sup>11</sup> The text of St. Matt. has: "shall find it." The Christian's ascetical effort consists in striving to paralyze self-love as the moving force of his activities and to have it replaced, in that function, by divine grace. Grace being endowed with an inner force of expansion, will always grow unless it finds obstacles to its advance.

Prior to regeneration by Baptism the soul might be likened to a vast territory wholly under the domination of self and its allied forces. At the first infusion of grace, God, as it were, secures a bridge-

<sup>8</sup> L. Lallemand, S. J., *Spiritual Teaching—First Principle*.

<sup>9</sup> Cf. *Imitation*, Bk. III, c. 55.

<sup>10</sup> St. Matt. X, 39. St. Luke IX, 24; XVII, 33.

<sup>11</sup> St. Luke IX, 24.



head in this territory. The entire economy of His further relations with a soul has, as its purpose, the extending of His divine influence over larger and larger areas of the country He wishes to bring into subjection to Himself. The soul remains master of its own free acts. It can throw its deliberate activities on the side of God or on the side of God's enemy. The Lord never does violence to the free will which is His great gift to man. He has a sovereign respect for it. Man is free to serve himself or to serve God. True, God gives actual graces in numbers to aid man to use his freedom rightly and yield that subjection which means his full emancipation. To subject oneself entirely to God is to be sovereignly free. Man is most independent when the divine good pleasure becomes the law of his life. This means the obliteration of self-love as a ruling principle of his activities.

A man who is earnest in his desire to attain a vigorous spiritual life must constantly endeavor to bring his determination and acts under the sway of grace. The negative aspect of this effort is to crush the influence of self-love. Every sin contains an element of the worship of self to the contempt of God. Sanctity, on the other hand, lies in the loving worship of God to the contempt of self. "Two forms of love have constructed two cities; the love of self to the contempt of God, has built the earthly city: the love of God to the contempt of self has built the Heavenly City."<sup>12</sup> The tendency to deification of self is the spirit of the earthly city. The best love of the human heart, when not informed by grace has a

<sup>12</sup> De Civitate Dei Bk. XIV. c. 28.

selfish taint in it. And as every act springing from grace prepares the way for an increase of grace, so every act prompted by egoism intensifies that vicious tendency. The mediocre Christian soul constantly oscillates between these two opposing poles of attraction. Self-abnegation is the checking, the inhibiting, the nullifying of the inclination to gravitate towards self as the centre of life's movements. The difference between the accomplished and the mediocre Christian is not found so much in the nature and difficulty of the actions the Saints perform, but in this, that the Saint unvaryingly directs everything that he does towards God, whilst the mediocre Christian acts for God only in a wavering, hesitating and fitful manner.

Very many of those who enroll themselves in Christ's following are prepared to resist self-love when it incites to grave treachery to the Lord, but listen readily enough to its solicitations, when it urges to what are considered minor infidelities. The struggle to gratify oneself in every way possible and yet to avoid serious infringements of the Christian law, is, as a rule, doomed to ill success. Souls that have attained some measure of intimacy with Jesus do not need to be warned of this. The spiritual instincts developed in sincere converse with the Lord speedily make them alive to it. Aiming at better things than getting the most out of earth without forfeiting heaven, they strive to avoid not only grave sin, but even deliberate venial faults. Such persons may succeed in leading a good life, but they will fall short of a perfect life, unless they push their self-denial somewhat further. A temper that allows itself

freedom to pursue every gratification that is not positively wrong, will not find itself quite at home with God. Friendship suffers if one of the parties to it, in a spirit of calculation, taking cognizance only of those strict obligations, the non-observance of which impairs friendship in a major or minor degree, studiously aims at nothing more than the fulfilment of all those obligations. Coolness is bound to result between friends if this be the attitude of one of them. The same thing will happen between the soul and God.

There is another reason why this coolness is almost inevitable. The soul has a congenital weakness in it because of the virus of the concupiscences. The unchecked tendency to pursue, without misgiving, any and every gratification, justifying oneself on the ground that it is not positively wrong, intensifies the creature's natural<sup>13</sup> frailty. This is true, of course, where pleasure is sought solely for pleasure's sake. Pleasure can be lawful on the grounds of necessity or utility. What is wrong and contrary to God's intention is to make pleasure an end. It is meant by the Creator to be a means. It is attached by Him to the normal functioning of every vital faculty. The purpose of the Creator is opposed when delectation is sought regardless of function, and the life purpose it is meant to serve. The habit of self-indulgence takes deep root in the habitual pleasure seeker. The power of resistance to the strong bait of what is unlawful declines and, sooner or later, there is a

<sup>13</sup> Using natural as equivalent to what is characteristic of fallen nature.

lapse from rectitude. The fall is hastened by the fact that habitual self-indulgence blunts one's spiritual sensitiveness. Because of this obtuseness what constitutes a real danger will come to be regarded as harmless and what is a serious fault will be judged to be a slight one. Even the vigilant and the self-denying find in themselves a strong drawing towards evil. How much stronger this inclination will be in those who hardly ever resist the solicitation of self-love, unless yielding to those solicitations involves sin! To acquire strength unflinchingly to overcome the allurements of what is unlawful, one must exercise a measure of self-restraint in the enjoyment of what is lawful. Delectation is necessary for life. In this Saint Thomas agrees with Aristotle. But the true disciple of Christ must rule out delectation for delectation's sake. That a thing is not wrong should not be for him sufficient reason to permit himself the doing of it: his aim should be to do what is right. This duty of positively aiming at the good as opposed merely to avoiding what is evil, is the advice of Saint Paul to the Philippians. "For the rest, brethren, whatsoever things are true, whatsoever modest, whatsoever just, whatsoever holy, whatsoever lovely, whatsoever of good fame, if there be any virtue, if any praise of discipline, think on these things. The things which you have learned and received, and heard and seen in me, these do you, and the God of peace shall be with you."<sup>14</sup> How often one hears careless Christians when reproached for their worldly and unchristian practices, justify themselves saying, "but what I am

<sup>14</sup> Philipp. IV, 8, 9.

doing is not exactly wrong." What is worse, they think that an unanswerable argument in favor of the course of action on which they are engaged. The Saviour sternly reprobates this negative attitude, in matters of conduct. His condemnation of it in the parable of the talents would strike many a conventional Christian as unduly severe. Such persons even find a difficulty in seeing anything wrong in the line of action taken by the unprofitable servant. He received a certain sum of money from a master, whom he acknowledged to be exacting but just. He feared that master and had no inclination whatever to defraud him. He even took great care of the property given him. He wrapped it up carefully and put it in safe keeping, so as to be able to hand it up intact on demand. Viewed from the point of view of abstract justice his conduct seems irreproachable. He could plead that what he had done "was not wrong." But he found to his cost that "what is not wrong" is not the exact equivalent of "what is right." He was sternly condemned. His condemnation was merited. He did not wish to do what was wrong, but he declined to do what was right. Having freed himself, as he thought, from all danger of injuring his master's rights, he forthwith proceeded to pursue his own interests exclusively. He used neither his faculties nor his energies to further the interest of his Lord. His life was one of calculated egoism rather than of positive disservice. He did not wish to displease his master, but he dispensed himself from all efforts to please him. He sought his own life and therefore, naturally, lost it. "Whosoever shall seek to

save his life, shall lose it.”<sup>15</sup> The loss was rendered more bitter by contrast. “For to everyone that hath shall be given . . . but from him that hath not, that also which he seemeth to have shall be taken away.”<sup>16</sup> The cunning self-seeker will always appear to compass his desires and get hold of the prizes of life. In the end his possession will be revealed as being but a phantom, and his greatness but a shadow.

The behavior of the other two servants is in striking contrast with that of the egoist. They used what was given them; they traded with it: they made it fructify in the interests of their Lord. They worked for his living not their own. They were willing to “lose their life for his sake” (that is to use their vital powers for his advantage) and, as a consequence “they saved it.”<sup>17</sup> They recovered what they had renounced and recovered it enhanced in value. They were rewarded not only with the price of their labor, but, as can be gathered from the text, with the whole capital and its proceeds. They found that, in working faithfully for their master they had, in reality, worked for themselves. This is an exact figure of what takes place in the spiritual life. To eschew all self-seeking and to spend one’s life for God, is to find one’s life in a more perfect form. Divine grace is the sum of talents given to the soul. The service of God consists in putting grace to use, that is, in acting habitually according to the instincts of grace, not the instincts

<sup>15</sup> St. Luke XVII, 33.

<sup>16</sup> Matt. XXV, 29.

<sup>17</sup> St. Luke IX, 24.

of self. This is what God looks for. But the soul in responding to God's wishes in this respect, actually increases the treasure of grace deposited with it. For every act done through divine love disposes the soul for a fresh inflow of divine life. When the day of accounting comes, the soul will be astonished to discover that what it thought it was accumulating for God, it was really accumulating for itself. The grace it started with and the grace that grew from that initial deposit, remain to it in secure possession for ever and are the measure of its glory in heaven.

A self-assertive life cannot be a healthy spiritual life. It will be normally an unhappy life. There will be constant suffering from twinges of conscience. This is always so for those who ought to lead a spiritual life. They can know little peace for they never resolutely face the root of disorder in themselves. Those who confine their efforts to resisting the actual assaults of mortal or venial sin according as they occur, and do not try to become detached from themselves, to correct their faults of character, to combat their pride, to restrain their thirst for pleasure, to check the disorderly tendencies of their senses, and to control their passionate eagerness in the pursuit even of legitimate things, are bound to suffer many a reverse in the spiritual warfare.

One of the main reasons why so many pious people are not saintly is to be assigned to this, that they make their spiritual effort consist in not doing wrong things and in practising a certain number of right things, rather than in endeavoring to transform



radically the springs of their life's activities. Saints always exert a charm: the merely pious rarely do. This charm is due to the utter self-forgetfulness of the Saints: the merely pious rarely forget themselves. The saints are said to be difficult to get on with in the business of life. That is not the fault of the Saints. It is invariably the fault of the others. When those who allow themselves to be swayed, as a rule, by personal interests and prejudices come up against those who invariably guide their activities according to objective and firmly held principles, difficulties are bound to arise. A saint is never a self-seeker: he is all out for the interests of God and never for his own. He is not of those of whom Saint Paul complains saying: "For all seek the things that are their own, not the things that are Jesus Christ's."<sup>18</sup> Anyhow the difficulties of the life lived in the company of the Saints are very much exaggerated. Their interference with life is necessarily infrequent, for their numbers are rare. Comparatively few are called on to suffer from the Saints, for comparatively few ever meet Saints. The Saints themselves do not, as a rule, stress the difficulties they find in living with others, though they might. The "others" being very numerous, the Saints can never escape the experience of living with them.

Self-denial, that is self-effacement, is the invariable characteristic of real holiness. Where it is absent, there is not holiness, though there may be a good

<sup>18</sup> Philipp. II, 21. In I Cor. XIII, 5, he again draws attention to this main characteristic of Saintliness, "Charity seeketh not her own."



deal of piety. Christian sanctity manifests itself in an unresisting flexibility to the direction of God. It can never be gained without a serious conversion of heart, and often a series of conversions. The Saviour told the apostles so, and they, at the time, were upright enough, had plenty of good-will and a certain attachment to their Divine Master. Conversion means something more searching than relinquishing certain bad practices, and substituting for them a certain number of good practices. It is a pity that there is so much insistence on "good practices." *Spiritual change comes not by adopting different doings, but by becoming fundamentally different.* It is arrived at by securing that the whole tide of a man's voluntary activity should set towards God and away from self. It is a waste of energy to be greatly pre-occupied about the chance movements of the waves under the action of the casual winds and to give no heed to the permanent direction of the waters beneath the surface. Those aiming at sanctity must not content themselves with fulfilling a part only of the Master's program. They must not think all is done when, figuratively, they have given up father and mother, wife and children, brethren and sisters. When they have thus renounced much that sits close to them, a good step forward has been made, but a great deal of road remains yet to be covered. They must not balk in face of the final demand. "Yea and his own life also." It is not enough to espouse such interests as one can bring into harmony with God's requirements. One must first explore what are God's

interests and then bend one's energies to furthering them. Many, in the good they do, seek themselves and then invite God to underwrite their undertakings. They would make God a partner in their enterprises, instead of allowing God the initiative in the courses they pursue. In all this is the taint of Pharisaism, that spiritual cancer which so frequently eats into what otherwise would be of considerable moral worth.

It would be an error to think that Pharisaism was merely a passing phase or an accidental product of the Jewish religion. It is of all times, for it springs from a permanent tendency of fallen human nature. In pious persons who are proud and self-seeking, there is always an instinct to strike a compromise between the demands of God and of self, and an unwillingness to declare definitely in favor of either. This instinct manifests itself in a readiness to multiply acts of religious observance and to leave the basic condition of the soul undisturbed. They indulge the illusion that legal sacrifices will act as a substitute for radical conversion. Like the Pharisees, they persuade themselves that they can be justified by the works of the Law without having to undergo the painful process of change of heart. It is a very accommodating kind of religion, for it allows one to give free rein to ambition and other disorderly passions—always, of course, restrained by astute casuistry within the limits of the Law—and promises salvation at what is perhaps a handsome price, but still a price. This is not the religion preached by

Jesus Christ. It is a religion which drew on it His most searing strictures.<sup>19</sup>

Because those types of soul, whose religion may be characterized by the aphorism, 'safety first,' are more concerned about doing actions which are good than being self-forgetting in the good they do, they are much moved by personal feelings in their reactions to life. They may not allow the left hand to be cognizant of what their right hand is doing,<sup>20</sup> but they do not allow any perceptive faculty in themselves to remain unaware of it. They will take steps, too, to secure that the left hand of their *entourage* should be well acquainted with what their own left hand is doing. A wound to their susceptibilities or to their self-love is quite enough to decide them to relinquish their connection with a good cause in which they may have been engaged. What they fancy is due to themselves in the way of personal consideration weighs more with them than God's interests to promote. Frequently a judicious concession to their pride, their vanity or their self-importance, is capable of winning them to use their abilities generously in a scheme to promote the greater glory of God.

Jesus said, "if thy eye be single, thy whole body shall be lightsome."<sup>21</sup> The only way to this single-

<sup>19</sup> Cf. *La Vie Spirituelle*, Vol. XX, p. 22. Pharisaism, consisting in trampling underfoot the spirit of the law, whilst affecting a scrupulous obedience to the letter, is but *the exaggeration of a defect which exists in germ in all men*. In all is found the desire of obtaining the immediate reward of virtue at the cost of the least effort and the minimum of sacrifice. *What costs to nature is not the mere natural act of religion, but interior renouncement and a continual vigilance over oneself.* (Italics are mine.)

<sup>20</sup> St. Matt. VI, 3.

<sup>21</sup> St. Matt. VI, 22.

ness of vision with its corresponding limpidity of soul, is the way of constant negation of self. That is the spirituality of Christ, on its ascetic side. The soul is like the grain of corn which possesses deeply hidden in it a principle of life. If the grain does not die in the earth it remains an undeveloped thing, without fruit. If it corrupts and dies, the spark of life bursts through the decaying matter enclosing it. In the soul is the living germ of divine life. The decay of self releases the divine energy. Spiritual growth and development are free to pursue their course. God aids the process by sending crosses of various kinds. These, as it were, harrow and break the close packed earth, and allow the moisture and the sun's invigorating rays to penetrate. The corruption of self, is the generation of the divine. It is a Scholastic axiom that the corruption of one thing is the coming into being of another.

Self dies hard. Nature resists desperately the assaults of grace. It yields only step by step. When the soul is forced to give way, it consents to forego much. But it obstinately desires to be untrammelled and undisturbed in some reserved section of its conscious life. What it clings to may be small, but it must be a kingdom within whose borders it enjoys complete freedom. To its own hurt it often succeeds. It is the reason why so few, comparatively, attain to any depth of intimacy with God. Yet the Lord carefully graduates the process of purification. In the beginning the soul is visited by slight trials. When it has been exercised and strengthened by these, then crosses of a weightier and more crucifying nature are sent.

When the measure of self-denial necessary for the proper bearing of these crosses, attains considerable proportions, the soul grows restive and then rebels. It turns and takes refuge in a less exacting form of spiritual existence.

Discouragement and loss of heart are the great disasters of the spiritual warfare. Discouragement is never justifiable. For though there may be many a failure in the fight, nevertheless, if the fight be not abandoned, these failures can be turned to good account. They help the soul to grow in the realization of its own weakness. They teach it humility and a sane distrust of self. They reveal to it the wisdom of relying on God alone. Much is allowed to happen to the soul, in order that it might become practically convinced of its own powerlessness for good. Occasional failures, proceeding from weakness should produce not discouragement but detachment from self. It is for this purpose, very often, that they are permitted by the Lord. Disappointment and irritability with oneself always come from wounded self-love and from having had too much confidence in one's own power to achieve good. Sins even need not be a failure ultimately. God can turn them into an occasion of progress. Failure in the real sense occurs only when the Christian turns from the path traced for all by Jesus Christ and says that it is impracticable for him. The man who refuses to die to himself, to push abnegation to its logical issue, condemns himself to a life which is, at best, but one of spiritual mediocrity.

## CHAPTER XII

# THE WISDOM OF SPIRITUAL CHILDHOOD

*"The commandment is a lamp, and the law a light, and reproofs of instruction are the way of life."—Proverbs VI, 23.*

IN THE preceding chapter it has been pointed out that the Christian's contribution to the process of his growth in Christ consists in clearing away the obstacles to it. It is God who rears the edifice of spiritual perfection. The ground is cleared for the building, by the practice of self-denial. It may seem to men a hard law, to demand of them, as the price of spiritual growth, what is most difficult for them to pay considering the frailty of their nature. Abnegation of self, embracing all man's life, is a hard thing to face. The law of self-denial has at all times encountered much resistance in the instincts of fallen man. This opposition has not grown less, but more bitter with the passage of time. It is, perhaps, more pronounced in our age than in any since an expectant world first heard Christ. The words self-expression, self-determination, self-realization, not only of individuals, but of groupings of individuals, embody the popular philosophy of the age. The mood of the moment is the self-expression of the collective multitude.

There is a way of interpreting this term, self-expression, according to which it bears an acceptable Christian sense and conveys an inspiring truth. But it is not the sense in which it is used by the statesmen, education-lists, the artists, and the writers who hold the world's ear. For them, and those who listen to them, whatever hints at restraint or repression in any form is 'taboo.' "One must live one's life, untrammelled and unfettered"—that expresses the spirit of our time. This means that one is not only entitled, but that one has a duty, to taste any experience to which one is inclined. This is called the enlargement of personality. It is not surprising that the call to self-abnegation gets no hearing in such a world. It is hard to escape entirely the influence of this prevalent mood. Those who elect to preach the Gospel of Christ uncompromisingly do not find a great degree of responsiveness in their hearers. Christians, in great numbers, will give eager attention to discourses which hold out to men the promise of reaching the kingdom of Heaven, without their being obliged to tread the hard path traced by Christ. They welcome any expositions of the Gospel which appear to explain away, or considerably mitigate, the severity of its demands. They will admit the necessity of the observance of the Ten Commandments and say that this is as much as can be expected of the average man. The observance of the Ten Commandments is not as easy as all that. The Christian who does not practice habitual self-denial will find such observance extremely difficult. Without it violations of the divine precepts are inevitable.



Self-denial is not, like poverty and chastity and religious obedience, a counsel of perfection. It is a command obligatory on all who wish to be true disciples of Christ. And He said to *all*: "If any man will come after me . . . let him deny himself." One need not practice evangelical poverty to be saved, but one must deny oneself. It is a law of the spirit that cannot be evaded.

The law is inexorable, but is it as harsh as it is supposed to be? It would be strange if Jesus, having done so much for man's restoration, should leave the attainment of a living union with Him, dependent on a condition presenting an almost insuperable difficulty for human frailty. Could not He, who was powerful enough to reverse the primeval curse, "to blot out the handwriting of the decree that was against us,"<sup>1</sup> make the kingdom of God accessible, even to the weakest amongst his adherents? Having made salvation possible, could He have failed to make it easy? If the entry into God's inheritance for man, in his unfallen state, depended on such an easy condition as an act of obedience that cost nothing, is it not legitimate to expect that the entry of redeemed man into the same inheritance would be linked with a condition of similar ease? The parallelism observable in the whole economy of the Fall and the Restoration would lead one to expect some such thing. Of course man in the state of original justice had not the obstacles to contend with that regenerated man has to overcome. But though this is true and the ravages wrought in man's mind

<sup>1</sup> Col. II, 14.



and will through the Fall could not be too much stressed, yet wholly insufficient emphasis is laid on the advantages he enjoys. As a member of Christ's Mystical Body, regenerated man has inexhaustible stores of divine grace to draw upon. Adam had no such treasure at his disposal, nor would his children have had them, even had he proved faithful. "Where sin abounded, grace did more abound,"<sup>2</sup> says Saint Paul. "And if by one man's offence death reigned through one, much more they who receive the abundance of grace, and of the gift and of justice, shall reign in life through one, Jesus Christ." ■ Whilst many are ready to join in the wailings that arise from men as they are a prey to the misery consequent on the disorder introduced by the Fall, few echo with enthusiasm the 'Felix Culpa' of the Church on Holy Saturday. Men are always more alive to the disadvantages from which they suffer than they are to the advantages which they enjoy. Incorporated in Christ restored man participates, to a certain extent, in that union with the Word, which is the prerogative of the Sacred Humanity. "The Word was God. . . . In Him was life . . . as many as received Him, He gave them power to be made the sons of God . . . who are born, not of blood, nor of the will of the flesh, nor of the will of man but of God . . . and the Word was made flesh . . . full of grace and truth, and of *His fullness we all have received and grace for grace.*"<sup>4</sup> The union with the

■ Rom. V, 20.

<sup>3</sup> *Ibid.*, V, 17.

<sup>4</sup> St. John I, 1-16.

Word of God, which exists in its perfection in Christ, is, in a certain sense, communicated to us, by participation.<sup>5</sup> The degree in which we are one with the God-man by partaking of His flesh and Blood is proclaimed by Himself saying: "I live and you shall live. In that day you shall know that I am in the Father, and you in me and I in you." (St. John, XIV, 19, 20.) What Christ implies is not mere harmony of will, but that He is in the Father by the reality of the Divinity and we are in Him through His Nativity of the Virgin, and He in us, by the Mystery of the Eucharist. Such is the perfect union given us by the Mediator. He holds us in Himself, whilst He abides perpetually in the Father. And whilst abiding in the Father, He dwells in us. In this way we acquire union with the Father, because He is "really" in the Father, and we are "really" in Him and He is "really" in us.<sup>6</sup> God did not repair grudgingly the ruin caused by man. To stress the disabilities under which restored man labors and not to realize the rare advantages he enjoys betrays an incomprehension of the marvellous character of the redemption wrought in Christ.

For, as a member of Christ, one is armed with mighty resources against the assaults of sin and enjoys inexhaustible recuperative powers. The Christian can rise from the death of sin, not once, but an incalculable number of times. There is in him a

<sup>5</sup> Mersch, S. J., *Le Corps Mystique du Christ*, Vol. I, p. 42.

<sup>6</sup> St. Hilary, *De Trinitate*, Bk. VIII, is quoted by Mersch, S. J., *op. cit.*, p. 432. "Really" in the text is opposed to the term morally. It is not a question of mere moral union with Christ and with God.

source of vitality, in virtue of which, it is in his power to enjoy innumerable resurrections.<sup>7</sup> "And not as it was by one sin, so also is the gift. For judgment was by one unto condemnation, but grace is of many offences unto justification."<sup>8</sup> Adam fell once, and in spite of the greatness of his endowments, he could not rise even once. So superabundant is the grace of Christ that the Christian can fall many times and rise again many times.

Furthermore, though Adam was immune from the inclinations to sin that harass his children, he did not, *de facto*, remain sinless. For all his perfection he sinned as none of his descendants sinned. And many of these, in spite of the absence of the preternatural gifts that their First Parent enjoyed, have carried their baptismal robes stainless to the grave. Undoubtedly the darkness of understanding caused by the stirrings of the passions and the rebellion of the senses are a prolific source of sin in the children of Adam, but they are not the only source. In Adam, and those born of him, exists the same malignant germ of corruption. The chief cause of man's conflict with God, whether it be a question of man fallen or unfallen, *is a certain thirst for independence*. "Adam longed to be, himself, by the exercise of his reasoning faculties, the head and fountain of the innocence that was his. He could continue holy as children are holy, without effort. The habits of virtue which fallen man gains by dint of exercise, working up towards them by religious acts, Adam acted from

<sup>7</sup> Cf. Abbot Vonier, *The Spirit and the Bride*, Chap. VIII.

<sup>8</sup> Rom. V, 16.

and this he did from the very beginning of his career. He was sinless and perfect and acceptable to God, though he had done nothing painful to obtain his robe of innocence and sanctity. He tired of it: he tired of being upright from the heart only, and not in the way of reason: he desired to obey not in the way of children, but of those who choose for themselves. He ate of the forbidden fruit that he might choose with his eyes open, between good and evil.”<sup>9</sup> This hankering after independent action, this impatience of dependence on a higher power was the root of evil in Adam. The same evil pride, the same resentment of control by a power superior to man lies at the origin of the greatest sins committed by the members of Adam’s race. Man proud of the freedom of his will is ever tempted into revolt against the natural limitations that are inherent in created freedom. He is tempted to aspire to the unconditioned freedom of God. He wants to stand on his own feet. He would not be a child: he would be a man in the order of grace as well as in the order of nature.

Christ’s teaching strikes at the very root of this disorderly tendency in rational creatures. He warns men that their entry into the kingdom of God, their return to the paradise from which they had been expelled (in so far as such a return is possible in the actual condition of things) can be effected only

<sup>9</sup> Newman, *P. and P. Sermons*, Vol. V, p. 109. It is to be remarked that Adam’s ambition reappears in many modern philosophies. The teachers of them confidently assert the possibility of the realization of an age of ‘innocence’ through the advance of reason and science.

through the abandonment of this independent attitude of soul. He tells them that they must shed the 'grown up' or 'adult' attitude in their dealings with God and become as little children with their Heavenly Father.

The incident which provoked His lesson on this theme is related in the eighteenth chapter of Saint Matthew's Gospel. It took place at the time of the year at which it was customary to collect the temple tax. The collectors, moved by some reasons which they could not account for, did not approach the Divine Master Himself, but addressed themselves to Peter. They asked the apostle if it was the intention of their Chief to pay the assessment that had fallen due. Peter, on his own initiative, and somewhat rashly as was his wont, replied immediately in the affirmative. Jesus, with gentle irony gave him to understand that he had too readily assumed for his Master the existence of an obligation, which, in fact, was non-existent. He implied that had Peter enlightened theological notions on the personality of his Master, he would not have fallen into this mistake. The apostle was delicately rebuked for his want of knowledge. Jesus, after having administered this lesson, in order to extricate His follower from his rash commitment, and not to excite scandal by a refusal, agreed to pay the tribute demanded. Yet he would do it in such a manner as would make it clear to His apostle, that He, who was the Son of the King of Israel was above any such obligation. A miracle was performed to pay the tax. In the mouth of a fish, brought miraculously to Peter's line, was to be found

double the necessary sum for a single Hebrew. Peter was able to acquit his own debt and the seeming debt of his Master.

The incident, and the part played in it by Peter, caused some stir and aroused some questioning on the part of the rest of the apostolic band. They had not been moved to envy and emulation when Peter and James and John had been selected as witnesses to the scene on Mount Thabor. But now in this affair of the tax, Peter, in his individual person, had been singled out in unmistakable fashion. Feelings of jealousy stirred in their hearts. As is the way of grown-ups they began to analyze (with unfavorable results, of course) Simon's aptitude for the chief post in the Kingdom that was to be established. They contrasted his qualities and endowments with those of the others in Jesus' following. Whilst apparently sustaining the claims of the others, each could not conceal his intimate conviction that he, himself, was, taking all in all, really the best fitted for the position to which Simon was mistakingly being called. The self-centeredness, the ambition, the rivalry, the eagerness to get on, the thirst for place, and power and distinction, so characteristic of the 'grown-up,' showed through all this discussion. What a complete alienation of spirit, it revealed, from the spirit of the Kingdom under discussion! To correct their false attitude, Jesus called them about Him, and having seated Himself in the midst of them, called a child that was near and placed him in full view of His apostles. What the apostles had under their eyes was not a grown-up child, but, as the text assures us,

quite a little one, with all the guilelessness, confidence, wonder, unself-consciousness, docility and objectivity of the very young. The grown-up men wondered what an infant had to do with a man's life and interests. Jesus, reading their thoughts, said: "Amen, I say to you, unless you change and become as little children you shall not enter the Kingdom of Heaven," and then, turning around and pointing to the open-eyed wondering infant in the midst, He continued: "Whosoever shall humble himself as this little child, he is the greatest in the Kingdom of Heaven."<sup>10</sup>

The whole incident illustrates a striking characteristic of the working of Christ's thought. Starting from a particular fact, of but ordinary significance, He constructs from it a lesson which opens up illimitable horizons and turns on eternal issues. A very simple and every-day thing suggests to the Saviour an instruction which embraces time and eternity in its application. He takes occasion of correcting the jealousy of his apostles, to give an insight into the high destiny of man and the dispositions that adapt him for it. The apostles looked for distinction in Christ's Kingdom. That distinction would not be denied to them, but the way to it was not the way of self-advertisement, but self-effacement.

There is an intimate connection and close parallelism between the text declaring the necessity of becoming as a little child and the one which inculcates self-denial. The ideas in the two texts seem widely divergent: when analyzed they reveal an un-

<sup>10</sup> St. Matt. XVIII, 3, 4.



expected identity. The parallelism is clear: the identity is not obvious. Self-denial is laid down as the condition of discipleship of Christ: conversion to a childlike attitude of soul is demanded for admission to the Kingdom. To be a disciple of Christ and to find place in His Kingdom are but different ways of expressing what is in effect the same notion. In each text, the clause stating the conditions required for the realization of the "if" clause, crystallizes the whole moral effort obligatory on the Christian if he is to make good his vocation. But the cultivation of spiritual childhood seems very dissimilar from the practice of self-denial. The latter program is harsh, forbidding, austere. The other is tender, gracious, appealing. Yet, strange as it might seem, they are but two facets of the same truth. It might be conceded that, perhaps, the text dealing with spiritual childhood reaches greater depths than the other. Practically, however, they are the same. It is not impossible that the Saviour, in delivering His object lesson to the apostles, wished to soften the rude edges of His previous exhortations to self-abnegation. He aimed at making the truth more humanly appealing by showing it as a change not as a mere negation. Rather He revealed that the negation was but a graceful change.

Self-abnegation being mentioned in close connection with the daily carrying of the cross runs risk of being understood as equivalent to the practice of rude mortifications. Nature shrinking from rude mortifications turns from self-denial, identifying one with the other. Yet mortification and self-denial are



distinct notions. The baptized child, who undergoes no voluntary penance, is yet pleasing to God, and if it dies sinless it is admitted immediately to the Beatific Vision. If, having come to the use of reason the soul continued uninterruptedly in its tendency towards God, there would be no necessity to practise austerities, in order to remain pleasing to God. Mortifications are not self-denial but a means to it. Unfortunately owing to the perverse inclinations which they inherit from unfaithful Adam, men speedily manifest movements away from God and towards themselves. Mortification imposes itself as a curb on these perverse inclinations. The followers of Christ inflict penances on themselves, not to distinguish themselves as heroes of endurance, but to keep themselves in a humble, docile, and chastened attitude in their dealings with themselves and with God. Saint Paul avers that he, in spite of his great graces, felt the need of this: "I chastise my body," he says, "and bring it into subjection lest perhaps, when I have preached to others, I myself should become a castaway."<sup>11</sup> The Saints mortify themselves in order to discipline themselves into a child-like spirit. The votaries of the world face great hardships, in order to prove themselves "men." "Everyone," says Saint Paul, "that striveth for the mastery refraineth himself from all things: and they indeed that they may receive a *corruptible* crown, but we an *incorruptible* one."<sup>12</sup> The "old man" is strong in all the heirs to original sin and is ever on

<sup>11</sup> I Cor. IX, 27.

<sup>12</sup> *Ibid.*, IX, 25.

the alert to express himself, to assert himself, and to insist on his false claims. To vanquish this enemy, the devoted disciples of Christ do not content themselves with refusing him his unlawful demands, they push their resistance further. They assume the offensive. They deprive him even of what it would be permissible to grant. It is interesting to note that the apostle describes this domestic enemy of ours by a word expressing hoary age. This is no accident. For the child of Adam in us manifests none of the characteristics of childhood. Pride, ambition, selfishness, eagerness to get on and to achieve publicity, these are the evil qualities of the "old man." In a spiritual sense men are born old and somewhat gnarled. They have to be reborn in order to become children, vital with the vitality of childhood. After having been reborn, the "old man" which clings to them has to be "done to death" by mortification if they are to enjoy the untrammelled life of childhood, thus mortification issues in the childlike spirit. Mortification likewise issues in self-denial. Hence it is that self-denial as a habitual disposition of the soul, is akin to the disposition of spiritual childhood.

Mortification is the positive infliction on oneself of what is contrary to one's ordinary inclinations. Self-denial is a state rather than an act or series of acts. It is a state in which the demands of self find the soul unheeding. In mortification there is not always present the element of self-denial: in self-denial there is always present the element of mortification. Mortification consists in doing something painful to oneself, and this may be vitiated sometimes by a wrong

or imperfect motive. Christ's life, generally speaking, was not characterized by mortification, if we are to except the opening forty days of his voluntary fasting, and his observance of the penitential prescriptions of the law. It was, however, marked by sustained self-denial. "He came," it was said, "eating and drinking,"<sup>13</sup> and not at all practising the rigid austerities of the regime adopted by the Baptist and his disciples. But "He did not please Himself,"<sup>14</sup> in anything. Self-denial is much broader and more fundamental than mortification: it is bound up with the very springs of our activity. It aims at purifying that activity at its source. Mortification lops and prunes the living plant. Self-abnegation aims at a complete modification of the life-giving sap itself. Mortification is medicinal and is, therefore, of a rather negative nature. Self-abnegation is spiritually hygienic and invigorating and, consequently, highly positive in character.

As self-denial must be clearly distinguished from mortification, so too must it, in no sense, be confounded with self-repression. God's purposes are always positive, never negative. Everything pertaining to His religion must bear the stamp of what is living and of what is positive. Christ came not to destroy but to fulfil. As accredited envoy of God, His discipline must secure the expansion and perfection of human nature and not effect its contraction and impoverishment. The frequent occurrence of the word,

<sup>13</sup> St. Matt. XI, 19. "The Son of man came eating and drinking and they say: Behold a man who is a glutton and a wine-drinker, a friend of publicans and sinners."

<sup>14</sup> Rom. XV, 3.

'dilatate' (to enlarge, to give wide scope and free play to something) both in the Old Testament and in the New, is noteworthy and significant. Had man been created for a natural destiny, God would have assisted him to secure the fullest measure of self-expression, using the word in its rightful sense. When man has been created for a supernatural destiny, there is no reversal of God's purpose. Supernatural elevation but opens up indefinitely large possibilities of self-expression for man. God made everything to be perfectly itself. Man realizes God's purposes in his regard when he achieves himself fully, and expresses himself in the supernatural order, to the measure of his individual capacity. Self-realization in and through grace is God's will for man; and is the purpose of the whole economy of his relations with man. Grace does not eliminate, it but sublimates nature. Man, submissive to God's action, attains the highest development of human personality. According to the teaching of Christ, self-denial paves the way to the achievement of a complete personality.

## CHAPTER XIII

# THE FULL FLOWERING OF THE CHRISTIAN SPIRIT

*"Amen I say to you, unless you be converted and become as little children you shall not enter into the kingdom of heaven."—St. Matt. XVIII, 3.*

"A MAN'S true self is that in him which is most eminent and best." <sup>1</sup> By baptism a man is made a child of God. "Behold what manner of charity the Father hath bestowed upon us, that we should be called and should be the sons of God," <sup>2</sup> writes Saint John. To be, effectively, as becomes an adopted child of God to be, is, for the Christian, to be his real self. To become perfectly that constitutes the veritable self-realization and self-expression for the Member of Jesus Christ. For though a Christian, from the moment he emerges from the waters of baptism, has the status of a child of God, he has as yet but the beginnings of the spiritual temper that corresponds to his status. By his first birth he is a child of Adam, with a number of inherited evil instincts. By his re-birth, "of water and the Holy Ghost," <sup>3</sup> the child of Adam is disinherited and cast out. He is struck with juridical death. "For we are buried together with

<sup>1</sup> Aristotle, *Nich. Ethics*, Bk. X, Ch. 7.

<sup>2</sup> I St. John III, 1.

<sup>3</sup> St. John III, 5.

Him (Jesus), by baptism unto death.”<sup>4</sup> But though then outlawed from the kingdom of God and of His Christ, the “child of Adam,” does not cease to press his claims. He asserts himself with the beginnings of self-determined life. This is the false self in each of us. Its development effects not the enlargement but rather the disintegration of our true personality. It is this false self, and not the true, that the Christian is called on to deny.

The conversion which Jesus enjoins consists in the abandonment of the dispositions which characterize the old man in us, and in developing the dispositions that befit “the new creature,”<sup>5</sup> the child of God. The “Abba Father” on the lips of the neophyte must not remain a mere formula; it must become the expression of a corresponding inner attitude of soul. It is not sufficient to *address* God as Father, one must become towards Him as a little child. This implies a universal, full, loving and spontaneous dependence on God for all things. As long as a Christian is in the flesh, he never really comes of age in the household of God. It is only on his entry into heaven that he attains his majority, becoming, “the perfect man unto the measure of the age of the fullness of Christ.”<sup>6</sup> During his time on earth he remains supernaturally a child, needing constant care and vigilance on the part of his heavenly Parents. His perfection in that state is proportioned to the degree in which he enters into the dispositions that properly

<sup>4</sup> Rom. VI, 4.

<sup>5</sup> II Cor. V, 17.

<sup>6</sup> Ephes. IV, 13.

express that condition of utter supernatural dependence and helplessness.

The most marked characteristic of the child is its entire dependence on its parents. It lives by them and not through itself. The child instinctively turns to father and mother for the supply of all its needs. It looks to them for protection. It calls to them in danger; it clings to them in distress: it looks to them for comfort and healing. It has no fears that its wants will not be seen to. Its utter trust, untroubled by hesitation, is based on the instinct that its welfare is the preoccupation of the person to whom it turns, and this child trust is a far more beautiful thing than gratitude. The child's life is wholly suspended from its parents. "Confidingness" is the permanent quality of the child spirit. The little one does not fret against, or resent, its dependence. On the contrary it nestles in it and gives itself unreservedly to it. It does not want to "stand on its own feet" as it were. It finds a more firm and assured foothold in those that lovingly carry it. It does not think for itself, nor has it any need to fend for itself. It lovingly, and willingly and unquestioningly lives on, and by, those who have given it birth. It depends on them as naturally as it breathes.

There is in the child a complete absence of self-consciousness or reflecting back on itself. It is wholly objective. Its life is grappled to a life outside its own. It relies on its parents not because it judges them wise enough to guide, powerful enough to guard, and rich enough to provide for it—its reliance rests on a surer foundation than reason, for it

cannot reason. This transfer of the centre of gravity of its existence outside of itself is the source of the utter confidence and fearlessness of the child. It is beautiful to remark in the face of the child its serenity and the absolute unconsciousness of danger as it reposes in a loving mother's arms, even though the mother may be beset by dangers on all sides. Children are not *self-regarding*. Their glance is ever outwards on the little world that envelops them with tenderness, it is never inwards on themselves. This is the secret of the charm found in the limpidity, frankness, and directness of their gaze. The charm fades as soon as the mists of self-consciousness begin to cloud the flawless heaven of their eyes. Their attraction lies in this gracious "objectivity" so innocent of itself. It is in striking contrast to the subjectivity and self-preoccupation that mark the adult. The life of the child has its springs outside itself. That life is not calculating. The source of the determinations, judgements and providence by which its life is protected, guided and governed lies in those to whom the child wholly trusts itself. Its great wisdom is found in its not being wise in its own conceits but wise with the wisdom of the guardian whom nature has given it. Its strength, its force, its power lies in its confident dependence. Danger menaces it the moment it struggles against, or strives to emancipate itself from, that condition. What drew Our Lord to children was the absence in them of all those vices which ravage the hearts and souls of the "grown-up." Free from ambition and worldly cares there is no room in their hearts for caution, reserve, and calcu-



lation. They are perfectly spontaneous in the expression of the thoughts that pass within them. When punished they do not cherish resentment, and they do not respond to the pains inflicted on them with sullen and brooding anger. Their instinct impels them to protect themselves against suffering by a loving confiding of themselves to the hand that punishes them.

With the objectivity of childhood goes a curious realism. In their relations with persons they manifest surprising indifference to appearances. They are not carried away by the external advantages that so powerfully influence the adult. They are not attracted by mere physical beauty, and the choice of the persons to whom they readily give themselves is not determined by riches or by beauty, but by affection. Their mother, even plain of feature and simple of garb, if rich in love, is dearer to them than a queen in glittering apparel. Children love the imaginary but have a profound distaste for the unreal. There is in childhood an instinctive discernment combined with simplicity, which is of more worth than the findings of philosophy. All these natural characteristics of children—of course, in all this there is question of those who are such in reality,—were present to the mind of the Saviour, when He traced for the apostles the ideal to which they were to aspire. He bade them learn to act, by discipline of their wills, as children act by the promptings of nature. In the self-oblivion and the self-effacement of childhood is found the highest form of self-abnegation.

To attain to this childlike disposition in one's

relations with God, is to realize one's true and best self. If there is repression in Christianity, it is the repression of what is false and perverse. By Baptism men are placed as new-born children in God's arms, having been made sharers in His Divine Nature—"Sicut modo geniti infantes." By the Sacrament they do not become dependent on God, for they are that already: they become dependent, with the dependence characteristic of the infant. When they become responsible for their acts they have the power to accept, or reject, or merely to struggle against, this condition. But their perfection lies in a practical harmonizing of their inner dispositions of soul, with their actual supernatural status. The dependence, in the natural order, of the child on its parents is but a feeble image of the utter dependence on God in which man finds himself in the supernatural order. Without the actual assistance of God, he cannot make the slightest step in the life of grace. All the resources by which that life is imparted, fostered, nourished, enriched and developed, remain in the hands of Our Heavenly Father. The Christian is obliged to call incessantly on these resources to supply the ever recurring needs of the life according to grace. He is true to himself when he is dependent, not only in fact, but in disposition. There is no derogation to true manliness in this. Neither Adam nor any of his children could even remotely attain to the perfection of the manliness of Jesus. Yet no words can express the completeness, the tenderness, the wholeheartedness of Christ's childlike clinging to His Heavenly Father. The eyes of His soul were ever

turned to the face of God. Thence He drew the inspiration of all His activities. No helpless child's life, in the natural order, was ever so completely controlled by the loving providence of a parent as the life and life's activities of Jesus were regulated by God. He did nothing unless at His Father's showing, "The Son *cannot do anything of Himself*," but what He seeth the Father doing. . . . For the Father loveth the Son and showeth Him all things which Himself doeth." <sup>7</sup> He is but the echo of His Father's voice.

He does not think out things and express them on his own account, in adult fashion. He looks to the prompting of His Father. "The things, therefore, that I *speak*, even as the Father said unto me, so do I speak." <sup>8</sup> His wisdom and doctrine are not His, but like those of the child, derived from His Father. "My doctrine is not mine but His that sent me." <sup>9</sup> He lives through His Father. "As the living Father hath sent me, and as I live by the Father." <sup>10</sup> The accents of Jesus are vibrant with a tender and deep and wonderfully simple and almost emotional affection, wherever He has occasion to speak of His Father in Heaven. And Jesus lifting up His eyes said: "Father, I give thee thanks that thou hast heard me. And I know that thou hearest me always, but because of the people who stand about, I have said it." <sup>11</sup> This note of melting tenderness is very pro-

<sup>7</sup> St. John V, 19, 20.

<sup>8</sup> *Ibid.*, XII, 50.

<sup>9</sup> *Ibid.*, VII, 16.

<sup>10</sup> *Ibid.*, VI, 58.

<sup>11</sup> St. John XI, 41, 42.

nounced in the words that pour from His heart, when His apostles report to Him the success of their apostolic work: "In that same hour, He said, I confess to thee *O Father*, Lord of Heaven and Earth, because thou hast hidden these things from the wise and prudent, and have revealed them to the little ones. Yea, *Father*, for so it hath seemed good in thy sight. All things are delivered to me by *My Father*, and no one knoweth who the Son is, but the *Father*, and who the Father is, but the Son." <sup>12</sup> The reiteration of the word *Father* is to be noted. It is as if the filial love of Jesus made it a delight for Him, to murmur the word over and over again. How childlike it is! The childlike quality of the magnificent manliness of Christ has been much dwelt upon. The clearness of His gaze, the directness of His speech, His quick sympathy with the real, are all qualities that belong to childhood. Profound, penetrating and intuitive is the mind of Jesus. One would never dream of applying to it the adjective subtle. His intelligence resembles a sheet of water, of immense depth yet so utterly clear as to allow the objects of thought lying far down beneath the surface, to be seen with perfect distinctness. He verified the ideal He recommends to His apostles: "He was as wise as the serpent, but as simple as a dove." <sup>13</sup> As children do, Christ went straight to the heart of the real and was neither distracted by, or attracted to, the purely accidental. His simple directness crashed ruthlessly through the sophistication of His contemporaries. The character-

<sup>12</sup> St. Luke X, 21-22.

<sup>13</sup> St. Matt. X, 16.

istics touched upon here are so distinctive of the moral character of the Saviour, that Saint Jerome advances the strange opinion that the Divine Master, when administering his lesson to the apostles pointed to Himself as the "little one" (*parvulus*) on whom they were bidden to model themselves.

To be *childlike* is far different from being *childish*. Jesus was the one; He was anything but the other. Childishness consists in attaching undue importance to things of little significance or no significance at all. The apostles showed this unworthy disposition when they quarrelled amongst themselves about pre-eminence. It is only one who has the veritable spirit of the child of God who is childlike. The child of Adam is in all its tendencies childish. Saint Paul avows himself guilty of this fault of childishness in his early years. "When I was a child, I spoke as a child, I understood as a child, I thought as a child. But when I became a man I put away the things of the child."<sup>14</sup> That this is his thought is clear from a later text in the same epistle. He warns his hearers, "not to become children in sense, but *in malice to be children*, and in sense, perfect."<sup>15</sup> The Christian is, in a sense, perfect, when, like a child, he submits the whole conduct of his life to the ruling of God as against the promptings of self. He proves himself more wise when he directs his life by the wisdom of God rather than by his own. A loving, trusting, whole-hearted surrender of the care of his destiny to

<sup>14</sup> I Cor. XIII, 11.

<sup>15</sup> *Ibid.*, XIV, 20.

Almighty God is but the logical consequence of the condition in which he is established by baptism. *Self-abnegation* is but *the practical acknowledgement* of the fatherhood of God. It is living in the spirit of this acknowledgment. It is a bowing down to the laws and obligations of the state to which God has raised us. It is a lived dependence. The whole discipline of Christianity aims at forging in us the royal dispositions of the children of the Great King of Heaven.

The instincts of fallen human nature are in perpetual revolt against such dispositions. Nature, as vitiated by the Fall, is ever striving to assert itself—to do the very thing which Christ condemns in promulgating the law of self-denial. To assert self is to refuse to recognize any guiding principle of one's conduct other than one's own judgements, tastes, aspirations and ideals. To be self-assertive is to be a law to oneself; it is to make self the measure of all things. Ruskin, in a passage that deals not with false religion but with bad taste in art, analyzes this baneful subjectivity, contrasting it with an attitude of spirit which harmonizes admirably with the littleness which the Lord so commends: "False taste in art may be known by its fastidiousness . . . and by its pride also: for it is ever meddling, mending, accumulating and *self-exulting*: its *eye is always upon itself* and it *tests all things around it by the way they fit it*. But true taste is for ever growing, learning, reading, worshipping, laying its hand upon its mouth because it is astonished, lamenting over itself, and *testing itself*

*by the way it fits things.* And it finds whereof to feed, and whereby to grow in all things." <sup>16</sup>

The only restraining principle that the egoism of unregenerate nature tolerates is the law of self-interest. The "old man" in the child of Adam wants to be independent, to live life *à sa guise*. He frets and chafes at the restraint of his father's house and wishes to judge and act for himself, without the father's dictation. This state of spirit is admirably illustrated by the parable of the Prodigal Son. The origin of the misery and degradation to which the wayward youth sank was his longing for emancipation from his father's control. He wished to stand on his own feet,—to play the part of one "grown-up." He made no extravagant claim to an undue share in his father's possessions. He accepted the portion that was destined for him. "Give me," he said, "the portion of substance that falleth to me." <sup>17</sup> No more. The action of the parent in complying immediately with his request and to the letter, was a tacit admission that what the younger son demanded was truly destined to be his. "And he divided unto them his substance."

The folly of the Prodigal lay in thinking that life would be happier for him when he could use the goods of his inheritance at his own discretion and deal with them according to the promptings of his own will. This seemed to him far better than enjoying them as a child under the loving and protecting influence of his father. He had no intention, when

<sup>16</sup> Ruskin, *Modern Painters*, Vol. II. (Italics mine.)

<sup>17</sup> St. Luke XV, 12.



quitting the parental roof, to make a wicked use of his substance. He but wished to turn it to such use as should seem to him good. He did not hanker after a riotous life: he simply yearned for an independent life. He wished to usurp the position of his father and to have in his own hands the ordering of his inheritance. He was blind to the fact that the satisfaction and well-being he derived from the goods of his inheritance were due to enjoying them under the prudent and loving care of his father. The consequences of his thirst for complete emancipation were disastrous. It happened to him as it happens to the child, as yet unable to walk, when it leaves go of the hand that sustains it. The Prodigal fell into misery and distress. The ostentation, the profligacy, the lavish spending, followed by want and squalor, were the inevitable result of his revolt against the wise ruling of his parent.

The history of the Prodigal Son is the analysis, in figure, of an all too frequent spiritual experience. Fallen man longs to be free to deal with his heaven-given substance in accordance with his own views. God holds for each soul an inheritance consisting of wealth in the order of nature and in the order of grace. A usage of this wealth, under the control of God and in dependence on Him, makes for peace of heart and dignity of existence. The Christian, under the promptings of the "old man" in him, grows tired of the tranquil happiness of the home-life in the house of God. He goes abroad taking with him his spiritual substance and straight away sinks into spiritual beggary. The riotous living is not the chief



guilt. The criminal folly lies in leaving the Father's home and flinging off the Father's control.<sup>18</sup> This is the source of all the evils resulting from the initial utterly false step. Fallen man does not want to be a child, even to be a child of God. That is the radical cause of all his errors and his miseries. "Wherefore if, in perversity, man wishes to imitate God in this: namely, that just as God has nobody by whom He is governed, so he himself too should so use his powers as to live free from all controlling influence, what is the inevitable result? What can it be but this, that in departing from the ancestral hearth, he should become benumbed with cold; in withdrawing from the source of truth he should sink into folly."<sup>19</sup> "Man when he would be as God could only attain the shadow of a likeness which as yet he has not, by losing the substance which he had already."<sup>20</sup>

When Jesus, requested by His apostles to teach them how to pray, answered by the "Our Father who art in heaven," He gave them a clear insight into what should be the ordinary relations between the regenerated soul and God. God deigns to be, and to have the heart of, a father towards all the baptized. He has predestinated Jesus to be "the first born amongst many brethren."<sup>21</sup> God's loving designs are thwarted if men do not respond to His advances, by being towards Him as children. The finest expression of Christianity consists in this, in trusting God as a

<sup>18</sup> Europe has played the Prodigal Son for the past three centuries or more. It is sunk, as a result, into utter spiritual want.

<sup>19</sup> St. Augustine, Sermon 34.

<sup>20</sup> Newman, *P. and P. Sermons*, Vol. V, p. 257.

<sup>21</sup> Rom. VIII, 29.

loving Father and in behaving, in His regard, as an utterly dependent child. That is the ideal of perfection to which Jesus directs the minds of the apostles.

It is strange that man will more readily adopt towards God, other attitudes than that of a child. They will look upon Him as a just and severe Master, to whom a rigorous account of one's conduct has to be rendered one day. Many incline to look upon Him as the generous Lord of the vineyard who repays faithful service with lavish generosity. Others, and those are the more numerous, will regard Him as a Supreme Sovereign, to whom as subjects they consent to pay a regular tribute out of their resources. All these attitudes come more easy to the "grown-up" temper of men, than that of the natural self-oblivion of the child. It is interesting to note how this tendency reveals itself in the repentance of the Prodigal. He does not return as a hurt or wounded child to cast himself into the arms of a loving parent. Entering into himself, he said: "I will arise and go to my father and say to him: I have sinned. . . . *Make me one of thy hired servants.*" On the other hand the action of the father in brushing aside this request, and in straightway restoring the wanderer to the privileged conditions he had forfeited, illustrates the unwavering paternal attitude of God. A man works for hire or struggles for a prize, or pays tribute to a sovereign. A child does none of these things. Its life is one of complete surrender to the care of another, to whom it wholly commits itself.

From this state the pride of the "old man" shrinks. And yet with all this shrinking and this reluctance

there is in man a certain yearning for it. This yearning is borne witness to by the universal love of which children are the object. There is something of "pathos," something of a vague suggestion of a simpler and happier life that has been somehow lost, in this drawing of the sophisticated towards the guilelessness of childhood. "In presence of the uncontaminated hearts, open countenances, and untroubled eyes of those who neither suspect, nor conceal, nor shun nor are jealous, there stirs within them wistful, undefined memories of what the human nature, which they share in common with the child, was in the days of the primeval innocence. The limpid look of childhood is not only a recalling of the past, it is also an intimation of the future. For what creatures are, when children, is a blessed intimation of what God will make us, if *we surrender our hearts to the guidance* of His Holy Spirit,—a prophecy of good to come—a foretaste of what will be fulfilled in Heaven. Thus it is that a child is a pledge of immortality; for he bears upon him in figure those high and eternal excellences in which the joy of heaven consists, and which would not be thus shadowed forth by the All-Gracious Creator, were they not one day to be realized." <sup>22</sup>

Men vaguely feel something of all this as they gaze with affection and yearning on innocent childhood. To become as a child is the perfection of Christianity, for it is a return, in some measure, to what was the state of man in the days of original justice. It seems to have been man's happiness in Paradise not

<sup>22</sup> Newman, *P. and P. Sermons*, Vol. II, p. 67.

to think about himself, or to be conscious of himself, —such is the state of children. They are not self-regarding or self-reflecting or self-conscious. What is contemplation but a resting in the thought of God to the forgetfulness of self? “The first recorded act of Adam (after the Fall) was one of reflection on himself.”<sup>23</sup> A child’s glance is always outwards. To keep one’s eyes habitually turned towards God, as a child looks to its parent, is the perfect way to self-oblivion. To commit ourselves wholly to God’s paternal love, to put fearless childlike trust in His goodness, and to base all one’s hopes of being in the Divine favor, in life and in death, in His fatherly loving kindness and mercy, is to have attained to a lofty degree of spiritual childhood.

Diametrically opposed to this disposition of filial abandonment to the care of God, is a tendency observable in many pious persons who make scrupulous efforts to square their conduct with the Christian law. To find the assurance of its being well with them spiritually, they direct their attention to what they can discern in themselves of right purpose, sincere effort and of painstaking scrutiny of conscience. They anxiously explore their souls to discover there some good or, at least, the absence of positive evil, as something in which to base a sense of security about their spiritual welfare. Sincere confession of sins, purity of conscience, and efforts to overcome defects are, it is true, demanded of good Christians. But it is incomparably easier to secure all three by a loving childlike surrender to God, than to attain to

<sup>23</sup> *Ibid.*, Vol. VIII, p. 259.

surrender to God by working one's way through a laborious dealing with oneself. One must be pure to be with God: but it is not to be forgotten that willing contact with God works purification. The winsome ways of the child gain more from God than the dutiful activities of the servant who fulfils his task conscientiously but keeps at a respectful distance. The final obstacle to intimate union with God is found in the virulent activity of the pride of life. The cultivation of a Childlike attitude towards God is the most powerful antidote to this baneful pride. "Whosoever shall humble himself as this little child is the greatest in the kingdom of heaven."<sup>24</sup> Men are wont to blame their moral failures on the weakness of their nature. They would be nearer the truth if they laid the blame on the strength of their pride.

The following passage from Newman serves as a recapitulation of the foregoing pages and is also an admirable analysis in felicitous language of the qualities that make childhood the fitting type of consummate Christianity. "If we wish to affect a person and (if so be) humble him, what can we do better than appeal to the memory of times past, and above all to his childhood? Then it was that he came out of the hands of God, with all lessons and thoughts of heaven freshly marked upon him. Who can tell how God makes the soul or how He new-makes it? We know not. We know that besides His part in the work, it comes into the world with the taint of sin upon it: and that even regeneration which removes the cause, does not extirpate the root of evil. . . .

<sup>24</sup> Matt. XVIII, 4.

But we know full-well—we know from our own recollection of ourselves, and our experience of children—that there is in the infant soul, in the first years of its regenerate state, a discernment of the unseen world in the things that are seen, a realization of what is Sovereign and Adorable, and an incredulity and ignorance of what is transient and changeable, which mark it as a fit emblem of the mature Christian, when weaned from things temporal, and living in the intimate conviction of the Divine Presence. I do not mean, of course, that a child has any formed principle in his heart, any habits of obedience, any true discrimination between the visible and the invisible, such as God promises to reward for Christ's sake in those who come to years of discretion. . . . But he has this one great gift that he seems to have come lately from God's presence, and not to understand the language of this visible scene, or how it is a temptation, or how it is a veil interposing itself between the soul and God. The simplicity of a child's ways and notions, his ready belief of everything he is told, his artless love, his frank confidence, his confession of helplessness, his ignorance of evil, his inability to conceal his thoughts, his contentment, his prompt forgetfulness of trouble, his admiring without coveting: and above all, his reverential spirit, looking at all things about him as wonderful, as tokens and types of One Invisible, are all evidence of his being lately (as it were) a visitant in a higher state of things. I would only have a person reflect on the earnestness and awe

with which a child listens to any description or tale: or again his freedom from *that spirit of proud independence, which discovers itself in the soul as time goes on.*"<sup>25</sup>

<sup>25</sup> Newman, *P. and P. Sermons*, Vol. II, pp. 64, 66. (Italics mine.)

## CHAPTER XIV

### THE MOTHER OF THE REDEEMER

*"Behold thou shalt conceive in thy womb and shalt bring forth a son; and thou shalt call his name Jesus."—St. Luke I, 31.*

IN THE preceding chapter it was shown that the features of mature Christianity are the features of childhood. Now it is a difficult thing for the soul to have a childlike disposition unless it lives in the abiding sense of being under a mother's loving care and tenderness. To achieve the gracious perfection of the child spirit, there is required, in addition to the strong protecting influence of the father, the unwearied affection and solicitude of the mother. The perfect *home* demands the presence of the one and of the other. The absence of either during the formative years of a child's upbringing reacts unfavorably on its character. Of the two, the loss of the mother is more cruelly felt than of the father. There is a marked difference in the temperament of a child that has grown up under a mother's care and one who has not. There is something in the manner and ways of the motherless child, that suggests some quality of soul left undeveloped. It manifests a personality that has, in some indefinable but unmistakable way, suffered a species of starvation. There is wanting in it a certain spontaneity or expansiveness: it gives the impression of something stunted in



spiritual growth. This is necessarily the result of a natural craving for tenderness having been left unsatisfied during the years of helpless dependence. The father's love no matter how strong and deep it may be is powerless to supply the indefinable wants of childhood years. There is, generally speaking, a certain reserve in the relations of a child to its father which is wholly absent in the relations of a child to its mother. The relations with the father lack the spontaneity, the tenderness, the "abandon" that ordinarily mark the relations with the mother.

God, being the Author of nature, is not indifferent to any of its characteristics and normal tendencies. When He raises His creature to the supernatural order, He sees to it, that this elevation takes account of, and follows the lines of structure, even the very temperament, of nature. No legitimate tendencies that, in obedience to nature's own laws arise from the created springs of energy in the human soul are nullified or even thwarted in the process of divinization. On the contrary, in that process, these tendencies receive their highest expression and fullest expansion. If the little one born of the union of man and woman needs both father and mother for the perfect development of its sensitive and emotional nature, then this need will be taken full account of by God, in the second birth, by which the child is born to the supernatural life. As in its natural life the child looks to both a father and mother, so too, in the mysterious life of grace, will it find itself enveloped not only in a Father's providence but in a mother's love as well. God draws us to Him, by the

“cords of Adam.” To supernaturalize us, He plays on all the legitimate affections of the human heart. By His Divine Law, He has bidden men to be children. The supernatural life will follow closely the analogy of the natural life, transfiguring it. It is impossible to have the spirit and instincts and dispositions of a child unless one is conscious of being enfolded in a mother’s care and love. Hence God provides us with a Mother in our supernatural existence. Mary is that Mother.

This term “mother” can be used in a variety of figurative senses.<sup>1</sup> It is a title of courtesy given to those who hold a position of authority in religious houses of women. It is often a form of respectful address offered to women distinguished by their mature prudence and wide influence. In Scripture it is applied to the valiant Deborah after the triumph over Sisara related in the fourth chapter of the book of Judges. She is hailed as “Mother in Israel,” because through her virtue and valor her people were delivered from danger. But it is in no metaphorical sense that Mary is styled “Mother” by the instinct of the whole Christian people. That woman is mother, in the rightful sense of the term, who co-operates with God in being the source of life. When the title Mother is applied to the Blessed Virgin Mary, it is in this sense that it must be taken. For she, in the mystical <sup>2</sup> order, is under God, for men the source

<sup>1</sup> Cf. J. B. Terrien, S. J., *La Mère des Hommes*, Vol. I, Bk. I, c. 1. This work has been extensively used in the following pages.

<sup>2</sup> Note that the word Mystical is not opposed to real, but to natural. There is a mystical reality and natural reality. The former is more real than the latter.

of their supernatural life. In the supernatural order, Mary is Mother of men, for it is she that brings them to birth in that order of things.

The analogy with the natural life preserved in the supernatural order, is termed the analogy of proportion. It is much more than a mere similarity or parallelism. It consists in this that the specific relation which exists between two terms in one order of reality should find itself verified in a different and higher order of reality. The Blessed Eucharist furnishes an outstanding example of this analogy. This Sacrament exists under the appearance of bread and wine, the ordinary materials for human food and drink. Just as, in the natural order, bread and wine, maintain, nourish, and strengthen the life of the body, so the Blessed Sacrament operates as regards the life of the soul. It does for the mystical life what food does for the physical life of man. The New Testament supplies numberless other instances of this form of analogy. Jesus speaks of Himself as the "door" and the "Good Shepherd." The application of these analogies is easy. As the door admits to the sheepfold, so Jesus admits to the pastures of the Kingdom of Heaven. As the shepherd, in his providence, care and tenderness, is to his flock, so is Jesus to His followers.

As the Divine Master's instructions to His followers were drawing to an end, and He had, step by step, and by the employment of analogy after analogy, prepared their minds for a complete understanding of the mysterious union that reigned between Him and them and with all mankind, he definitely

unveiled the character of that union by a figure which is clearly stamped with a certain finality. On the night of the Last Supper, He said to those who were seated about Him, and who were representative of all that were ultimately to adhere to Him, "I am the Vine, you the branches."<sup>3</sup> The contact between the shepherd and his sheep, the door and those who enter it, is external and non-vital. The contact between the vine and its branches is a living one. The stock and what springs from it have a common life. As the branch is to the parent trunk so is the Christian to Christ. Important consequences follow from this. It is from the mysterious vital principle in the seedling that springs the lofty tree: consequently it is from it too that the branches draw their life. Mary is the seedling from which grew the Vine: hence too she is the seed whence issue the branches that adhere to and adorn the Vine. Undoubtedly the divine grace by reason of which Mary was chosen to give birth to the Vine was not her own: it was God's gift. It is, therefore, ultimately, to God that the branches owe the life that is in them. But after God it is from Mary that Christians derive their life; for the divine life that is theirs comes from the living stock that sprang from her Immaculate body. It is, for this reason that from the earliest years of the Church she has been called the "Mother of the Living." Saint Epiphanius writing in the fourth century says: "Externally it would appear as though it were from Eve that issued the human race, but in reality it is by *Mary* that *Life Itself* has been introduced into the

<sup>3</sup> St. John XV, 5.

world. Having borne in her womb the living "par excellence," she is become Mother of the Living. Therefore it is that the title of Mother belongs to her of right." <sup>4</sup>

Mary in giving birth to the Saviour Jesus gives birth to Christians. This is the logical consequence of the mode which the redemption followed. Salvation was not won through Christ's coming on earth and teaching men the ways of holiness. Men were not saved by each receiving a supernatural life which should be peculiar to himself. All were made just by the justice of Christ. Men form one supernatural body, having through all its parts the same supernatural life, derived from the Humanity of Christ. This is the analogy that Saint Paul builds up on the analogy of the Vine and the Branches, bequeathed to Him by his Divine Master. As the Vine and the Branches represent for Christ, reconstituted humanity, so the Head and Members forming one Mystical Body, express for Saint Paul the "New Creation" that had its origin on Calvary. The Apostle's most complete expression of this truth is found in the fourth chapter of the Epistle to the Ephesians. His words can be paraphrased thus: "It is He, Christ, who has established all the divine, hierarchical, organically united functions, in the Church. He has thus made some to be apostles, others prophets, others evangelists, others doctors and so on. Diversity of functions demands diversity in the organism. This organized diversity He formed in view of building up the Living Mystical Body. He makes all to function in their

<sup>4</sup> St. Epiphanius, *Adv. Haer.* 78, No. 18, quoted by Terrien.

different ways in order that the "Body" may reach the fullness and perfection of its life. The expansion is complete when it attains the measure of the stature of Christ. Through the functioning of these diverse organs, each in its own sphere, (like the eye, the hand, and the foot in the natural frame) the whole Christian body waxes strong, receiving its vitality all the time from its Head, Christ. For it is from the Head that the whole body, co-ordinated and reduced to organic unity by the vital bonds which keep the members together and through which these members lend one another mutual support, (each operating according to the nature and scope of its own distinct activity) increases in stature and grows perfect in Charity." <sup>5</sup> It was in order to be the Vital Head of that Mystical Body that Christ came into the world. For it was thus that mankind was to be restored to the divine favor. It was in order to fulfil this destiny that His Sacred Humanity was formed of the pure flesh and blood of the Virgin Mary.

There are two aspects to be considered in the origin of Jesus from Mary. She gave birth to the Son of God: but she in doing so, gave birth to the Son of God whose name means Saviour. The Angel Gabriel said to her: "Behold thou shalt conceive in thy womb and shalt bring forth a Son and shalt call his name Jesus. He shall be great and shall be called the Son of the Most High." <sup>6</sup> The name of a person

■ Eph. IV, 11, 16. The paraphrase is based on the French version. Cf. Crampon.

<sup>6</sup> St. Luke I, 31, 32.

in scripture when divinely bestowed, signifies the nature, the essence, or the function of that person. In this case, the Son of the Most High, born of Mary is named Saviour. The word expresses what He is to be, His function, His *raison d'être*, in a certain sense. Mary did not give birth to a person who was subsequently to undertake the work of redemption. She gave birth to a Redeemer. As a consequence, Jesus has a two-fold relation to her. As being physically formed of her flesh and blood, He is to her as any child is to its mother. She is the parent of that man whose countenance his fellows could gaze upon, whose accents they could hear, whose hands they could touch. But He issued from her not only as the individual Christ, but also as the Saviour, who, as such, was destined to be the Head of the Mystical Body. Her fiat was given to the conception of the Son of God, under both aspects. Supposing the Fall had not taken place, and that nevertheless, God was to become man and to be born of Mary, in that case she would be Mother of God, but not of God a Redeemer. For there would have been no redemption to be accomplished. It is, however, the common teaching of theologians, (though some dissent) that God would not have become man had not mankind needed redemption. And because it was decreed that Christ should redeem mankind by forming of it a Mystical Body united to Himself it may be said with some justice, that the maternity of Mary with regard to the Mystical, has a certain causal influence on her maternity with regard to the individual natural, body of Christ. Therefore Mary in assenting to the



operation of the Holy Ghost, assented not only to being Mother of God but to being Mother of God, the Saviour.

What is more she consented to being intimately bound up with the scheme of salvation and to taking her place by the side of her child in the great conflict which was to break the power of Satan. Her fiat implied the acceptance of the formation, through her, not only of the individual Christ according to His human nature, but also of the Mystical Christ. And as she was to co-operate with the Holy Ghost in giving birth to Christ the Head, so too was she destined to co-operate with the Holy Ghost in bringing forth the Members, that is, the whole Christian body. Blessed Grignon de Monfort writes: "As, in the natural order, the same mother cannot give birth to the head without the members nor the members without the head, so in the order of grace, the Head and the members issue from the same Mother."<sup>7</sup> The holy Pope, Pius X., in his encyclical, "Ad diem illum" develops the same theme in a clear and excellent manner. His words are: "Is not Mary, Mother of God? She is, in consequence, our Mother, for it is to be laid down as a principle that Jesus, being the Word made flesh, is, at the same time, Saviour of the Human race. But as God made man He has a body like other men. As Redeemer of our race, He has a spiritual body, or as it is generally named, a mystical body, which is nothing else than the whole Christian corporation united to Him by faith.

<sup>7</sup> *True devotion to the Blessed Virgin*, Chap. I.



‘Though many we form one body in Jesus Christ.’<sup>8</sup> Now the Blessed Virgin has conceived the Son of God not only that He should become man, but that through the nature received from her, he might become the Saviour of men. Hence in the chaste womb of the Virgin Mary, when Jesus took human form, He has also taken to Himself a spiritual body formed of all those who were to believe in Him: so that it can be said that Mary, bearing Jesus in her womb, bore also those whose life is contained in the life of the Saviour. This is the reason why we are all called in a spiritual and mystical sense the children of Mary, and that she is, on her side, the Mother of us all—Mother according to the spirit, but nevertheless real Mother of the Members of Jesus Christ, which we are.”<sup>9</sup>

Mary is the Mother of regenerated mankind because she freely co-operated with the Holy Ghost in bringing about the rebirth of Humanity. She was not a passive or involuntary instrument in the work, through which men are born anew. That work is nothing else than the Incarnation by which He, who is Life Itself and in whom all that have supernatural life live, was given to the world. The formation of the Sacred Humanity in Mary, and the mystical formation of the living members of that Sacred Humanity, are the work of the Holy Spirit. To this work Mary gave her free co-operation. She played an intimate part in it.<sup>10</sup>

<sup>8</sup> Rom. XII, 5.

<sup>9</sup> Ad Diem Illum.

<sup>10</sup> The following passage from the writings of Albert the Great illustrate this truth. “It has been,” writes the great theologian,

The Fathers of the Church and other ecclesiastical writers following in their train never weary of pointing out the contrast between her who was called the Mother of the living, and her who was, really, the Mother of the living, that is between Eve and Mary. By the willful act of the one, mankind was still-born, supernaturally. Through her disobedience and the confidence she placed in the lying words of the false angel, Eve became a source of death for all men. On the other hand, Mary, by her humble docility to God and the faith she put in the message of the holy Archangel, became, through the fruit of her womb, a source of life for mankind. Her obedience was expressed in the simple but eloquent words. "Behold the handmaid of the Lord." Her marvellous faith is borne witness to by the Holy Spirit Himself, speaking through the lips of the Virgin's cousin, Elizabeth. "Blessed art thou that hast believed, because those things shall be accomplished that were spoken to thee by the Lord." <sup>11</sup>

Well might Elizabeth extol the faith of Mary and

"the will of God that Mary should have her share in the recreation of our nature, and that too according to the four kinds of causality. She has been, after God, with God, and under God, the *efficient cause* of our regeneration, because she has given flesh to our regenerator, and because, by her virtues, she has merited, congruously, this incomparable honour. She has been the *material cause* because acting, on her consent, the Holy Ghost took of her most pure flesh and blood, to form the body immolated for the salvation of the world. She has been the *final cause*, because this great work, directed principally to the glory of God, contributes, in a secondary manner, to the glory of the Virgin. She is the *formal cause*, for by the light of her life, of so divine a form, she is for all an example which shows the way to emerge from darkness, and the direction we are to take to arrive at the Beatific Vision." Quoted by J. Terrien, S. J., *op. cit.*, Vol. 1, p. 107.

<sup>11</sup> St. Luke I, 45.

be filled with enthusiasm at the vision of what this maiden of Nazareth had done for the whole race of men. Elizabeth, under the inspiration of the Holy Ghost, divined that the supernatural life that was beginning to circulate in the veins of mankind, long since sunk in a mortal torpor, could be traced, under God, to the woman who honored her house with her gracious presence. She felt the infant stir in her womb under the onrush of the divine life that invaded his soul like a flood, and that had been released at the sound of the Virgin's voice. The sanctification of John the Baptist was the attestation of the spiritual maternity of men that was henceforth to be Mary's prerogative. It is clear that it is only God that can breathe life into the dead bones of humanity. But it is by Mary's freely acquired virtues and by her free consent to the Incarnation that the Vivifying Principle was brought in contact with the dead members of humanity.

It is scarcely necessary to state that Mary could not merit the Incarnation, using merit in the proper sense of the term.<sup>12</sup> The Incarnation being the very fountain-head of all merit, could not itself be an object of merit.<sup>13</sup> It is from it that is derived Mary's grace of the Immaculate Conception, the beginning, in her, of the whole series of graces with which she was adorned. Moreover, the dignity of Mother of God being a dignity that touches on the confines of the infinite, could not be within the power of any crea-

<sup>12</sup> Merit in the proper sense of the term is what the theologians call, "de condigno." It signifies a proportion of equality between a good act and the recompense assigned to it.

<sup>13</sup> St. Th. III; Sent. D. IV, Q. 3, a. 1.

ture to merit. But there is another type of merit which the theologians call, "de congruo." This implies that a certain privilege, incapable of being merited, is nevertheless bestowed with a certain suitability on one person rather than another because of the eminent qualities and exceptional deserts of the person thus singled out. Mary was singled out from all women as being the one most fitted to be called to the Divine Maternity. God could not, with any degree of propriety, take flesh of any creature but one dazlingly pure and adorned with the most eminent virtues. Mary fulfilled this requirement. Hence God's choice of her. No other could congruently be chosen for the lofty dignity to which she was called. Starting at an elevation of grace, to which no created person ever attained, she, by her devoted fulfillment of the will of God and her perfect correspondence to the promptings of the Holy Spirit, accumulated merit on merit, until at the time of the Archangel's visit, she had reached a height of sanctity, of which it is impossible for us to form an idea. And this accumulation of grace and this growth in all the virtues, she merited in the strict sense of the term. It was then, the initial grace being presupposed, due to her own free acts and freely acquired virtues that Mary merited that supereminent, supernatural comeliness that won for her the favor of the Most High, and made her to be that person amongst the daughters of men to whom, alone, God's proposal to be her Son could be fittingly made. "Fear not, Mary," said the Angel to her, "for thou hast found

grace (that is favor) with God.”<sup>14</sup> And this spiritual beauty which so won the regard of God was the fruit of the Virgin’s own life.<sup>15</sup>

But Mary exercised an influence on the Work of the Redemption more directly still than by meriting to be the elect amongst women for the prerogative of the Divine Maternity. It has been already pointed out that she was not merely a passive channel through which God made His entry into the world. God had too much regard for her to assign to her but this impersonal part in the Incarnation. He allowed the great mystery of His taking flesh to depend on her free choice. He formally demanded her consent to it. “The Almighty had from all eternity determined to give Jesus Christ to the world by Mary. But having called her to this glorious ministerial function, He did not wish that she should be a mere channel by which grace was to come to men. He willed that she should be a voluntary instrument in this great work, contributing to it not only by the excellence of her disposition but also by a movement of the will.”<sup>16</sup> God, knowing what was involved in His proposal to her, would not, unless she was perfectly willing, make her a party to the Incarnation. This would not have been so necessary

<sup>14</sup> St. Luke I, 30.

<sup>15</sup> In the liturgy of the Greek Church, we read: “Behold O Word of God, your throne is adorned. . . . And the Christ won by your beauty, more than flawless, has made his chosen dwelling in your virginal womb, in order to free the human race from the yoke of its passions, and to restore to it the gift of its original beauty.” (Men. for the 10th Feb., quoted by J. B. Terrien, S. J., *op. cit.*, Vol. 1, p. 117.)

<sup>16</sup> Bossuet, “Sermon on the Blessed Virgin Mary,” *Sermons*, Vol. V, p. 603.

were Mary simply called upon to give of her flesh and blood for the formation of the Sacred Humanity, and then to remain a simple spectator of the drama of Calvary and a happy recipient of its blessed fruits. But she was destined to be not a mere spectator but a real actor in that terrible drama. She was invited to enter with the Son born of her into the dread struggle with the forces of sin, which was to issue in the regeneration of mankind. Being asked to become the Mother of the Saviour she was asked to share in the task of salvation. Jesus was not to be alone in the decisive combat with sin. This is the reason why the Almighty treated her with such deference, with such a divine respect for her liberty and did not move until she gave her consent. The destiny of mankind hung on that consent of hers.<sup>17</sup> God knew what her decision would be, but that did not make the Virgin's choice any less free and deliberate. The Gospel narrative reveals the fateful pause between the Angel's proposal and the Virgin's murmured "fiat." Well might she have hesitated. A Son was offered to her, whose destiny was that he should be torn from her. In that tearing, her heart was to be riven with

<sup>17</sup> Cf. Bossuet. It is not enough for our Heavenly Father to form in the bosom of the Virgin Mary the precious treasure which He gives to us; He wishes that she should *co-operate* in the inestimable gift that He bestows on us. For, just as Eve brought about our ruin by an act of her will, so it was seemly that the Blessed Virgin Mary should contribute in a similar manner to our salvation. That is the reason why God sends a heavenly envoy to her. And the Incarnation of His Son, this great work of His power—the incomprehensible mystery which, for so many centuries, held heaven and earth in anxious expectancy, is brought to pass only after the consent of Mary, so needful was it for the world that Mary should desire its salvation. "Sermon on the Annunciation," *Sermons*, Vol. II, p. 10. Ed. Lebarq.

grief. This prevision of hers was only too fully borne out by Simeon's prophecy, the prophecy that some months later was to chill her soul with dread. "Behold this child is set for the fall and the resurrection of many in Israel, and for a sign that shall be contradicted. And thy own soul a sword shall pierce."<sup>18</sup> All this, in broad outline, she envisaged before even she heard this terrible prophecy. She knew her scriptures well, and through them was sufficiently, though not in all details, instructed in the divine plan of the Redemption. She was not for a moment misled as were her countrymen by the gorgeous visions in which the reign of the Messiah was presented to the great prophets. She knew well that certain of the psalms, and especially the fifty-third chapter of Isaias more closely foreshadowed the reality that was to be. She never overlooked the suffering rôle of the servant of Jahveh as depicted by the prophet. As she pondered the words of the Angel her mind reverted to the earliest prophecy of all, that which is styled the "Proto-evangelium" or primitive Gospel. "I will put enmities between *thee* and the *woman*, and thy *seed* and her *seed*: she shall crush thy head, and thou shalt lie in wait for her heel."<sup>19</sup> She grasped the significance of these words. It was not the "seed" alone that was to trample down Satan and regenerate mankind. It was she and her seed. The two were to be indissolubly linked in that combat, the woman in union with, and dependently on, her

<sup>18</sup> St. Luke II, 34.

<sup>19</sup> Gen. III, 15.



child.”<sup>20</sup> The travail out of which humanity was to be reborn was to be hers as well as His.

God’s proffered gifts are terrible in what they demand of human nature. The privilege extended to Mary demanded of her in the way of trial, what no human mind can conceive. It exacted her *com-pas-sion*. Her child was born a victim for sacrifice. His destiny was to be a victim. In consenting to the Incarnation, she consented to that victimhood. There was not to be for her a single day in which she could give herself up unrestrainedly, to the gladness of having Him, without having the gladness clouded by the shadow of the impending doom. She realized the love she would bear to her child and in consequence, something of the agony that parting from Him would cause. Knowing all this, or at least suspecting it, she well might hesitate whilst the fate of mankind hung in the balance. Everything depended on her word. It was not a word she could

<sup>20</sup> It is not without its significance that there is no certainty as to the exact reading in the text of Genesis III, 15. According to the Vulgate it is “she” the woman that was to crush the Serpent’s head. According to the Hebrew text it is “her seed” that should stamp out the power of Satan. This uncertainty in the reading indicates the closeness of the union of the woman and her child in the work of Redemption. It is also to be noted that the seed of the serpent may be understood as a collective term meaning all those who are born in sin, all those who stain themselves with personal sin, and especially all those who do the work of Satan on earth corrupting and destroying souls. By a certain parallelism of ideas we can understand the “seed of the woman” as applicable to another collectivity,—Christ and His mystic members; to the former, in the primary and literal sense, to the latter in a legitimate, consequent sense. The text therefore insinuates Mary’s dual Maternity; her Maternity according to nature and her maternity according to grace, Her seed in the primary sense being the Physical Christ, and in the secondary sense, the Mystical Christ. Cf. Terrien, S. J., *La Mère des Hommes*, Vol. 1, Bk. 1, Chap. 2.



easily utter. The utterance of it would involve dreadful consequences for herself.

“Consider,” writes Nicolas,<sup>21</sup> “not only the expectancy of the angel, but the expectancy of the world dating back for some thousands of years: consider its ever increasing disorders more compelling still than its expectancy. Consider the divine promises, the longings of the patriarchs, the predictions of the prophets, the sighs of the just, the groans of the whole race. Recall those great titles under which the Son of God is incessantly called upon and heralded in the sacred writings, as the “Desired of nations,” the “Prince of the world to come,” the Angel of the New Covenant, “the Prince of Justice,” the Redeemer and the Saviour. Recall those cries of holy impatience. ‘O that the heavens would open and that thou wouldst come down! Drop down dew, ye heavens and let the clouds rain the just one, let the earth open and bud forth a Saviour.’ Consider furthermore that all these figures, all these preparations, the gradual evolution of the forms of religious worship, all these successions of empires, all this movement from the beginning of things, all arranged and directed in view of the coming amongst men of the Eternal Word, and of His union with His own work. Consider, on the other hand, all future centuries that were to issue from and to be dated from that time onwards. That is not all. Passing beyond all temporal interests, consider those of eternity, the joy of the angels, the overthrow of the demons, the

<sup>21</sup> “The Virgin Mary in the Gospels,” c. 8. Quoted by Terrien, S. J., *op. cit.*, Vol. I, pp. 143-144.

deliverance of the just, the conversion of sinners, the salvation of the elect, the honor of creation, the glory of God, the consummation of all things in divine unity, the destinies of heaven and earth, the Plan Divine—consider, I repeat, that all that converges towards, and is suspended on, Mary, on her humility, on her virginity, on her faith. All that is, as it were, held up by her “fiat.” The whole creation, in a sense, breathed one vast sigh of relief and gladness as Mary murmured her acceptance of the divine proposal, consenting to become Mother of God, and in that Mother of men. For it was not only her love of God and her consequent wish to further His designs of mercy in regard to the world that determined her decision. Her great love for men and for their happiness cast its weight into the balance and swayed her judgment in favor of the plan of redemption proposed to her, in spite of its cost to herself. The whole human race owes the heroic virgin an unpayable debt of gratitude.<sup>22</sup> “It was, indeed, of urgent necessity for the world that Mary should desire its salvation.”<sup>23</sup>

“The fiat of the Virgin of Nazareth brings to an

<sup>22</sup> Cf. the following from Bossuet. The Eternal Father sends an angel to propose to her this great mystery which shall not be consummated as long as Mary remains hesitant. Hence the work of the Incarnation which for so many centuries had kept all nature in a state of expectancy, still remained, even when God has resolved to bring it to pass, in a condition of suspense, until the Virgin has given her consent. That consent given, the heavens are opened, the Son of God becomes man, and the world has a Saviour. The charity of Mary has then been the fertile source, from which grace has taken its rise and poured itself out with great abundance on all mankind. “Sermon on the B.V.M.,” *Sermons*, Vol. IV, p. 603.

<sup>23</sup> *Ibid.*

end the old era, and ushers in the new. It is the accomplishment of all the prophecies, the pivotal point of time, the first glimmering of the morning star, announcing the rising of the Sun of Justice. As far as could be effected by a purely human will, it forged anew that admirable and mysterious bond which reunited earth and heaven, humanity and God.”<sup>24</sup> Her “fiat” issued from her in a dual maternity, a maternity of nature, in which She conceived the Incarnate God and a spiritual maternity according to which She conceived humanity itself.

<sup>24</sup> Hettinger, *Apologie du Christianisme*, Vol. III, quoted by Terrien, S. J.

## CHAPTER XV

# THE MOTHER OF THE REDEEMED

*"When Jesus therefore, had seen his mother and the disciple standing, whom he loved, he saith to his mother: Woman behold thy son. After that he saith to the disciple: Behold thy mother."—St. John XIX, 26, 27.*

WHEN, at Nazareth, Mary had murmured, in answer to the proposal brought to her from God by the Archangel Gabriel, "Behold the handmaid of the Lord, be it done unto me according to thy word,"<sup>1</sup> she had a prevision of the destiny to which she was committing herself. But, thirty years had to elapse before all the issues involved in that "fiat," became actual for her. Man was saved, only in principle, by the Incarnation. It was on Calvary that he was saved in fact. God had decreed that Mankind was to be restored to the supernatural life by the consummation of Christ's sacrifice on the Cross. It was ordained that the living race should issue from the opened side of Christ in His sleep of death. It was Calvary that definitely witnessed the rebirth of humanity. The whole life of Christ, in its doings and sufferings, was but a prelude to, and a preparation for, the supreme hour of the First Good Friday. Hence too it was at Golgotha, at the foot of the Cross, that Mary's Motherhood of men attained to its final consumma-

<sup>1</sup> St. Luke I, 38.

tion and perfection. She was led there that it might be so. In spite of her natural shrinking from witnessing the indescribable tortures inflicted on her divine child, the sight was not spared her. As the first woman had co-operated with the first head of the race in bringing about the death of humanity, so the new Eve, spoken of at the very dawn of history, should co-operate with the New Head of the race in giving life to Mankind.

Being impelled by the urging of the Holy Spirit to Calvary, it was decreed that she should not assist as a mere broken hearted and sympathetic onlooker. Neither was it granted her to indulge, free and unrestrained, her mother's grief. It was demanded of her that she should, herself, take an intimate part in the Sacrifice that was being offered on the altar of the Cross. That act of will which had existed in disposition from the day of the angel's visit at Nazareth, had to be definitely formulated. It now became incumbent on her actually, and no longer merely habitually, to "will" the life of mankind and hence to will its cause—namely, the sacrificial death of her child. As Jesus looked down from the Cross He beheld in His Mother's soul the enactment of an agony that recalled to Him vividly that which some hours before He Himself had undergone in the Garden of Gethsemane. As she gazed upon Jesus fixed on the Cross, Mary underwent a veritable passion. A most suitable word has been framed to express what this was: it is called her com-passion. The dreadful agony she experienced—and no human being ever did or could endure the like—was due, not to sufferings in-

flicted on herself, but to the sufferings that were accumulated on Jesus, her divine child. Every wound to His body and to His soul pierced her through with pain. She suffered all His sufferings in herself. Not only did she vividly realize the pain that tortured His body, she, with deep supernatural insight, fathomed to a vast extent, the awful interior sufferings in which His soul was steeped. Her sanctity gave her depth of understanding and her mother's love sharpened still further her vision.

The love of Christ which assuaged the tortures of the Martyrs was for Mary the instrument which drove the agony more deeply into her soul. Every fiber of motherhood in her clamored to be allowed to bring relief to the cruel sufferings she contemplated. Her will, following the will's natural horror of the evil that assailed her in the sufferings of her beloved, strove against the passion. On the other hand, the will in her, as submitted to the merciful decree of God, drove her to accept and to assent to the passion. Her soul was torn with agony. The prophecy of Simeon was fulfilled: "thy own soul a sword shall pierce." The pain of her soul found utterance in a prayer that paralleled that which fell from the lips of Jesus in the Garden. "Father if it be possible let this Chalice pass from me, yet, not my will but thine be done." The agony on Calvary reproduced in its details the agony in Gethsemane. As then, so now, the chalice should not pass. Mary could not have the sad consolation of yielding to a grief which could legitimately wrestle against the woe causing the grief; it was not permitted to her to desire that the Passion

should not be or that it should not pursue its course. She, as the Woman, who was predestinated to be united with her seed in the crushing of the serpent's head and the undoing of death, had to will the Passion and the death of Jesus. As God "delivered up His Son" for the salvation of men, so Mary too had to "deliver up her Son" to death, for the same object. Her official rôle did not permit of her refusing the Passion of Jesus. She had to pronounce another "fiat" the echo and full realization of the first. And in the second "fiat" her soul was rent with agony. The agony was the dolorous travail in which she gave birth to mankind. The fruit of her natural conception was given to the world painlessly: the fruit of her mystical conception was produced in indescribable anguish. Because of this subordinate co-operation with Jesus in presenting to God a humanity living with supernatural life, she is styled Coredemp-tress of the human race.<sup>2</sup> It is not as if the merits of her com-*passion* paid the price of the graces that flow from the Cross of Jesus. All her own graces have their origin in the sacrificial death of her Son. The title of Coredemp-tress is given her because of the intimate and personal way in which she has been associated with the immolation of Calvary, first, by providing the Victim through her consent to the Incarnation,

<sup>2</sup> Cf. the following passage from the Encyclical of Leo XIII, *Quamquam pluries*, Aug., 1889. The most Holy Virgin, Mother of Jesus Christ, is also Mother of Christians: for she has given birth to them on Mount Calvary amidst the extreme sufferings of her Son, our Redeemer. Jesus, then, is as it were the first-born of Christians who by the adoption and redemption are become His brethren.

and then, by offering that Victim in union with God the Father for the salvation of men.

It was by that "fiat" murmured at the foot of the Cross that Mary's spiritual maternity of men reached its consummation. It was, then, most fitting that this should be the moment chosen for the solemn promulgation to all mankind of this mystery,—a mystery of such vast import for them. The dying Saviour takes upon Himself to make the solemn declaration and seizes this dramatic instant for doing so. "When Jesus therefore had seen his Mother and his disciple standing, whom he loved, he saith to his mother: *Woman behold thy son.* After that he saith to the disciple *Behold thy mother.*"<sup>3</sup> The employment of this term, "woman," is weighty with significance. It spans all time and links that instant on Calvary with that fateful moment following hard on the Fall when God said to Satan "I shall put enmities between thee and the *woman.*"

It would take utterly from the grandeur and solemnity of the scene on Calvary to see in these words of the dying Saviour a mere anxiety to provide a support and a refuge for His Mother when He should have quitted the earth.<sup>4</sup> Nothing of a merely transient, local, narrow, or merely individual, significance could intrude itself exclusively on the great act of Sacrifice, which was being offered to the Almighty on behalf of the whole human race. That sacrifice was the supreme act of worship offered by mankind to

<sup>3</sup> St. John XIX, 27-28.

<sup>4</sup> It is needless to remark that this provision of a support is contained and included in the wider signification of the words of Jesus.



its God. Its results were as wide as time and eternity. On it turned the everlasting destinies of mankind. Every action, every word, every gesture, must, necessarily, form an intrinsic element in the sacred ceremonial of that great sacrificial act and have a bearing on its constitution or on its effects. Everything should necessarily be of a universal import. The whole mind of the Saviour was concentrated on His great Sacrifice, on its accomplishment with perfect fidelity to detail, and on its great issues. It would be almost sacrilegious to suppose any thought, that had not relation to God and to the whole human race, intruding itself on the mind of the Great High Priest at the solemn moment of the Supreme Sacrifice. Such a thought would be something of an unworthy distraction. The reality signified by the words of Jesus must necessarily be intimately bound up with, and be an element in, the whole reality of the Great Sacrifice.<sup>5</sup>

In actual fact these words of the dying Redeemer expressed an immediate and essential effect of the Cross; and words more apt could not have been selected to state that effect. They announced the establishment, in its final and perfect state, of a relation of motherhood between Mary and mankind as represented by John and of the correlative filial relationship between Mankind and Mary.<sup>6</sup> Jesus pro-

<sup>5</sup> Cf. Terrien, S. J., *op. cit.*, Vol. 1, p. 283.

■ Leo XIII writes: The immense charity of Christ towards us is revealed in this that he wished at his death to leave his Mother to Saint John, his disciple, by these ever memorable testamentary words: Behold thy son. Now in the person of John, following the perpetual tradition of the Church, Christ designated the whole

claims what already had existed in principle but what had only then attained its full perfection—and he proclaims it at that moment, because the completion or perfection of motherhood on the part of Mary was one of the essential consequences of the passion. This great mystery of the spiritual maternity of Mary called for a solemn promulgation. The solemn promulgation took place when Jesus said: “Woman behold thy son,” for it was then only that the Blessed Virgin became completely Mother of men. Up to that moment she was such only in an incomplete manner just as her Son, until the consummation of the passion was but incompletely Saviour of men.<sup>7</sup>

The words of the dying Man-God not only announced a fact, they had as well an effect bearing upon that same fact. The words of man are inefficacious and limited to signifying what is: the words of God are effective and can produce what they signify. In the present case, the words of Jesus did not constitute Mary, Mother of Mankind, for she was that already in virtue of the Incarnation and her part in the Passion, but they had a singular power in creating in her heart sentiments of the tenderest maternal affection towards those who were given her as her children in the person of St. John. At the words of her Divine Son, a great wave of tender love for redeemed Mankind welled up in her heart. In like manner there was created in the heart of St. John, (as was to be the case, in after times, for all who should human race, and in a special manner those who are united to Him by the faith.

<sup>7</sup> Terrien, S. J., *op. cit.*, Vol. 1, p. 299.

resemble him in his love for the Divine Master) a deep sentiment of filial affection towards his mystical mother.

Mary is the source of our supernatural life, that is, has brought us to birth spiritually, not only in this, that she has given to the world, Jesus, who is the Source of all supernatural life, but also because she has actively co-operated in the drama of redemption by which we are born anew. She did this by meriting, through the graces and virtues which she freely acquired, being chosen to be the Mother of the Saviour of mankind; by freely consenting to the Incarnation; by preparing of her own flesh and blood the victim of the Great Redeeming Sacrifice; and finally by voluntarily, in union with God, surrendering to death that victim who was her own Son, for the Salvation of mankind. But her maternal rôle with regard to us did not end on Calvary. Not only has she been for us the channel of all graces, she also presides at the distribution of these graces that have been won for us. She not only gives us life; she also maintains it.

A mother's function with regard to her child does not cease when she has brought it forth. It devolves on her to protect, and to nourish, as well as to provide for, the growth and development of the life she has communicated to her infant. The same law holds in the supernatural realm. Mary having brought us into being, mystically, is charged with the task of securing the nourishment and the progress of the life of grace in the souls of men. All graces have as their object to impart to man a resemblance to Christ.

Mary's work is to preside over, and contribute, to the forming of the lineaments of Jesus in every individual soul. All the needs of the life of the "new creature" have to be supplied by her as every child's needs in the natural order are normally seen to by its mother. By the graces that flow from the merits of Christ the supernatural life in the souls of men is generated, developed, and brought, to its consummation. Hence it is that there is committed to Mary the distribution of all graces which have their source in the person of Christ. "God," writes Bossuet, "having once for all decreed to give us Jesus Christ by the hands of the Virgin Mary, the order of things thus established, the gifts of God being without repentance, suffers no change. It shall remain ever true, that, having received through her the universal principle of grace, we continue to receive through her as intermediary, all the diverse applications of grace in all the various states of the Christian life." <sup>8</sup>

This rôle of the Blessed Virgin Mary in the distribution of graces in accordance with the needs of the members of the Mystical Body must not be understood in a material sense. Graces are not entities which can be, as it were taken from a store and handed out to the needy, much as food is given to the distressed. The transmission of grace by Mary must be taken in a purely spiritual and mystical sense. God alone infuses into the soul divine life and all *that prepares for it*. But He has ordained that His Mother should take a voluntary and *determining* part in the effect to be produced, so that in subor-

<sup>8</sup> Bossuet, "Sermon on the B.V.M.," Vol. 5, p. 604, Lebarq.

dination to, and in dependence on, God, she exercises on her children a veritable transforming and vitalizing effect. The divine life, in itself, and in all its effects, dwells in its plenitude in her divine Son. Overflowing from that plenitude it reaches Christ's members only by passing through Her, because of the close and intimate contact existing between Christ and his Mother. In that passage, just as a thing takes a certain tonality from the medium which it traverses, (and in this case the medium is exercising a voluntary and co-operative influence), grace takes a certain modality from Mary. The effect attained in the member of Christ bears the impress of Mary's supernatural character. She is a living bond between Christ and men—not a mere inanimate or involuntary channel through which flows the stream of graces which issues from Christ's passion. Hence it is that, in a bold figure, she is frequently called by the ecclesiastical writers, the *neck* of the Mystical Body.

If her mediation in procuring the various dispensations of actual and habitual grace were restricted to mere impetration, this simile would be a meaningless one. The image necessarily implies on the part of Mary active and personal influence in the effect of grace produced. To all the saints is given the power to obtain supernatural and natural favors for their clients by the force of their intercession. Yet, no matter how great might become the power of that intercession, no matter what a degree of intensity should be given to it in the providential designs of God, it could never rival the energizing power of

Mary's mediation. The reason is that the influence that belongs to the mediation of the Mother of God does not differ from that of the saints in being immeasurably greater. It differs not only in degree but in kind. Of course, she acts in a subordinate position to God, but because of the singular and incommunicable relation in which she stands to Him, there is given her a certain dependent authority in the distribution of all graces. It is Mary's will that causes immediately the divine energy to converge on this or that member of the Body of Christ that happens at the moment to be the object of her motherly solicitude. She acts so that she appears to command the exercise of the divine power,—though in all her commands there is an implicit prayer.

It is difficult to find words to express this real and efficient influence that Mary exercises in the application of the fruits of the passion. A kind of efficient causality must be conceded to her, otherwise the expressions which the ecclesiastical writers use from the very earliest times, to explain the part she plays in the work not only of the regeneration of men, but of their sanctification, could be taxed with exaggeration and inaccuracy. This conclusion follows clearly from the words of the great Pontiff, Pius X in his encyclical, *Ad Diem Illum*.<sup>9</sup> He writes: "Mary is the conduit, or preferably, the neck which unites the (mystic) Body to its Head, and *by which this latter exercises on the Body its active (i.e. energizing) force and its effective nature.*" The intervention des-

<sup>9</sup> 2 Feb., 1904.

ignated is plainly not merely of a moral but of an efficient kind.<sup>10</sup>

To explain clearly the nature of this dependent but yet authoritative and efficient rôle that Mary plays in the sanctification of men presents a great deal of difficulty. The difficulty cannot be dispelled but may be much attenuated by a consideration of the analogy that the supernatural life bears to the natural. The Father, who is in heaven, has, through the Sacred Humanity of His Divine Son, won for all mankind a magnificent inheritance, which might be likened to a vast estate with a noble mansion set in its midst. God is the proprietor of this vast property: it has been acquired by the labors and sufferings of the Incarnate Word. Mary, the Mother of God, is the Mistress of the household. Men by baptism are born spiritually of God and are admitted as adopted children to be members of the family circle and co-heirs with the eldest and Only-begotten child, Jesus. This perfect family necessarily realizes the highest ideals and noblest traditions of family life.

As long as man remains on earth, he abides, as far as his supernatural existence is concerned, in the condition of childhood. "The adult man, in the mystical sense, is not of earth but of heaven."<sup>11</sup> Saint Paul writes: "He gave some (to be) apostles, and some prophets . . . for the perfecting of the saints, . . . for the edifying of the body of Christ: until we all meet into the unity of the faith . . . unto a perfect man, unto the measure of the age of

<sup>10</sup> Cf. Mura, *Le Corps Mystique du Christ*, Vol. II, pp. 140-145.

<sup>11</sup> Terrien, S. J., *op. cit.*, Vol. I, p. 62.



the fullness of Christ.”<sup>12</sup> In God’s household Jesus alone has attained His majority. His adopted brethren are but as children. In the ideal family, the care and education of the children devolve on the mother almost entirely. It is a task to which the true mother—and Mary is all that—gives herself, wholeheartedly and gladly. The Master of the House is as a rule, much busied with the management of the affairs of his vast estate. Much of his time is devoted to the transaction of business. He relinquishes the upbringing of his children to the lady of the house. She provides for all their wants. She draws upon all the resources of the estate for that purpose. She deals with these resources as if they were her own. She appears to handle them at her own will and to dispose of them according to her own judgment. But the children, whilst they turn to her in all their needs and confidently look to her to have these needs supplied, realize in the background of their childish consciousness that all that comes to them, belongs to their father and are his riches. The mother whilst she freely dispenses all things, does so in implicit dependence on the Master of the household. A demand for permission to use the master’s wealth is implicit in all her dealings even whilst these seem to proceed from the arbitrary determination of her own will. There is no necessity for expressly formulating the request, the Lord of the estate trusts her so completely. He commits to her not only the means to provide for the suitable care and upbringing of his children, he, as well, confides to her the task of form-

<sup>12</sup> Eph. 4. LL 11-13.



ing them to the noble traditions and ideals of the house. It is her task to mold them to the ancestral spirit and give them the manners and ways of the Eldest born, who is the living exemplar of the high traditions of God's home.

*The father's spirit comes to the children through the mother.* It takes her form. It reaches the little ones toned down, as it were, and impregnated with the suavity and graciousness that belongs to the woman's living presentation of an ideal. The children, whilst children, tend to assume that form of the family nobility which is realized in the gracious womanhood of their mother. From her that nobility comes with a special attractiveness and appeal and with an exceptional formative influence. Mary in molding her adopted children to her own spiritual character gives them that supernatural character and stamp which is most pleasing to her First Born: Because in her He contemplates the highest and most perfect human realization of his own perfection. In the example of the function of the lady of the house in a family of the noblest blood, the truest nobility and the greatest wealth, there can be traced an image of the work that Mary does in guarding, protecting, fostering and promoting, the growth and development of the supernatural life in those to whom she has given mystical birth.

Mary in her rôle of mother towards us fulfils all the functions that the mother in the natural order exercises in regard of her infants. She protects the supernatural life, which she has transmitted to men, against all dangers that threaten it, in much the same

way as an earthly mother anxiously strives to guard her little one from the insidious attacks of disease. Mary flings around her child all the tenderness of her great womanly heart. The words of the dying Jesus created in her unfathomable depths of motherly affection for men, her children. An incessant flow of actual graces is needed to preserve, and to make active, the supernatural life in the soul. All these graces pass through the hands of Mary. She is endowed with a deep understanding of the requirements of the spiritual life, and of the dangers that beset it. She knows the help that is required to meet the needs of each of her children. She is all eagerness to put the treasures of God at their disposal. As a mother broods over her newborn infant, so Mary broods over each new-born soul that is placed in her arms by God and committed to her trust and keeping. That little one is the fruit of her compassion, the child of her bitter pain. She it is that directs its first steps in the way of holiness and initiates it into the mysteries of the life of grace.

Incalculable is the force of the silent influence that Mary exercises over the imagination, the mind, and the heart, of every true Catholic. It is her teaching and example that show the brethren of Jesus how they are to walk in the ways of God. She is vigilant to detect the first symptoms of those tendencies that threaten to wean the soul from its Maker. She provides grace after grace, inspiration after inspiration, to check the evil. She has, as a good mother always has, inexhaustible and unwearied patience with the perversity of the wayward and the erring

amongst her children. She is ever pleading with God to obtain their pardon and forgiveness. For she is the Mother of Mercies. Her function does not lie in the administration of justice. The father of the family, in virtue of his position has, at times, to vindicate the claims of justice. Not so a Mother. The claims of justice find her unresponsive. Her whole attitude towards her children is summed up in love and tenderness—a love and tenderness which is proof against every trial to which it is submitted by rebellion, ingratitude, indifference and even forgetfulness.

She has a heart full of compassion for the trials, the sorrows and the difficulties of our life. She has a deep pity for us in our struggles to guard unimpaired the life of grace. She herself, though she never experienced the painful struggle against evil, has tasted all the bitterness of the cup of life. Her heart has been wounded in every fiber that is sensitive to pain. Having suffered as men suffer she has learned sympathy by her experience. She is ever ready to show herself helpful, consoling and comforting. It was a kind thought on the part of God to provide His children with a Mother in their supernatural life. The child, in the disasters caused by its obstinacy, willfulness and passion, instinctively has recourse to its mother rather than to its father. It fears the word of condemnation and the rod of justice and so takes shelter in the arms of mercy. It knows it will hear from its mother not words of blame, reproach and condemnation, but words of comfort, sympathy and pity. The same instinct manifests itself in the supernatural realm. Sinners find it easier to have first re-

course to God's Mother and theirs, than to God Himself. And even when all goes well and success attends the struggles of the spiritual warfare, it is helpful for the members of Christ to be accustomed to confide the story of their victories to their mother. There will be always something harsh, unlovely, and un-Christlike, about the righteousness which is not softened and refined by constant contact with the heavenly Mother of Men.

And when life's bitter struggle is drawing to its close, and death approaches to liberate the Christian, Mary will ever be there, as is to be expected of so good a mother, at the bedside of her departing child, engaged in its final combat. By her presence on Calvary at the death of Jesus, Mary has merited the grace of being potently helpful to her children, in their passage from time to eternity.<sup>13</sup> As she watched by the Cross and saw the life blood which she gave to Jesus, flowing from His many wounds, and in that flowing, sweeping away the power of Satan, so too she watches by the side of the dying Christian to bring about by the graces she secures for her child, the discomfiture of the evil one. It is certain that, to one who has had, during life, constant recourse to Mary as his mother, no harm can come at that last hour. It is a mother's duty, and she cannot be wanting in that, not to leave her child unprotected until she sees it safe in the arms of God, its Father and secure in its everlasting home. Hence the Church prays: Holy Mary, Mother of God, pray for us sinners now and at the hour of our death. Amen.

<sup>13</sup> Cf. Terrien, S. J., *op. cit.*, Vol. I, p. 235.





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