

## EDITORIAL

IT is mistaken to think of the saints as people of outstanding moral excellence. They may be, but that is not what makes them holy. Moral excellence and human holiness are very closely connected, but they are not identical—as could be inferred from our very use of words. Holiness is something which, to judge merely from language, the saints can share with holy water, holy days, holy places, holy things, and above all with God ‘who alone is holy’. But moral qualities, virtuousness, are limited to the human sphere, and cannot properly be ascribed to water, smoke, days, things, places—or to God. This is the important point; God is not moral, any more than he is immoral, because he is not human, or even angelic, and the choice between morality and immorality and the subjection to moral judgments are ‘privileges’ that are confined to men and angels. Morals imply standards, rules, limitation. Standards, rules, limitation only make sense for limited, finite beings. We can never use the word ‘ought’ of God. So when we say that God is holy we do not mean that he is pre-eminently virtuous, and when we say that he is good we do not mean that he lives as a decent deity ought.

It was the great merit of Rudolf Otto’s classic, *The Idea of the Holy*, to disentangle holiness from morality, though he rather overdid it by ignoring the inseparable connection between true *human* holiness and true *human* morality. But as far as God’s holiness is concerned, Otto’s work is most salutary in showing that ethics has nothing whatever to do with it. He describes the holy as *mysterium tremendum et fascinans*; and we fall down in worship before the God of our fathers, crying ‘Holy, holy, holy’ with the Cherubim, because our God is a great mystery, whom no man has seen at any time and who dwells in light inaccessible; and because he is fearful and terrible above all gods, and our God is a consuming fire; and because, as St John says so simply, God is love.

The essence of God’s holiness is his ‘otherness’, his ‘beyondness’, his being outside all the rules, standards, limitations, definitions, classifications, of the familiar things of our experience. So the primary meaning of being holy is being other, unfamiliar, extraordinary; the holy is something apart, cut off from the ordinary

or profane. Things of everyday, times, places, stones, animals, men, become holy to the extent that they are set apart from ordinary use, and approach to the divine source of holiness. They become holy by being made holy, that is by being consecrated or sacrificed in some religious ritual. Religion could be described, roughly, as dealing with, even manipulating, the holy. At this level morality simply does not enter in, and indeed many pagan cults have no more intrinsic connection with morality than does modern physics; it is simply a different domain of human life.

But besides this sense of otherness, or apartness (holiness=*apartheid?*), holiness also involves the idea of completeness or perfection. The holy is the whole, or the hale; holiness is connected somehow with health—according at least to the linguistic evidence. And it is here that the connection between holiness and morality is to be looked for; for moral goodness is really nothing else than human wholeness, completeness, and perfection. This link between holiness and perfection is investigated in the first article of this issue.

Christian perfection, however, that is to say Christian holiness, is more than just moral goodness. For a man, like any other created thing, is not holy unless he is made holy, taken and set apart in some way for God, unless he is somehow consecrated, or sacrificed. It is by baptism, a religious ritual, that man is first consecrated to God. The Christian becomes holy when he is baptized, and he does so because baptism incorporates him into the Holy and Just One, into Christ. Christian holiness, then, consists in me living in Christ and Christ living in me, and I grow in holiness by growing deeper and deeper into Christ, by growing up, as St Paul puts it, into the perfect man, into the fulness of the stature of Christ. The dimensions of Christian holiness are the dimensions of Christ.

Now while growing more like Christ obviously involves leading a good moral life, and always trying to lead a better one, this moral effort is certainly not at the centre of the Christian life. At the centre of it is simply union with Christ, and this is achieved by a co-ordination of the sacraments on the one hand and of faith, hope, and charity on the other. But these three virtues, it might be objected, are a matter of morality. Not so, however. They lie beyond the purview of ethics, beyond the measurement of moral standards and norms. They are significantly called, not moral but

theological virtues, bringing to full flower in man the image of God in which he was created.

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In this number we print what we hope will be the first of a series of short sketches of some of the English martyrs.

We would like to apologize to the editor of *Tertiary Annals* for omitting to mention in our last issue that the article entitled 'Sheep among Wolves' was reprinted from that periodical by his kind permission.



## HOLINESS AND PERFECTION

OSMUND LEWRY, O.P.

**I**SRAEL'S first call to holiness was full of the awe of Sinai, that dread meeting with God on the mountain:

*I am the Lord, who brought you out of the land of Egypt, that I might be your God.*

*You shall be holy, because I am holy. (Lev. xi, 45-46.)*

So far from being 'a serious call to a devout life', this shattering contact with the 'wholly other' is the very source of their life as a people. They live constantly in the memory of this encounter; they respond to its claims with a fanatical insistence on their separateness. The Red Sea divides them now from a profane world; they have been brought out of Egypt to be shattered and remoulded around this experience. God has spoken to them out of the thunders and lightnings of the holy mountain, and in that moment of history they have been set apart; still trembling in the grip of that fearful revelation Israel grows to nationhood as a chosen people. To be chosen by God is always to share in that mystery of life and destructive power which is the holiness of God himself. Although its claims are absolute, to those who consent to be moulded by it there is an opening to intimacy with God. Terrible as those demands are, they are realized in a covenanted love:

*Thou art a holy people to the Lord thy God.*

*The Lord thy God hath chosen thee to be his peculiar people of all peoples that are upon the earth.*