

tians of deifying Mary. Although there does not appear to have been a full-fledged worship of Mary as the Third Person of the Trinity, St Epiphanius mentions a heresy, 'widespread in Arabia, Thracia and Upper Scythia', that of the Collyridians, who offered sacrifices to Mary.¹¹ Some such heretical notion of the status of Mary in Christianity might have reached Muhammad. Or it might even have been a piece of malicious, heterodox propaganda disseminated by the Nestorians, as flowing logically from the official teaching of the Church, defined at the Council of Ephesus in 431 and according to which the Virgin Mary could rightly be called *Theotokos*, or Mother of God.¹² For, 'would not the Mother of God partake of his divinity?', our hypothetical heretic would argue in the manner of the Nestorians. But with this important question we cannot deal at length here, especially as the suggestion belongs to the realm of conjecture.

¹¹ Cf. *Ad. Haer.* L. 3, 79.

¹² This point suggested itself to me as the result of a discussion with Professor A. Guillaume on this question and it is consequently to him that the credit for it belongs.



SPIRITUALITY AND PERSONALITY

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IN the course of twenty centuries the simple message of Christ has developed in many directions, like the mustard-seed of the Gospel. Dogma, moral theology, canon law, administration and organization have branched out, together, into a gigantic system which gives the impression of providing all the answers the world needs to become heaven on earth.

The only answer the system does not contain is the personal answer of each soul to its Maker. That is the soul's own and exclusive preserve. It also happens to be the only answer that really matters. St Paul made that abundantly

clear in his statement on the nature of true love (1 Cor. 13). The worth of the whole system, its vitality, its measure and stature in terms of final redemption, all this depends ultimately on the individual soul's response to Christ and his Church. Tiaras, honours, demonstrations, movements, vestments or medals will not be restored at the Last Judgment to cover our personal nakedness.

This key-truth—which is one of private responsibility, not of the Protestant private judgment—has been recognized since the beginnings of Christianity: all other factors are but meant to evoke the right response from each person: truth for vision, grace for strength, power and guidance for the liberating of love. And so saints (and occasionally sinners), pastors and learned men have set about adapting the substance of the life of Christ to the individual's need for a genuine 'spiritual life'. This is the task of what is commonly called 'spirituality', a characteristic Catholic term for a characteristic Catholic need. This does not mean that the science of spirituality is the *deus ex machina* which will provide the very decisions which each individual man or woman has to make. But it tries to provide the atmosphere, or to form the mentality and habits from which this response will come forth, if it comes at all.

Spirituality, therefore, is from a severely practical point of view of immense importance. Man's response to God is not a matter of cold reason, or of isolated actions, or of a general assent to a social, though spiritual, structure. It engages the quivering marrow of the soul; it is made at precisely that inner centre of man where thoughts become his own thoughts; where feelings, leanings, delicate hesitations, entirely and exclusively personal, due to innumerable and often unfathomable sensibilities, gradually delineate the true face of a person. It is, therefore, of all the parts of the Catholic synthesis the most subject to susceptibilities, idiosyncrasies, psychological factors. In dominant groups it is the delicate shades of one or other form of spirituality which determine the complexion of the living Church in its historical phases.

This is not always appreciated. Historically the process may be somewhat like this. One or other 'response' has,

through the guidance of the Holy Ghost, the influence of contemporary history, or in some other way, risen to the level of public attention and admiration. The 'response' is scrutinized. The main lines are fixed by successive disciples. But, since man is not exclusively rational, the analysis always falls short of the reality, and in the attempt there will always be something more than an objective approach. Life pulls and stretches the original mysterious facts to adapt them to the public eye. Emotions, loyalties, sometimes a queer kind of ecclesiastical policy, habits, routine, taste, the 'spirit of the age', the need for some new fashion, a dose of religious chauvinism, and a thousand other subtle factors come into play. Not all these factors are of the pure metal as it was originally melted and purged by God. One school of spirituality corrects another. There is a difference of emphasis—and many ways of assertiveness. There is exclusiveness for the highbrow and streams of diluted propaganda for the so-called simple layfolk.

Anyone can see the danger. By over-emphasizing the system, the method, the peculiar insistence on one practice or another, gradually and unconsciously the attention shifts from the essential matter of a spiritual life to the school as such, this or that form of spirituality as such, this or that devotional practice as such. And when this process sets in, the whole psychological setting of our approach is affected. and with the best will in the world and the sincerest of examinations of conscience we are in great danger of overlooking the basic factor of all genuine spirituality which is the unique, inimitable and incommunicable personal response of the soul to God and his Church.

This response must come from *within*; it must be a response which is the true personal reaction of this or that man or woman. And it does not seem heterodox to maintain that precisely because of the uniqueness of every human person, the basic dissimilarity of each personal contribution to what we have in common in our human nature, no system, no practice, no devotion, no saint can provide the complete and adequate answer to God for any of us. We need a common source—which is Christ and the Church—and we need guidance, example and aids; but the fine edge of

the response is unique, as unique as our conscience itself. No aid can serve as a substitute, however much approved or indulged, for the burden of a uniquely personal responsibility. This can only *grow*; it cannot be bought, borrowed, stolen, or forced.

This is the very basis of that personalism which makes the Catholic Church stand out today, in a world soaked in an emotional mass-neurosis, as the bulwark for the defence of all human values as well as divine.

If, in our spirituality, we lose sight of this radical personalism the consequences are fatal. We shall be tempted to superimpose some impersonal and exterior formula or system upon an immature basis. We shall usually overlook the vast sphere which lies, in our psychological constitution, between the grossly natural and the supernatural in us. Psychological factors of whose existence in ourselves we are not even conscious will run wild and easily escape the most loyal and superficially sincere examinations of conscience. The response of the individual, however sincere, will be hampered by unaccountable conflicts, by a scrutiny of the façade but not of the inner rooms. There will be nervous tensions, breakdowns, moral lapses. Authority cannot deal with the situation. The individual cannot deal with it. There follows a wholly unnecessary deadlock, a breach, with fatal injuries on both sides. Men have abandoned the faith; communities have fallen apart; potential saints have crumpled up, and men in high places have committed disastrous sins against true love—all because of the neglect of the psychological and personal elements in their own notion of spirituality, borrowed from the outside and indiscriminately accepted.

In France, during the last two decades, some points have been brought to the fore in honest enquiries. Fr Bonduelle, O.P., and an anonymous 'Directeur de Séminaire' have examined one aspect of the conflict of 'spiritualities' in the case of the average seminarist.¹ In England we seem to have driven our susceptibilities to such a pitch that no one dares mention the real components of our leakage-problem and

¹ *La Vie Spirituelle*, October 1945, pp. 289-303; December 1945, pp. 541-555; June 1946, pp. 59-68.

superficial education. Yet, in his *Mediator Dei*, the Pope has found it necessary to devote a whole Encyclical to precisely such a conflict of spiritual schools and methods.

This short essay is but a mere effort to start the ball rolling. The argument may be sketched out as follows. Most forms of spirituality, and certainly the Church's official guidance in this matter, are based on the truth that grace is there to perfect nature, not to destroy or ignore it. This truth implies that this nature should be healthy, normal, balanced and alive. It is the wider and deeper application of the classical motto: *mens sana in corpore sano*.

If the natural foundations show cracks, the supernatural superstructure will lack balance. It is therefore sensible to order one's spiritual life in such a way that an eye is kept on the natural foundations whilst the supernatural is being built up. It is somewhat presumptuous to expect God to infuse sanctity miraculously, i.e. without our using the secondary causes created for the purpose. The principal of these secondary causes is precisely our psychological maturity and balance. This is characteristic of the saints, however 'simple' their appearance. If we paid more attention to being naturally predisposed for true redemption, there would be a better opportunity for redemption to take its full effect in us *as we are made*. We would not, on theological principles, invoke a form of justice and harsh judgment in dealing with our fellow men, which in the eyes of a decent pagan would be a flagrant travesty of common decency, let alone of Christian love.

Sanctity and sanity are words implying 'wholeness'. This is common ground. But the natural wholeness of an individual lies principally in the possession of what psychology calls an 'integral personality'. Therefore a sound spirituality is one which starts with building up a sound and decent personality. Besides concentrating on being, nature, incidental actions and habits, it would concentrate on the integral elements of the personality: true self-knowledge (meta-physical and psychological—which implies more self-humiliation than many modern spiritual authors are aware of), balance and judgment, harmony of emotion, imagination, creative vision and sound reason, and so on. A balanced

and mature person does not think himself a hero of self-sacrifice for having helped a fellow creature to share in the goods of this world: he would call it elementary decency and leave the assessment to God. He would not expect a crown for having endured someone's mannerisms: he would call it elementary courtesy. He would not brandish the label 'Catholic' over the heads of non-Catholics: he would try to attract them by an understanding and a generosity as vast as God's own and leave the result in his hands. Do our authors and hagiographers study the originality, the vitality, the independence and the supple balance of a saint's personality, and offer *these* features for imitation? If the answer is in the negative we need a change of direction. It is a change which might throw open many windows and clear the unhealthy atmosphere which vitiates so many attempts at piety, and contorts the noble features of loyalty and love. Authority without true inner personality is not a pleasant vehicle for God's spirit to be conveyed in. Submission without inner personality is hardly the stuff from which a genuine Superior can strike the necessary sparks. . . .

The early Fathers of the deserts of Nitria and Scete had this sense of personality and freedom in spirituality. 'The way of truth will aim at reaching the real and true God. But for its knowledge and accurate comprehension there is need of none other save ourselves. Neither, as God himself is above all, is the road to him afar off or outside ourselves, as Moses also taught when he said: 'The word of faith is within thy heart. Which very thing the Saviour declared and confirmed when he said: The kingdom of God is within you.'² This is Athanasius's version of Origen's lapidary words: 'The Apostle teaches that the interior man is one thing, the exterior another. The interior man is he who has more in himself to offer to God; for in him it is that the virtues dwell; in him all the understanding of knowledge; in him the renovation of the divine image. He who has recovered his appearance (*species*) in which he was moulded in the beginning by God, and who has received the beauty

² St Athanasius, *Contra Gentes*, c. 30, P. Gr. XXV, 600. For some of the texts I have used Dom Michael Marx, *Incessant Prayer in Ancient Monastic Literature*, Rome, 1946.

of his first appearance (*prioris formae*) by restoring his integrity through the virtues, can now offer his gifts to God. . . . But these things must not be sought somewhere outside man. The saving occasion (*salutis occasio*) is within us, as the Lord said: Behold, the kingdom of God is within thee. For within us lies the faculty of conversion.³ The 'kingdom within' is the key-note of St Anthony's address to the Brethren, as related by St Athanasius.⁴

There is no mistaking this language. At a time when the notion of 'person' had not yet received the full elaboration which resulted from the christological controversies, it would be difficult to express the fundamental position of the integral personality and of intensely personal responsibility more forcefully. For the Fathers of the Desert genuine spirituality is above all a personal spirituality, and not above all a matter of conformity.

This is also borne out by the hundreds of incidents related in the *Lausiac History* and the *Sayings of the Fathers*. There is an immense freedom underneath an exacting discipline, and it is the very power of this personal freedom which keeps the purpose of self-sanctification as keen as a razor-blade. It allows of no shirking reliance on other members of the community, no diluting of the unique personal issue, the responsibility for which demands freedom of choice where the means are concerned. There is no blind, ignorant, parasitical or passive yielding to an outward structure—though it exists and is revered—as if to escape from that inner true kingdom where God is King and man's own self the steward. This is precisely what makes the greatness of these giants. You wish to live in a cell? Go and build yourself a cell. You prefer a coenobium? Betake yourself to a coenobium. You do not know which? Then, says an 'old man' laconically, try first the one and then the other. Even the rise of the Rules did not change this. Even St Benedict, who came after Pachomius, Jerome, Basil, Augustine and the mysterious Master of the *Regula Magistri*, made it plain in his rule that he did not attach a final value to his advice, and that in any case it was simply meant for begin-

³ Homily in *Numeris*, 24, 2.

⁴ Vita Antonii, P. Gr. XXVI, 20, col. 872-873.

ners, a technical term understood in monastic tradition.⁵ The Rule was not, in his eyes, what in the language of some it has become since, a final and complete structure, in every detail absolute, endowed with its almost charismatic power. . . . 'The brethren asked Abbâ Nastîr: What rule of life and conduct should a man follow? The old man said: All rules of conduct are not alike. Abraham was a lover of strangers, David was a humble man, Elijah loved silence, and God accepted the work of all of them. Whatsoever work is of God, if thy soul desireth it, that do, and God be with thee.'⁶

It is because of this basic outlook of the freedom and responsibility of the person that the virtue of *discretio*, of discernment, was of such fundamental importance to the old Fathers. Freedom lies in the perfect balance of the powers of our personality, and it is the task of *discretio* to set them free and to balance them. Thus *discretio* comes to mean: moderation, measure, human sensitiveness, divine sensitiveness, wisdom, understanding of oneself, and of others in the light of this usually humiliating self-knowledge, the careful appreciation of human and divine values, a sense of perspective, proportion, and ultimate harmony. The pattern falls into shape. And this, indeed, is but a rough sketch of some features of that *integritas* in which we were created and towards which we were redeemed.

This virtue of *discretio*, the mother of virtues, as St Benedict calls it, shows how closely the theological and psychological *integritas* are interwoven. It is in this all-round integrity that we must mature in the unity of the faith and the knowledge of the Son of God unto a perfect man, unto the measure of the age of the fullness of Christ.

The Liturgy of the Church expresses this in its inimitable simplicity when it prays, as it does so often, for the support of God *quia pondus propriae actionis gravat*, because the burden of our own decisions weighs so heavily upon us. It does never pray, though, that we may run away from it or even may be delivered from it.

⁵ *Regula Monachorum*, XVIII and LXXII.

⁶ Appendix to the *Questions and Answers*, Wallis Budge, *The Paradise or Garden of the Holy Fathers*, London, 1907, I, 283, n. 605.