

the dying Jesus, or chastity except his pain, or obedience except his death under the stroke of God's holiness, so joyfully willed and welcomed as it was?

'If thou wilt be perfect, go, sell what thou hast and give to the poor; and thou shalt have treasure in heaven; and come, follow me. . . . There are eunuchs that have made themselves so for the sake of the kingdom of heaven. . . . If any man would come after me, let him deny himself, and take up his cross daily and follow me. For whosoever shall lose his life for my sake, the same shall save it.'

Collectively and individually, many of us religious of the present day would acknowledge that by our shameful mediocrity we are failing our Lord on the Cross. But the moment of his death, the moment of our invitation, continues for us. His nakedness and pain and death cry out to us still to be poor and chaste and obedient, to share with him in the holiness of God, to war with him against the powers of evil, to be his religious. What can one say? Only:

'I make profession and promise obedience to God, to Holy Mary, to my holy founder, and to you, my superiors and to your successors, that according to the Rule and Constitutions of my Order, I will be obedient to you and to your successors until death'.



## THE SPIRITUAL LIFE; AN HISTORICAL APPROACH—I

SEBASTIAN BULLOUGH, O.P.

**T**HERE is a department of theology known as 'spiritual theology' or 'ascetical and mystical theology', or from a more historical standpoint 'history of spirituality'. (The word 'spirituality' is unwelcome in English, but corresponds to the perfectly acceptable '*spiritualité*' in French.) This 'discipline' or subject within a course of theology is, from an academic point of view, something of a cinderella among the subjects in which the clergy are trained, and indeed in the 1930s the Angelicum in Rome claimed to be almost uniquely advanced in possessing a chair of *historia spiritualitatis*, the chair being first occupied by Père Paul Philippe, O.P., who subsequently became Commissary

of the Holy Office (the modern title of the Inquisitor General). But the subject as an historical discipline was gaining recognition at that time, and the great *Dictionnaire de Spiritualité* was begun by Père Marcel Viller, S.J., in 1937 as a counterpart to the great *Dictionnaires* in other areas of theology. Meanwhile there existed already what is still the standard work from the historical angle, Père Pourrat's *Histoire de Spiritualité*, whose four volumes began to appear in 1918. M. l'Abbé Vernet's *Spiritualité médiévale* was published in 1929, and Père Viller's *Spiritualité des premiers siècles* in 1930. From the angle of technical theology several textbooks had been appearing by that time, notably Padre Juan Arinterro, O.P., *Grados de Oración* in 1918 (the English translation *Stages in Prayer* was published in 1957), the famous *Perfection chrétienne et Contemplation* of Père Garrigou-Lagrange, O.P., in 1923 (with the brief résumé entitled *Les trois conversions et les trois voies* in 1933), and what is probably the most well-known textbook of the theology of the spiritual life, including extensive historical sections, the *Synopsis* of that great Sulpician priest, Adolphe Tanquerey (†1932), first published in 1926 as a counterpart to his *Synopses* of the other parts of theology, which had begun to appear at the end of the last century and are still standard works. A modern post-war textbook in this tradition is that of Père de Guibert, S.J., *Theologia Spiritualis*, published posthumously in 1946 (English translation 1954). Another posthumous publication of the same author is the most important history of the spirituality of the Jesuits, which is a close examination of a narrow field in the history, as is, of course the monumental *Histoire littéraire du sentiment religieux en France* by M. l'Abbé Henri Brémond, which began to appear in 1916. Interest in the history of spirituality in the East began to grow at the same time, notably with the work of Père Irénée Hausherr, S.J., for instance, with his work *La méthode d'oraison hésychaste* of 1927. And for the roots of Christian spirituality in the Fathers of the Church all students are indebted to Père Rouet de Journel, S.J., for adding the *Enchiridion Asceticum* (a collection of relevant texts) in 1929 to the existing series of *Enchiridia* or collections of sources for other areas of theology, Denzinger for authoritative declarations of the Church, Kirch for early Church history and Rouët de Journel himself for patristics, together with the biblical volume, the new edition of which now matches the series.

All this goes to show that especially from the historical angle, this is still a relatively new department of theology. We have indeed always had at our elbows the masters of the spiritual life, but what is new is the study of the development of their thought and their approach to the problems of the life of the spirit. We all know that we are here on earth to know God, to love him and to serve him. The question is, how have the generations of the masters throughout the centuries understood this? What have they taught us (and successively one another) about prayer and Christian perfection? For prayer is our means of growing in the knowledge and love of God, 'the doorway of God's gifts' as St Teresa says (*Vida*, 8), and with it must go the 'conquest of self' as St Ignatius says (*Exercises* 21): indeed not only with it, but because of it, and in turn our own perfection makes us more ready to pray. This is the interplay of the ascetical and mystical elements in the spiritual life: the spiritual combat on the one hand and the heart raised to God on the other. Some modern writers (as Père de Guibert) have deplored the division into ascetical and mystical theology, and only use the term 'spiritual theology', because of the unity of the spiritual life: God's work in the soul which is ready to receive him, and man's own conquest with the help of God's grace. It was, after all, an early master of the ascetical life, St Basil (†397), who said that 'the ascetical life has a single object: the salvation of the soul' (PG 31, 625; *Ench. Ascet.* 261), and his brother St Gregory of Nyssa (†394), who has been called the Father of Christian mysticism, who said at the end of his *Vita Moysis* that 'only one thing is really worthwhile and precious (*timion te kai erasmion*), namely to become God's friend' (PG 44, 429; *Ench. Ascet.* 345). And before hard and fast distinctions between ascetical and mystical theology had been thought, of, we have St Thomas' theology of the Gifts of the Holy Ghost, which is central to his teaching on the spiritual life, for the Gifts are 'a kind of habits, by which man is rendered perfectly ready promptly to obey the movement of the Holy Spirit' (e.g. I-II, 68, 3), and, since 'it is charity (or the love of God) which is the measure of Christian perfection' (II-II, 184, 1), it is in particular the Gift of Wisdom that is concerned with spiritual perfection, because it is 'related to Charity' (II-II, 45, prologue). Thus for St Thomas it is the Gifts of the Holy Ghost which link man's work of his own perfection (ascetical theology) and God's work in the soul

(mystical theology), since grace builds upon nature, and the love of God excludes that which is contrary to Christian perfection, such as grave sin, and also that which obstructs growth in perfection, such as venial sins (II-II 184, 2-3).

The present series of four articles is being written with the conviction that an historical approach to Christian teaching on the spiritual life, an enquiry into the thought of successive masters on the subjects of prayer and perfection, will be a powerful aid to the deepening of our own understanding of what the knowledge, love and service of God means today to us, who have 'so great a cloud of witnesses over our head'. For Christian teaching has been built up gradually from the Gospel itself, and there is a most remarkable unity throughout the history, with frequent echoes from one age to another, as when Gregory of Nyssa in the *Vita Moysis* speaks of 'seeing God in a cloud (*en gnophô*)' (PG 44, 375; *Ench. Ascet.* 341) and the word is taken up a thousand years later by the anonymous English author of the *Cloud of Unknowing*. Yet there are constantly new statements and new emphasis, and one master will speak to our hearts more readily than another at one stage or at one age of our lives, or even in one or another mood of day-to-day living. Sometimes it will be the fourth-century mysticism of Gregory of Nyssa that will show us the way up the mountain of God, or the fifth-century Denis that will open the heavens to us for a moment, or we shall feel the need of the ascetical discipline of their contemporary Basil, with his rule, or the arduous lives of the Fathers of the Desert. At another time maybe it will be the medieval bitter-sweet of the severe yet mellifluous Bernard that will capture us, or the analytical guidance of St Thomas Aquinas, or the wise counsels of Thomas à Kempis, or it will be St Catherine's understanding of *la dolce providenza* that will bring us consolation. Or again we may feel ourselves children of our age when we turn to the *devotio moderna* that began in the Benedictine abbeys of Padua and Montserrat, became famous in the brilliance of St Ignatius, and had its counterpart in the mysticism of St Teresa and St John of the Cross, all of which had a wonderful flowering in the teaching of St Francis de Sales, who is still the modern master of today.

The above sentences are designed to indicate what may be called the three ages in the development of Christian teaching on the spiritual life: the patristic heritage, the medieval period and

the new devotion which arose together with the new world which came into being in Tridentine times. The next three articles will be devoted to a closer examination of these three periods. In this introductory article let us indicate on a larger canvas something of their development and characteristics.

In the patristic age, when men's thoughts on the life of the spirit sprang directly from the Gospel and were tempered with the notions of Greek philosophy and sharpened at the beginning by the vagaries of Gnostic heresies, we find the first express teaching on the spiritual life with Clement of Alexandria (†216). Certain words that were to become so familiar are already current in his writings: contemplation (*theôria*) brings knowledge (*gnôsis*) of God, which is the object of all piety, but to achieve this it is necessary to practise *apatheia* or a conquest of the passions. Here we have the contemplative or mystical element closely bound up with the ascetical. It is with the two brothers Gregory of Nyssa and Basil that we find with the one an emphasis on the mystical element and with the other the groundwork of the asceticism and monastic traditions of the East. In the fifth century in the East we have the great Denis (the 'Pseudo-Denis the Areopagite') who had such an enormous influence on the medieval world, and where we find the first traces of the 'three ways' or three stages in the soul's spiritual development with his 'purification (*kátharsis*), illumination (*éllampsis*), and union (*hénôsis*'); while almost contemporarily in the West is the dominant figure of St Augustine (†430), the great lover, who probably more than any other writer has taught all succeeding ages of Christendom what is the love of God, and how all Christian perfection is ultimately this. Near the end of the patristic period there is Maximus the Confessor (†662) who summed up, as it were, both the mystical and ascetical traditions of the East. It was Cassian (†435) who brought the Eastern ascetical and monastic traditions of the Fathers of the Desert into the West, and it is worth observing that St Benedict (†543), the father of Western monasticism, in the last chapter of the Holy Rule prescribes for the Brethren's reading, after the Bible, the Lives of the Fathers of the Desert, the conferences of Cassian, and the Rule of St Basil. Thus the patristic heritage comes to the middle ages.

Christian thought in the medieval time was greatly influenced on the one hand by St Augustine and on the other by Denis (the

*Dictionnaire de Spiritualité* devotes no less than 112 columns to the subject of Denis' influence in the West). At the same time a typically Western attitude of theological analysis was developing in Scholasticism. St Anselm (†1109 as Archbishop of Canterbury) was a Benedictine, and has rightly or wrongly been called the father of Scholasticism, and his interest at once in theological speculation and in what Père Pourrat calls the 'affective approach' to prayer—a turning to the Lord with consuming love—has made him specially typical of his age. Later in the twelfth century the loving and lovable character of St Bernard (†1153) is a dominant master, and it is with him that we find the first working-out of the theology of mysticism, the soul's union with God, which received its fullness of exposition with St Teresa and St John of the Cross. In the fourteenth century there are several contemporary groups, independent, and considered by the historians as 'schools': there was the German Benedictine school of nuns, with the two Mechtildes (both these actually before 1300) and St Gertrude; there was the great German Dominican school of mystics, Eckhart, Tauler and Suso; and at the same time a great influence in the Augustinian Ruysbroeck; and the English school of Richard Rolle, Walter Hilton and Mother Julian of Norwich. It is difficult at first to realize that all these were near contemporaries of St Catherine of Siena (†1380), whose thought had been in turn much indebted to the teaching of St Thomas Aquinas (†1274). St Catherine perhaps represents the last flowering of the medieval world in this area of history: there are still many echoes of the Fathers, not least important the notion that Christian living is prayer all the time; 'the whole of life is filled with the power of prayer', said St Basil a thousand years before (PG 31, 244; Ench. Ascet. 257; cf. *Dialogo* 78).

But the way was coming for the new world, an expanding world full of new things, a world where there were no more deserts in which to pray undisturbed. Already with Thomas à Kempis (†1471) we find the need of turning in upon oneself to consider the eternal truths and gradually we find books of formal meditation appearing—a time is to be set aside for prayer. Père Pourrat (III p. 6) speaks of '*la méthodisation de la prière*'. It did not happen suddenly: the principles of a method were already well known: a careful meditation upon a particular subject, the fruit perhaps of reading, and then in the light of these considerations,

acts of love and quiet contemplation. One of the first and most important of strict methods was the *Modus meditandi*, of Abbot Luigi Barbo (†1443) of Santa Giustina at Padua. A little later came the *Ejercitatorio* of García de Cisneros (†1510), Abbot of Montserrat, and it was this book that was given to the young Ignatius when he went to Montserrat in 1522 after his conversion. Cisneros' method was closely followed, but brilliantly developed, by St Ignatius in his *Spiritual Exercises*. Meditation followed by what he called the 'Colloquy' or conversation with our Lord, and a brief contemplation with acts of love: these are, after all, the elements of all prayer—a raising of the mind (thought) and the heart (love) to God.

Thus the *devotio moderna* became widespread, and at the same time the complete theology of mystical union with God was being worked out by St Teresa and St John of the Cross. The theology of the 'three ways' had become classical: the Purgative Way for beginners, including St Teresa's first three 'moradas' (or stopping-places, usually translated 'mansions'), the first being just to lead a good life, the second being to pray, and third to pray more seriously and intensely; the Illuminative Way of the 'proficient', which includes the fourth 'mansion', being what later writers called '*abandon à la volonté de Dieu*' (Père de Caussade, S.J., †1751); and finally the Unitive Way of the perfect who are wholly conformed to God's will, which includes the fifth to the seventh 'mansion' of St Teresa, where union of wills is complete.

St Francis de Sales (†1622) built his teaching with regard to method to a great extent on St Ignatius, though much freedom in exact method is characteristic of St Francis de Sales, and his teaching on mystical prayer and contemplation is based upon St Teresa. We should remember that Francis de Sales was already nineteen when Teresa died, although he had not yet begun to think very much about these things at that time; yet their lifetimes do overlap. Pope Pius XI wrote an encyclical in 1923 about St Francis de Sales—his predecessor Benedict XV had intended to write it for the tercentenary, but died before doing it—and he points out that it was Francis de Sales who proclaimed that 'holiness of life is not a privilege of a few, but that all are called to it', and attacked the notion that it is 'so involved in difficulties, that people in the world cannot attain it', and furthermore he asserted that 'sanctity is compatible with every walk of life'. And

a master of today, Père Garrigou-Lagrange, O.P., has repeatedly declared that contemplation is in 'la voie normale de la sainteté': some measure of contemplation is normal for all who are trying to lead a holy life. It may not be universal, but it is normal, to gaze quietly at God, even if only for a second, with a deep conviction of his presence. It is the *theôria*, or 'gazing', which the Greek fathers spoke of. St Teresa said that it is for the soul to 'gaze at him who is gazing at us' (*Vida* 13). And we are back with St Gregory of Nyssa at speaking with God, as Moses did, 'as a man is wont to speak to his friend'.



## THE SACRAMENTS: V—ORDER

LAURENCE BRIGHT, O.P.

THE sacrament of order is much less familiar to most people than the sacraments which have so far been considered. Every Catholic has been baptized, confirmed, has gone to confession; many are married or have assisted at a marriage; very few have taken part in an ordination. The priesthood is often falsely thought of as a special privileged state, remote from the Catholic community at large, and naturally there is little interest in the sacrament by which priests are made. We must therefore begin by getting an idea of the meaning of priesthood in relation to the whole Christian people.

A priest is a man who offers sacrifice to God. In the Old Testament we find careful regulations for the offering of ritual sacrifices of every kind by the official priests. But here at once we also find a warning against any narrow interpretation of the word 'sacrifice'. For the prophets speak strongly against sacrifices which are merely external; however exactly the holocausts are performed in accordance with the rubrics of the law, they are not pleasing to God unless they are true signs of an inward disposition of heart. We begin to see that sacrifice must extend to a total offering of self to God, beyond the symbolic offering of some possession.

A sacrifice to God is an afflicted spirit; a contrite and humble heart, O God, thou wilt not despise' (Psalm 1, 19). It is this notion