

sandals of the Gospel and will restore you to the heavenly land, in Christ Jesus our Lord, to whom be glory and power for ever and ever. Amen.



THE SPIRITUAL WRITINGS OF EDITH STEIN

DONALD NICHOLL

READERS of this review will already be familiar with the name of Edith Stein—or Sister Benedicta, as we prefer to call her (*cf.* the May 1949, February and April 1950 issues of *LIFE OF THE SPIRIT*). Of her life something has been said, and the translation of her biography should soon be available in English. We are now able to enter more deeply into her thought through the publication of her works. In 1949 Schnell and Steiner Verlag of Munich published some of her essays on woman's vocation under the title *Frauenbildung und Frauenberufe*. Meanwhile Dr Gelber of Louvain and Fr Romaeus Leuven, o.c.d., have been preparing an edition of her complete works, which are being published jointly by Herder Verlag of Freiburg and Nauwelaerts of Louvain. Some eight volumes are envisaged of which two have appeared in 1950. The second, *Kreuzeswissenschaft* ('The Science of the Cross'), can be described here along with the earlier work on woman's vocation.¹

The essays on woman's vocation date from the time before Edith Stein entered Carmel, while she was a lecturer at Münster and being constantly invited to lecture on this theme in Germany, Austria and Switzerland. Most of the suggestions which they contain are inspired by a very practical desire to see that young women should be educated according to their natures. Sister Benedicta points out, for instance, that there are large areas of a woman's life over which she needs the help and guidance of another woman. It is naïve to assume that such questions can be treated in a detached scientific way which will free them from personal connotations. It is equally naïve to believe that the young women receiving such instruction from a priest easily appreciate the distinction between the office and the person. Therefore the need for women in the teaching profession and sharing in the

¹ The editing of the works is in itself a moving instance of the devotion which Sister Benedicta has inspired; it is brilliantly done—though I have noticed several misprints.

teaching functions of the Church is obvious enough. Because this need has lately been recognised, and because women are playing an ever more active part in the Church's work of mercy, Sister Benedicta thinks it quite likely that we shall once more have deaconesses such as they had in the primitive Church. On the other hand, she produces very good reasons for believing that women will never be ordained as priests.

More rewarding, however, than these observations, which are stamped with Sister Benedicta's own enthusiasm for woman's emancipation, are her meditations on the differences between the sexes and what these differences betoken for each one of us in our natural and our supernatural life. The differences between the sexes, as she rightly insists, are not primarily differences of sex; this distinction between male and female has to be regarded as primarily a metaphysical one and, since it applies to the whole of the creation, has some ultimate rôle to play in the glorification of God.

In order to achieve some intimation of this rôle, Sister Benedicta turns towards the Biblical account of man's creation and redemption, bringing out the respective male and female rôles. This subject she handles with extraordinary insight and skill. What God created in his image was not a man but *man* (i.e., male *and* female), and so the Three-Personed God is imaged in the perfect union of male and female.

Fixing our attention on the woman's part in the redemption, Sister Benedicta singles out the fact that our Lady is Virgin-Mother; our Lady is perfect virgin because she accepts to be Mother of God; she is the perfect mother because she receives completely, she accepts her creatureliness—and this is perfect virginity. Our Lady, then, the perfect creature, is Virgin-Mother, and gathers under her patronage all creatures, of whom she is Queen.

Sister Benedicta's second work, *Kreuzeswissenschaft*, presents much greater difficulties for anyone trying to summarise and describe it. It was completed on the very day that the Gestapo carried her away; and one feels as one reads it that only a person who has practised the 'science of the Cross' as ardently as she did herself can appreciate its full meaning. It is not only, as the editors say, that 'this writing is obviously the work of someone who has already reached the goal'; it is that her very German style ex-

presses her extraordinary purity, that kind of crystal clarity which one associates with mountain-springs and the *Summa* of St Thomas. And because I know of no English writer with the same qualities, I doubt whether her works can be successfully translated.

The main theme of her work is that 'the Cross of Christ, through its effectiveness, is more than a sign; it is a symbol. It re-presents "the nuptial union of the soul with God, the end, for which it was created, purchased by the Cross, completed on the Cross and sealed by the Cross for all eternity".' Sister Benedicta sets out to study the workings of this symbol in the soul, taking her beloved master, St John of the Cross, as her guide.

With sure instinct she introduces St John not by reference to his writing but by a description of his life, which occupies some forty pages at the beginning and is then completed at the end by a description of his last days when the Cross had done its work. She tells us that we can understand the Mystical Doctor only when we read his works in the context of his life. How right she is has become more obvious since she wrote; for since her death more and more pagan writers have been maintaining that Christianity is not essential to the mysticism of St John; these modern nihilists are quite prepared to accept a doctrine of 'nothingness'. They are equally prepared to accept the science of the Cross—but it is a cross without Christ. And Sister Benedicta's warning to read St John's works in the context of his life needs to be applied also to her own writings. It would be possible for a nihilist to pervert her statements by taking them out of their context and building them into his own worship of the cross without Christ. But when we read her life-story there can be no doubt that she saw the danger. She saw that what makes the Cross a symbol for the Christian is the Person who was crucified, the Word Incarnate; the mystery of the Cross is not to be perverted by separating it from the mystery of the Incarnation and the Resurrection.

In her account of St John's life Sister Benedicta seizes upon his artistic activity as an expression of the Cross-symbol within him, and as a means of integrating his own life into the life of the Crucified. But, unlike many artists, St John did not succumb to the perils of artistic expression: 'There is hardly one believing artist who has not felt himself compelled to represent a Christ on the Cross or carrying the Cross. But the Crucified demands from

the artist more than a picture. He demands from him, as from every man, imitation: that he should conform himself to the picture of the Cross-carrier and let himself be conformed to the Crucified. The external representation can prove a hindrance to self-formation, but must never be allowed to do so; it can serve this self-formation precisely because the inner picture itself is most thoroughly integrated through the external representation . . . we have every reason to believe that this is what happened with St John of the Cross.' She then goes on to trace the saint's experience of the Cross-symbol at various stages of his life, from his service in the hospital to his persecution by the Carmelites at Toledo, quoting the cruciform chapel at Dirvelo which he designed, and referring to the sketch of the Crucified which is preserved in the Convent of the Incarnation at Avila.

The whole of this section on the Cross-symbol is illuminating, throwing light especially on the mystery of Israel into which Sister Benedicta's own life was set. For it seems, when we consider the lives of Jews in relation to Christ (e.g., Sister Benedicta, Simone Weil, Max Jacob, etc.), as though Jewish people in particular carry within themselves this symbol which the choicest amongst them re-present to a world inclined to forget it. Though, as she points out, it would be straining the texts of St John to maintain that he himself has worked out this science of the Cross in specific terms:

'The dominant symbol both in his poems and in his treatises is not the Cross, but the Night . . . therefore it is essential to work out the precise relationship between the Cross and the Night in order to recapture the meaning of the Cross for St John.' And for the rest of the book this is more or less what she does; she arranges the texts of the saint's works so as to illustrate the ascent of Mount Carmel in terms of the practice of the science of the Cross. These long quotations from the saint, skilfully chosen to point the theme, are interspersed with trenchant comments of her own. Thus:

'There is a deep, thankful repose in the peace of the Night. We must think of all this if we are to understand the symbolism of the Night in St John of the Cross. From the accounts of his life, as well as from his poems, we know that he was delicately sensitive to all the tones and shadings of the cosmic night. He used to spend whole nights gazing out over the broad landscape or else in the open air.'

“The difference between formal and substantial expressions is that the latter exercise a powerful and essential effect: they produce in the soul that which they express. If the Lord says to the soul: “Love me”, then it is so, if the words are substantial, possessing and producing the true love of God. The words: “Fear not”, will instantly bring great courage and peace to an anxious soul.’

The only part of the book at which Sister Benedicta declares her intention of going beyond her beloved St John is in the section on ‘The soul in the realm of the spirit and the spirits’. And it is here, presumably, that the experts will find points for debate in her teaching. For it has been maintained (cf. Josef Pieper in *Die Wahrheit der Dinge*) that Sister Benedicta was never able to free herself from the Platonic assumptions of the philosophical school in which she was brought up, and therefore did not acquire a Thomist vision of the universe. Certainly she is no strict Thomist; she follows the divisions of the soul according to the Mystical, rather than according to the Angelic, Doctor. And though this question of the divisions of the soul may seem highly academic, its relevance may perhaps be revealed in what Sister Benedicta goes on to say about the union of the soul with God:

‘Whoever in blind faith desires nothing but the will of God has reached the highest point at which man can arrive with the grace of God: his will is completely purified and free from attachment to earthly desires, he is united in free surrender to the divine will. And yet there is something still lacking which is decisive for the highest union of love—the mystical marriage.’ (p. 148.)

In other words, besides the mode of God’s presence in all created things and the mode of God’s presence by grace, there is a third mode, which is that of mystical marriage. This threefold distinction is found, according to Sister Benedicta, in St John, though not stressed—because he feared the Inquisition might accuse him of Illuminism. But it is found explicitly in St Teresa, for ‘our Holy Mother clearly and emphatically insists that this indwelling differs from that of grace not only in degree but in kind’. (p. 153.) In support of this theory she then cites some words of St Augustine which do not seem to confirm it. (p. 158, n.) On the basis of this distinction she goes on to mark the ‘clear delimitation’ of faith from contemplation: ‘Faith is primarily a matter of the intellect . . . contemplation a matter of the heart’. (p. 164.)

Whether this novel view of Sister Benedicta’s is the true one or

not, it is obvious enough that the unwary might find it leading them into esoteric practices. And so we can only pray that she and that resolute opponent of the esoteric, St Thérèse of Lisieux, are collaborating in Heaven to shield us all from the danger. It must be remembered that Sister Benedicta's training was a thorough-going philosophical one. Before her baptism she had been for years a leading philosopher herself. It was therefore inevitable that something of that philosophy which had been acquired without the safeguards of the faith to protect it should have later been used in her mind to elucidate the marvellous mysteries of the faith she had subsequently received. She knew of the 'mystical marriage' as a fact in the spiritual life. That was the important thing. That it was of a different nature from the union of grace was her own explanation. She knew by experience the fact of contemplation; her explanation of its relation to faith was perhaps coloured by a confusion of terms. But these points do not substantially detract from the power and beauty and profundity of her meditations set down in these two books.



THE INDIVIDUAL AND HIS RELIGION

An Examination of Professor Allport's psychological interpretation¹

AUGUSTIN LÉONARD, O.P.

In Newman's beautiful words: 'two only absolute and luminously self-evident beings, myself and my Creator', the believer recognises these as the real terms united by religion. Religion is the sacred, unutterable intercourse between a limited, sinful creature and Being and Holiness. Between the living God, as the Scriptures so often call him, and his living image, there is a personal and dramatic relationship, in which dread and tenderness, awe and love, hope and anxiety are mingled.

The ideas of the psychologist on a mysterious experience of this sort are very often perplexing to the theologian or the lay christian. To do justice to psychological works on religion, one must bear in mind the various levels at which religious phenomena can be viewed. Empirical methods of psychology cannot alter a metaphysical truth, still less supernatural faith. They are unable to prove or disprove the validity

1. Gordon W. Allport: *The Individual and his Religion. A Psychological Interpretation.* (Constable; 12s. 6d.)