

supernatural sphere, after the manner and the limitations of the causative activities of man. Moreover, in effect, it misconceives the very freedom of the will which it seeks to defend. The human will is not free as by any absolute independence in its own ultimate autonomy. It also is a relative, and therefore determined by nature to an absolute. But it is free by the infinite perfection of the divine power creating and moving it. He who is pure act, first mover unmoved, and Creator of all beings, is the primary cause of every positive act of their being, and of every mode of every act. The necessary effect receives its necessity from him; the contingent effect, its contingency. The free creatures are free by the freedom with which God endowed them; and from the infinite perfection of his causality they freely choose, under his liberating movement. Only by imagining his being and action to be of the same nature and manner as the being and action of created, secondary causes, can it be suggested that this is a Calvinistic determinism. The exact contrary is the truth; for it is a participation of the divine freedom, with which God endows his saints.



HEAVENLY MANNA & THE HOLY EUCHARIST

BY

THE MONK OF HEILSBRONN

[The author was a fourteenth century monk who wrote the famous poem *Die Tochter Sion*—a conversation between the soul and the Christian virtues—and other allegorical verse. The present extract is taken from the end of his treatise on *The Six Names of the Blessed Sacrament*, and is translated from the medieval German by K. Webber.]



HE sacred food of the holy Eucharist was prefigured for us in olden times by a heavenly bread called Manna, which God rained down upon our forefathers. This heavenly food had six characteristic qualities or properties, all of which are also present spiritually in our eucharistic food.

The first characteristic of the heavenly bread was that God caused it to drop down from Heaven in a marvellous manner, contrary to the laws of nature. Concerning this God said

to our forefathers: 'I will rain down bread from heaven', for when they arose each morning it lay everywhere on the ground outside their tents, like newly fallen snow. Of this same Manna the prophet says: 'God opened the gates of Heaven and rained down Manna'. In like fashion our Lord gives us the bread of his Body in a marvellous manner, contrary to the laws of nature, and comes down to us from heaven. Thus God says: 'I am the living bread that comes from heaven'.

The second characteristic of Manna lies in its taste, for when it was eaten it had for each man the flavour which most appealed to him. It is written in the Book of Wisdom concerning this variety of flavour: 'Lord, thou preparest for them, with no labour on their part, a bread which has for every one the delight and savour of all sweetness'. And it is further written: 'That same bread serves each one according to his will and with the flavour he desires'. In a similar way our Heavenly Bread possesses all the savour of the graces which we seek in our prayer with diligence and longing, since it is that living bread which contains in itself the sweet savour of all grace. 'According to the manner in which you encounter God', says St Bernard, 'God will deal with you; and as you receive God, in that measure also will he receive you.' That is to say, the spiritual dispositions with which you receive God will be intensified and increased by the reception of his sacred Body. In this connection also a venerable teacher and bishop, Albert the Preacher,¹ says that the Word of God produces different kinds of grace and enlightenment in the hearts of people who hear it, according to the state of each man's awareness of God. So also the Body of our Lord, devoutly received, produces a variety of graces in the souls of different people, provided only that they are in a spiritually healthy state. For however rare and delicate a food may be, it tastes bitter in the mouth of a sick man; so it is with those who are spiritually sick: they are unable to appreciate the divine savour because of the bitterness of their sins. To quote St Bernard again: 'Of necessity God—who is himself immutable—adapts himself, when bestowing his grace, to the varying spiritual condition of different souls. Accordingly, some receive him savouring his justice, others savouring his love, but each and every one receives his grace.'

The third characteristic of Manna has reference to the place where it was distributed: that is, it was given nowhere but in the wilderness, where there was no other palatable food. Similarly, the soul cannot obtain grace to delight in the savour of the blessed Eucharist unless it dwell in that desert whence all sensual delights are ban-

¹ i.e. Saint Albert the Great, member of the Order of Preachers.

ished. St Bernard says here: 'God is so gentle and fastidious that he will never come to that soul which finds consolation elsewhere'. Therefore the psalmist says that the wilderness shall become fruitful, since those who go into the desert which is empty of earthly enjoyments will become filled with divine consolation. Our Lord said to his disciples: 'Let us go awhile into the desert and rest'. We also read that God twice fed a large multitude in the desert, which he did not do elsewhere. This is intended to show us that those who follow him into the wilderness bereft of human consolation will not be left unsatisfied.

There is a fourth way in which the heavenly bread of Manna resembles our eucharistic bread. When our fathers were able to eat the fruits of the earth again the heavenly Manna immediately vanished, as we find written in the Book of Josue: 'The bread of heaven departed from them as soon as they were able to eat the fruits of the land'. Our divine bread of the Eucharist also has this fourth property, for whenever we partake of the fruits of this world with too much relish, and more than necessity requires, the divine consolation which we receive in our Lord's Body and Blood leaves us immediately. 'It is impossible', says St Bernard, 'that the soul which comforts itself with earthly things should receive spiritual consolation, for whenever a heart is filled with earthly comfort the oil of divine consolation runs dry.'

The fifth property of Manna was this: when it was laid in the heat of the sun it melted, and when it was placed before a fire it became hard; so that in one kind of heat it turned soft and in another it hardened. This characteristic is also found in our eucharistic bread, for whenever a man receives it with heavenly heat, that is to say, with spiritual fervour, it melts, and the whole soul is flooded with grace and devotion. But whenever it is received with earthly fire, which is, with a love of earthly things, the soul grows harder and harder. This is the reason why no soul is in so hardened a state and so difficult to convert as the one which frequently receives the Body of the Lord with a heart attached to earthly things, in a state of mortal sin—whether the hardness be that of avarice or of unchastity or of lust for pleasure.

The sixth property of Manna was that it fell from heaven in, and with, the dew. This heavenly dew symbolises divine grace, for the true bread of heaven, the holy Eucharist, when received worthily, always falls upon our soul with the dew of heavenly grace, so that it is never received otherwise than with the grace of God.

Let us pray, therefore, that the divine goodness which dwells in our Lord may always assist us. Amen.