

of society but is instead the efficient management of a community, and there must result the evil of institutionalism.

It is only when the delicate balance and interplay of all the principles involved is observed that obedience restores the divine order and gives back to man, by integrating him within that order and instructing him in the law of God, the wholeness of personality that was his and was, by disobedience, lost.



THE RELIGIOUS VOWS AND THE HOLY WAR

JOSEPH BOURKE, O.P.

IT was our Lord himself who taught us that it is holy to be poor and chaste and obedient. But even as he spoke, and indeed for many years before his time, other Jews had already realized this independently, and had been striving in their own ways to practise these very virtues. The descriptions of the sect known as the Essenes in the records of Josephus and Pliny the Younger, and especially the new discoveries at Qumrân, all bear striking witness to this fact. Where then did the idea originate that man can enter into closer union with God through poverty, chastity, and obedience? Clearly it was in the Old Testament, the common source on which our Lord and the Essenes both drew. And when we attempt to trace the idea back to its Old Testament roots, the trail leads us not, as we might have expected, to the temple, or to the altar, nor even, in the last analysis, to the vows of the Nazirites, but beyond this still further back to the remote nomadic past of ancient Israel, to what was probably one of the oldest of her traditions, the tradition of the Holy War.

In those early days, before the first kings, there was no standing army in Israel. When an enemy menaced her existence, her menfolk left their small possessions, segregated themselves from their wives, and lived together in camp under the leadership of a charismatic chief. It was under these circumstances that a form of poverty, chastity and obedience was practised for the first time. The earliest religious community was a community of warriors assembled in camp to do battle on behalf of the people of God.

At that stage in her history, Israel had hardly any natural resources with which to defend herself. And so her warriors strove to fill themselves with the holiness of the God who had made himself their own by the Covenant. They fought in his name, and needed no other strength. But to be filled with God's holiness a man must be ritually pure; above all he must have kept himself apart from his wife. Besides this he must remain day and night physically close to God, till he is steeped, body and soul, in holiness. And as long as he remains near God, his every action must be governed by God's will, made known through the charismatic leader.

Long after the Holy War in its fullest and truest sense had grown obsolete, this fundamental tradition survived. One of the most famous and striking illustrations of it is Uriah's rejoinder to David, who had recalled him to the royal palace at Jerusalem from the camp before Rabbath-Ammon. 'Have you not come from a journey?' asks David. 'Why then did you not go down to your house?' and Uriah answers, 'The ark and Israel and Judah are dwelling in booths, and my master, Joab, and my master's servants are encamped in the open field. Shall I then enter my house to eat and drink and lie with my wife? By your life and by your living soul I shall not do such a thing.' (II Sam vi, 11.) It is the reply of a consecrated man. An Israelite (and here Uriah the Hittite speaks to all intents and purposes as an Israelite) thought of his wife, his house, his property as comprising the sphere of the 'profane', the natural world in which his everyday life was spent. It was, in its degree, under the blessing of God, but it was not 'perfect'—not in immediate contact with God himself. Now Uriah has passed from this 'profane' sphere of life into the sphere of holiness, from the mundane environment into the charismatic environment of the war-camp. Together with the other warriors he feels himself in a state of physical and palpable union with God. To turn back now from the holiness of the camp and to resume contact with the 'profane' sphere from which he has separated himself would be a desecration, a betrayal. The camp itself is a place of unique holiness, for God dwells and 'walks' there. 'For Yahweh, your God, walks in the midst of your camp, to protect you and drive your enemies before you. So let your camp be holy; let not God see anything repulsive in you, to turn him away from you' (Deut. xxiii, 15). This passage is all the more significant when it is realized that everywhere else in Deuteronomy

God is thought of as dwelling transcendently in heaven.¹ Here, and here alone, in the context of the Holy War, does the Deuteronomist revert to the primitive idea of God walking through the camp and dwelling in the midst of his consecrated warriors.

In engaging himself to fight in the Holy War, it was not enough for the Israelite to separate himself physically from his wife and property. He had to banish the very thought of them from his heart. Part of the solemn ritual preparation for battle prescribed by Deuteronomy was for the scribes to proclaim before the assembled army that anyone who '... has built a new house and not yet dedicated it . . . planted a vine and not yet harvested its first fruits . . . espoused a bride and not yet taken her . . .' (Deut. xx, 5-7) should leave the camp and return home. Such men might harbour secret longings for the old world they had relinquished, the ties of which, it might be supposed, would still be exceptionally strong in their case. And any longings of this kind might prove fatal. Misgivings, regrets, and backward glances at the old 'profane' sphere of life would weaken the union between God and his men, and diminish the flow of charismatic strength to the army as a whole. And so even in his inmost heart the Israelite cut himself off from the very thought of wife and children and property, his ordinary world, in order to become possessed by God for the Holy War. It seems to me that that remains fundamentally and eternally the significance of the religious state. It is a question of two spheres of life which must not be mixed. Men become poor and chaste and obedient in order to pass from the 'profane' sphere of the ordinary world, and to dwell in God's immediate presence in the war-camp, in order to be possessed by God for the Holy War.

If then the Israelite warrior willingly forsook for a time the chief natural goods which life could offer him, it was because his soul was suffused and inspired to the exclusion of all else by two elemental ideas: the holiness of God sustaining him, and the malice of the enemy before him. Again I suggest that every religious who has consecrated himself to God by poverty, chastity, and obedience must, in some form or other, be inspired and possessed by these two ideas. They belong to the elemental meaning of the religious state. Let us consider them a little more deeply.

¹ In the Deuteronomic tradition God is thought of as being present in Sion only through the medium of his 'Name'.

I. THE HOLINESS OF GOD

It seems almost certain that the Hebrew word for holiness, *qodesh*, originally meant 'separateness'. Whatever is consecrated to God must be separated from the profane as he is separate. Poverty and chastity are in that sense measures of separation, ways of participating in God's separateness from the profane. But to realize the significance of this root-meaning, it must be appreciated that at the very origins of the idea of holiness lies an intuition of the mystery and terror of God. It is the first impact upon man's conscious soul of God as *numinous*, 'Absolutely Other' to the world of creatures, and 'Absolutely Unapproachable' by it. 'Absolutely Other': Beyond and prior to any notion of God's goodness, or even of his power, is man's elemental awareness of him as '. . . a Mystery, inexpressible and above all creatures', evoking the mental reaction of '. . . *Stupor* . . . blank wonder, an astonishment that strikes us dumb, amazement absolute'.² 'Absolutely Unapproachable': part of the same pre-conceptual intuition of holiness is a sense of utter baseness confronted with overwhelming sublimity. For man, the creature, to draw near to God the holy would be like a moth flying into the sun. Holiness shrivels up the profane, the 'common', the creaturely, the natural in its sheer radiant sublimity. It is 'like stored-up electricity, discharging itself upon anyone who comes too near'. It was holiness in this sense which struck Uzzah dead when he put out his hand to touch the ark (II Sam. vi, 7). If the sons of Aaron had seen the sanctuary 'even for a moment' they would have dropped dead. (Num. iv, 20.) Fire came forth from Yahweh and devoured the two hundred and fifty men who offered incense before him in defiance of Moses' command. And afterwards the son of Aaron was ordered to take up the censers and make them into a covering for the altar, because, sinfully as they had been used, they had been brought into the presence of God *and were charged with his holiness* '. . . for they offered them before Yahweh; therefore they are holy' (Num. xvi, 1-38).

It was because they were so conscious of, and so terrified by, these fearful and destructive aspects of the holiness of their God, that the Hebrew people so often (especially in their older tradi-

² R. Otto. *The Idea of the Holy*. (English Translation by J. W. Harvey), Oxford. 9th Impression, 1945.

tions and writings) depicted him as a furious, burning, jealous, and revengeful God, causing convulsions in the natural order by his very approach, and full of urgent vitality to destroy. This is in origin the nomad's idea of God. It was only later that the gentler aspects of the Divine Goodness became prominent. In Elias' vision of God, he saw a whirlwind, and an earthquake and fire before he heard the 'still small voice'. This might be regarded as an epitome of the deepening realization of God's attributes throughout the history of the people as a whole. And even in the second part of Isaias, where the Hebrew idea of God finds its most sublime and most developed expression, the author reverts again and again to the elemental concept of his sheer burning holiness.

Yet even as the *numinous* in God terrifies, so also it attracts. Man in his baseness longs for the unspeakable sublimity of holiness even as he trembles before it. The moth longs for the light-giving flame. And by the miracle of atonement God gives him the power to draw near and still to live. For this is, in essence, what atonement means: the miracle of being enabled to walk out of the profane world and into the holiness of God without being annihilated by it.

At the same time it cannot be too strongly emphasized that God lays down the conditions under which man may approach him. Only those whom he calls may draw near, and these only in the exact manner which he prescribes. This is the concept underlying the solemn rituals of purification and 'separation' with which priests prepared themselves for sacrifice, and warriors for the Holy War. Every detail prescribed must be meticulously obeyed. Every contaminating spot of the profane world without must be purged away. Above all the charismatic leader must be obeyed without question. The moment the people murmured against Moses and Aaron, the 'covering' sheltering effects of atonement were lost, and the holiness dwelling in their midst became a death-dealing plague (Num. xvi, 41-46). Religious obedience is nothing less than the meticulous observance of God's will and of the commands of his chosen leader, on the part of those who live in, and are charged with, the flaming radiance of his holiness.

That the Israelite warriors should have been able, through poverty, chastity, and obedience to dwell in the divine holiness

and be united to it was already therefore, in its degree, a miracle of atonement. They themselves became charged with 'numinous' force, one with the destroying sublimity of God. And it is because they thought of holiness as that which destroys and withers the profane, that they associated the state of holiness with war. Israel's war was *holy*. The strength in the warrior's arm and the courage in his heart was the holiness of God himself; it was God in him and with him, touching and annihilating the baseness of the gentiles with his numinous force.

It is vitally important not to lose the eternal truths which underlie these ancient images of God's destroying wrath. It is only the stupendous miracle of Christ that saves us from being withered up by the God who dwells so near to us and is so holy. What else is hell-fire except the unspeakable agony of being touched by God's holiness when one is cut off from Christ? Yet the miracle of atonement consists precisely in the fact that man does draw near to God, and the miracle of Christian atonement consists in the fact that man enters into divine sonship. Holiness, so terrible, rending, destroying without Christ, becomes 'through him, and with him, and in him', the loving and protecting Fatherhood of God. It is impossible to realize the wonder of being able to call God 'Father', without facing unflinchingly the fact that his holiness is *terrible*, and that it is only our union with Christ which saves us from its effects. But when the wonder of that fact seizes a man's soul, he will abandon at once, without a moment's regret, every natural good which the profane world can offer him. The real blessings which he surrenders by poverty, chastity, and obedience, fade into utter insignificance before the sublime joy of being possessed, body and soul, by the holiness of God.

II. THE MALICE OF THE ENEMY

No one at all familiar with the Old Testament can have failed to notice that it is pervaded from end to end with a sense of menace and peril from malignant enemies. 'Yahweh, how many are my enemies! Many are they that rise up against me!' (Ps. iii, 1.) Perhaps no theme in the Bible recurs more insistently than this one. Here again we touch upon the ancient traditions of the Holy War. The warrior's mind, as he waits in the camp under the shadow of God's protection, is filled with the thought of the enemy

before him. Active malignant forces have gathered to crush his people. Just as he is filled with the holiness of God, so they, dedicated as they are to false gods, are filled with the power of evil. In such circumstances the Israelite's whole attention is fixed on the battle. As long as the crisis lasts there is no room in his thoughts for the old world from which he has separated himself. But once the danger has passed and his vigilance relaxes, memories and longings for it will return. It is his intense awareness of the enemy confronting him which makes him for the moment of peril poor and chaste and obedient, separates him, that is to say, heart and mind, soul and strength from everything except the holiness of God.

Now let us turn for a moment from the early history of Israel to the latest phase, the era of intense Messianic expectation which ushered in the birth of Christ. Here again we encounter the phenomenon of poverty, chastity and obedience being practised by a band of men who have voluntarily chosen to live a communal life in segregation from the rest of the people. I refer of course to the Essenes. Again, what inspires them to these abnormal austerities is the sense of being engaged in a Holy War. They think of themselves primarily as warriors. This is to be the 'War between the Sons of Light and the Sons of Darkness', the war of wars, the final overthrow of the powers of evil, and the beginning of a new age and a new world. They have been chosen as the 'Elect of the New Covenant'. What has happened in fact is that the ancient ideal of the Holy War has been revived and reformulated. It expresses itself now not in a limited historical context, but on a cosmic and eschatological scale. The last age of the world has come, and a remnant at least of the Chosen People has not been found unprepared. Their communal settlement is a camp of war. They are borne up by the sense of the approaching battle, and their minds and wills are directed outwards, away from the natural world, away from wives and houses and property and from all that normally constitutes a man's happiness. The sense of watchfulness and expectation possesses them to the exclusion of all else; it is intense enough now to carry them through their whole lives in poverty, chastity and obedience. The same sense of the imminence of war explains too the intense preoccupation with holiness, and therefore with ritual purity, which is the other main characteristic of the Qumrân

community. The menace of the enemy and the holiness of God are the two fundamental ideas which must pervade a man's soul if he is to be uncompromisingly poor and chaste and obedient. They are the inspiration of all religious of all ages.

It is almost superfluous to point out how these ideas survive and achieve a sublimer dimension in the New Testament. One thinks of our Lord's own warnings, uttered at the very end of his life. 'What I say to you, I say to all: Watch!' (Mark xiii, 37). 'Watch and pray that ye enter not into temptation' (Mark xiv, 38). One remembers St Peter's 'Be ye sober and watch, for your adversary, the devil, as a roaring lion goeth about seeking whom he may devour' (I Peter v, 8). One remembers that for St Paul faith, hope and charity are shield and breastplate and helmet (I Thess. v, 8; Eph. vi, 16, 17). More than ever must the Christian man see his life in terms of the Holy War. More than ever must he be filled with the consciousness of a malignant enemy before him, immensely powerful and filled with hatred for the holy people of God.

Clearly, however, merely to be aware of the enemy is not enough. He must be fought and crushed. Satan himself is now the adversary, the dedicated instrument of evil. The curses Israel once hurled against her enemies, we Christians hurl against the devil and his angels. Solemn ritual cursing formed a distinct part of the preparations for the Holy War. So it does to this day. It cannot be too much emphasized that the curses and expressions of hatred in our scriptures are inspired by the Holy Ghost. Christians should use them as heartily as any Israelite warrior ever did, against their spiritual adversary.

In this connection there is another vital factor to be discussed. We may call it 'The Certainty of Victory'. Those whose strength is in the Name, Yahweh, cannot fail in battle and must not fear. It is a matter of sacred duty. Fear belongs to the sphere of evil and weakness. It is a sign that the individual concerned is no longer filled with holiness. His presence in the army is a source of danger to the rest. He may infect his fellows and so deprive them too of their charismatic strength. It is with this in mind that Gideon commands 'all who are fearful and trembling' to depart from Mount Gilead, before joining battle with the Midianites (Judges vii, 3), and the same measure is expressly legislated for in Deuteronomy (Deut. viii, 17). At all costs fear must be purged

out of the community of warriors. The certainty of victory depends not on the size of the army, but on the holiness of God. Here once more lies an elemental truth which it is vital to recapture from the ideals of the Holy War. Without it, poverty, chastity and obedience can hardly be preserved in their integrity. In the heart of the consecrated religious it is vital that there should be no fear. He must be absolutely certain that the evil of his own times will ultimately be crushed by the holiness with which he himself is possessed.

III. THE RELIGIOUS STATE IN CHRIST

One after another the great founders of the religious orders teach their subjects to see their life in terms of a holy contest against sin and the devil. In this they are utterly true to the scriptures, and to the ancient spirit of Israel. That one enters religion in order to vanquish Satan in the power of God's holiness, remains to this day a sacred matter of fact. The austerities of the religious life continue to be, in essence, the austerities of the war-camp. But far more than this, they are the austerities of Christ himself. One cannot remember often enough that he is the prototype of all religious, the very source of holiness, and as such the conqueror of the 'Prince of this world'.

In the moment of his victory the religious state achieves a new meaning. Poverty strips him of his garments; chastity hammers and nails the pain of all the world into his body. And in becoming obedient even to the death of the Cross, he overthrows for ever the kingdom of Satan, and enters as a co-equal into the holiness of God. What else is there for a Christian man still to want, when he finds himself called to live in union with him in the religious state?

In simple truth it must be said that there is no getting used to the wonder and happiness of being a religious; of being absorbed so uncompromisingly into the holiness of God, dedicated so utterly to crushing the evil of one's own times. The only real hardship here, the only real sadness, is not being a good enough religious, not being true enough to the poverty, chastity and obedience into which our Lord and our religious founder so graciously invited us. For relentlessly and unmistakably, first and last, that invitation reaches us in the last great cry from the Cross. And on the Cross what else could poverty mean except the nakedness of

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.

THERE 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