

LIFE OF THE SPIRIT
ON PSALM XCIX

BY
ST AUGUSTINE

[*Translated by Dominic Devas, O.F.M.*]



HE psalm just sung, dear brethren, is a short one, and its meaning is quite plain. I say this to put you at ease; there is nothing heavy here. However, just because the matter is so straightforward we must be as attentive and alert as we can. The spiritual meaning underlying the open sense, that is what we want to get at, as far as God gives us grace to do so. God's voice—use whatever medium he will—is always God's voice, and none other can please him. Thus, would we please him, when we speak it must be he speaking through us.

2. *A psalm of praise*—such is the inscription: few words, but big with meaning: may they lay such seeds within your hearts as to yield a big harvest and fill a storehouse of good grain for the Lord. The psalm urges us to rejoice in the Lord—that is its bidding: and, because the seeds of blessing have been scattered everywhere, the psalm demands world-wide jubilation, not simply from one isolated corner of the world, or one household or one community.

3. SING JOYFULLY TO GOD ALL THE EARTH. Has all the earth then heard this divine call? All the earth. The whole earth sings to God joyfully, or will do so. The blessing spreads abroad beginning with the *Church that is in Jerusalem* and passing unto all nations (Luke 24, 47), everywhere laying evil low and building up goodness. Yet over all the earth are good mingled with bad, and everywhere are both to be found. Over the bad the earth groans, and over the good sings joyfully. Such emphasis is laid on this *singing joyfully*, on this psalm as a *psalm of praise*, that we must enquire more closely into its meaning—what is its real significance? There is another psalm (88, 16) in which we find the phrase, *Blessed is the people that knoweth jubilation*. That must be something notable of which the knowledge makes people blessed. May he who is the source of all happiness help me to understand what I would say, and you to understand what you hear. *Blessed is the people that knoweth jubilation*: let us hasten to achieve this jubilation; and, for this, we must understand it. What would be the point of putting this psalm—*Sing joyfully to the Lord all the earth*—into practice and rejoicing ourselves until we understand what jubilation really is? That would mean jubilation on the lips merely and not in the heart, for understanding is the voice of the heart.

4. Now I am going to illustrate my meaning in very familiar language. When a person is rapturously happy he has no need of words to express himself: there are notes of joy that are wordless, the voice of the soul abounding in joy and striving not to probe its meaning but to express its ardour. A man, beside himself with joy, breaks out into a confusion of sounds, lacking all precision and meaning, into a *noise* of exultation without words. The joy is made evident by the noise, a joy so immense no words can be found to express it. You find this sort of thing in singers; and often, I am afraid, in those of the lewder level. Not such as theirs is our jubilation; theirs is busy over evil and is the voice of confusion; ours is busy over good and is the voice of praise. Again, to make the matter clearer, take the well-known example of those who till the soil. How they rejoice in its fruitfulness: they may be reaping, or treading out the wine or gathering in the fruit, but all the while they are singing, full of happiness in the earth's richness and fertility; and then suddenly their elated souls take wing, as it were, and sounds without words break into their song. That is jubilation—observe it, the next time you have a chance, unless you have done so already. And yet must we be ever on our guard, lest what *we* note be of a sort God would destroy. Alas—there will be no end to the thistles—grow they will—so, whilst we note, in those who exult over evil, a jubilation that is doomed to condemnation, we offer to God a jubilation that will at last be crowned.

5. How can we embark on such jubilation? By associating ourselves with nature's endless praise. Think for a moment of the created universe, the earth and the sea and the firmament and all that is in them; note the origin and causes of them all, the force of seeds, the order of birth, their measure of permanence, the manner of their dissolution; without any confusion the ages roll forward; across the firmament move the stars; the progress of each year is unfolded, we watch the lengthened hours, the measured months—and in them all, some unseen force, soul or spirit, call it what you will; and in all living things—vestige of their unity—an appetency for what pleases, a shrinking from what harms, and a care for their integrity; and in man, over and above life and hearing and sight and so forth, powers which he shares with animals, there is something he holds in common with the angels—his acknowledgment of God. This is the proper quality of mind; and as the eye distinguishes white from black, so does the human mind discern good and evil.

As a man thus passes in review all created things, and classifies and names them all, he should ask himself: Who made all these? Who created them and set me in their midst? What are all these

objects of my scrutiny, and I myself, with my power of scrutiny, what am I? And who is he who made both scrutinised and scrutiniser—who is he? Declare him—and that you may be able to do so, fashion of him a concept in your mind. You can think of something without being able to put it into words, but you cannot put into words what you have not yet been able to frame in your mind. Think of God, then, before you speak of him; and that you may have food for thought, approach him. You get as near as you can to anything you mean to talk about, in order to study it and not be deceived. Material things are seen with the eyes: God is perceived by the mind, and held fast by the will. Where is a heart so clear-sighted as this? *Blessed are the clean of heart for they shall see God* (Matth. 5, 8). I hear those words, and believe them and, as best I can, understand them. The will, then, is the vehicle of sight, and God cannot be seen but by the *clean of heart*. But I also read in Scripture: *Who can say: my heart is clean, I am free from sin?* (Prov. 20, 9). All creation has been the object of my thoughts, and I have, in sky and earth, perceived as far as I could the material side of things, and in myself who speaks the spiritual. I live in my members; I move my tongue, speak articulate words, am intelligible in my speech, and, by means of the senses I can appraise the objects around me. Thus I am intelligible to myself, but how can I mount above myself? I am promised the vision of God; there must then be some way of purifying my human heart—so much is clear from Scripture. Though as yet unseeing, you must fit yourself to see what you love. Only for the impious—swept far away from God: *Behold they that go far from thee shall perish: thou hast destroyed all those disloyal to thee* (Ps. 72, 27); only for such is no sweetness found in the hearing of God's name. What then of ourselves? Some are far off and in darkness, with eyes so wounded as positively to dread, not desire, the light. We are far off too. Listen: *Come ye to him and be enlightened* (Ps. 33, 6). That you may approach and see, hate your darkness: condemn what you are, that you may come to be what you are not: evil you are, just you ought to be: but just you will never be if evil still pleases you; sweep that from your heart, crush it out and purify your heart, for therein he, whom you long to see, longs to dwell. Every soul drawing near to God is re-made interiorly according to the image of God. In that image he was made originally, but distance brought dissimilitude. There is no question of material distance in this approach or withdrawal from God: unlike—and you are miles away; like—and you are very near. In his desire for our approach our Lord wants first to make us like him: *Be the children of your Father who is in heaven, he says, who maketh his sun to rise*

upon the good and bad, and raineth upon the just and the unjust. (Matth. 5, 45). If you would elude the enemy of all mankind, learn to love your enemies. As charity grows in you and moulds you into the likeness of God, your very enemies share in it; and thus do you resemble him whose sun does not rise for the good alone but for good and bad, and whose rain does not help the good only, but the bad as well. The nearer you get to this ideal, the truer will your charity be, and God will begin to become real to you. Are you returning to him; or is he—whom you are thus beginning to know—approaching you? But he never withdrew from you: your own aloofness was the sole measure of distance. Material things are just as near the blind as the seeing. Where both are together, the surroundings are the same for both, yet one is present and the other absent. You cannot say a blind man is present to the things around him because he cannot react to the light in which they are all clothed and so has *no sense* of them. That surely is absence rather than presence. Where two stand on the same spot, because the condition of their eyes is different, although the material surroundings remain identical, one is really there and the other is rightly thought of as absent. To be absent from a place means to have no sense of it. Now God is everywhere present, everywhere entire. *His wisdom reaches from end to end mightily and ordereth all things sweetly.* (Wisdom 8, 1). As is God the Father, so also is his Word and his Wisdom, Light from Light, God from God. What do you long to see? What you would see is not far from you. From none is he far, for *in him*, as the Apostle tells us, *we live and move and have our being* (Acts 17, 27-8). How great a misery to be far from him who is everywhere.

6. In charity, then, build up that likeness to God; and be constant in meditating upon him. *The invisible things of him . . . are clearly seen, being understood by the things that are made.* (Rom. 1, 20). Scrutinise created things, admire them and look for their creator. You will rejoice in the measure of your likeness; or, *unlike*, be repelled. Charity is the basis of *likeness*; and as charity grows you begin to approach and to 'realise' God, for *God is charity* (1 John 4, 8), and to see how much or how little there is of truth in your conception of him. Before you 'realise' God, you fancy you can discourse upon him: once you begin to 'realise' him, you see how impossible it is to declare what you see. But is that going to reduce you to silence? Is all praise to cease? Away with such ingratitude. Honour is due, and reverence and great praise. See how you stand, on whose merit you rest, face to face with whom? Man is face to face with God: on God's mercy, not on man's merit do I take my stand:

and his mercy is worthy of praise. But how shall I praise? I cannot declare even the little I can realise *in part through a glass darkly* (1 Cor. 13, 12). Remember the psalm: *Sing joyfully to the Lord all the earth*: make that universal jubilation your own: sing joyfully *to the Lord*, that is, do not dissipate your praise on this, on that: all created things can be enunciated once for all: he alone, who spoke and all things were made, is ineffable. He spoke and *we were made*; of ourselves we cannot declare him. His word, wherein we are enunciated, is his Son; but he became weak that we, in our very weakness, might declare him. And yet though we rejoice over the Word, we can find no word adequate to express it. *Sing joyfully to the Lord all the earth.*

7. SERVE YE THE LORD WITH GLADNESS. Servitude sounds bitter. A servile condition speaks of bonds, labour and distress. Have no misgivings about this service of the Lord: no groaning here, no indignant murmuring, no effort to get put up for sale and transferred elsewhere; everything is at peace and the same master has claimed us all. What a grand thing it is, brethren, to serve in that great house. Do not fret about bonds. Confess to the Lord, and attribute your bonds to your own deserts. Praise the Lord, and your bonds turn to ornaments. *Let the sighing of the prisoners come in before me* (Ps. 78, 11). *Serve ye the Lord with gladness.* But these are not idle, empty words. With the Lord service is free, for it is love that drives, not force. *For you, brethren, have been called unto liberty: only make not liberty an occasion to the flesh, but by charity of the spirit serve one another.* (Gal. 5, 13). Truth delivers you: love enchains you. *If you continue in my word you shall be my disciples indeed: and you shall know the truth, and the truth shall make you free* (John 8, 31-2). You are both bond and free: a slave by creation, free through your creator's love of you and yours of him to whom your very being is due. Serve—but not grudgingly: murmuring alters nothing except yourself, for you serve still, but as a bad servant. You are God's servant, God's freeman: but look not for such manumission as would withdraw you from his house.

8. *Serve ye the Lord with gladness.* This gladness will only be completely perfect when corruption yields place to incorruption: what is mortal to immortality (1 Cor. 15, 54). Gladness will be perfect then, jubilation unalloyed; praise will know no end, love no scandal, fulfilment no dread, life no death. But what about this present life? Is there to be no joy now? But without joy how can there be jubilation? And what, then, would be the meaning of: *Sing joyfully to God all the earth*? Joy there must be, plainly; if only in the hope of the future life, here but faintly savoured, there to enwrap us through an

through. But the corn, howsoever abundant, must needs grow up in the midst of chaff: there is cockle beside the wheat, and the lily is among the thorns. What does holy Church say? *As the lily among thorns, so is my love among the daughters* (Cant. 2, 2). Among daughters, note, not among strangers. God! How thou dost strike us down! How wilt thou console or strengthen us? What are thy words? *As a lily among thorns—what thorns?—so is my love among the daughters—what daughters?* Whose are these daughters thus likened to thorns? He tells us: *thorns* in their manner of life, *daughters* in virtue of my sacraments. Would that we sorrowed over strangers: less deep our groans than now: *If my enemy had reviled me, I would verily have borne with it. And if he that hated me had spoken great things against me, I would perhaps have hidden myself from him: but thou, a man of one mind, my guide and my familiar, who didst take sweet meats together with me* (Ps. 54: 13, 15). What feast is this in which they share who are, yet, not going to remain with us? What feast but that of which the Psalmist speaks: *Taste and see that the Lord is sweet* (Ps. 33, 9). Over such we needs must groan.

9. But he who would rid himself of all such sorrows at the hands of the imperfect—what shall he contrive? Where shall he betake himself? Will the solitude serve his purpose? But scandals can reach him there. His aim is a secluded holiness based on having no contradictions whatever to suffer from anybody. But wait awhile—what if before he attained to so elevated a degree of holiness no one had been willing to put up with anything from him? Does not his desire to evade the duty of tolerance convict him of defect, and show his holiness to be at the mercy of every passing inconvenience? Listen to St Paul: *Supporting one another in charity, careful to keep the unity of the spirit in the bond of peace* (Eph. 4, 2-3). *Supporting one another*: is there nothing about you others must put up with? That is very remarkable—but is it not more likely that the case stands thus? We grow more tolerant towards others in proportion as others have less occasion to show tolerance towards us.

Oh! but no one ever has anything to put up with from me.

Indeed! Then put up with them.

Impossible—their manners are quite insufferable.

Ah—how evident it is that there is much about you which others have got to put up with: *Supporting one another in charity*. You would abandon, then, all human contacts, and seclude yourself from everybody. But of what use is that? Are you so perfect that none can be of service to you? Or are you going to blow the bridge because you know you have got to the safe side of it before the rest? I urge

upon you all—rather it is God's voice: *Supporting one another in charity.*

10. But perhaps someone will say: Yes, of course, it's quite wrong and cruel to refuse to be of service to others; but let us get away with a few: I shall be all right living in the company of a few good men. But that is not the lesson our Lord taught: he never condemned the servant for stealing what he had got, but for not using it to good purpose. Of course slothfulness is a kind of theft and may be punished as such: *Wicked and slothful servant* was our Lord's condemnation. But he did not say: you stole my money; or: I gave you something, and you have not restored it intact. I punish you—he said—because you have not turned what I gave you to good purpose, because it has not increased (Matth. 25, 26). See how avaricious God is for our well-being. Still—our friend persists—what business have I got with crowds? Let me go apart with a few good men. Very well, then—a *few good men*: but whence are you going to produce them? However, granting that all are good, including your selected few, your idea is excellent: it is an admirable plan to associate with such as have chosen the quiet life, away from the restless crowds, the tumult of men: like ships in harbour safe from the stormy seas. But are untroubled joy and the jubilation of the blessed to be found there? Not yet: temptation remains, with its ceaseless soliciting, its tears. Every harbour has an entrance, else no ships could get in: at times a gale will get in too; and ships have been known to crash and break up, even though no rocks were there. But—you will say—if there is no safety in harbour, where can it be found? Surely it is better to be in port than on the open seas? Yes, of course, that is true, that must be acknowledged at once; but all I say is that, even in harbour, ships must have a careful eye on their moorings if they are to avoid trouble: all must be firmly secured, though allowing for a certain amount of free-play—in other words, mutual forbearance: and good seamanship is still necessary when strong gusts of wind are blowing up from the outside.

11. But to get back to these havens of refuge, these monasteries as we call them, what has the superior—or rather he who serves the brethren therein—what has he to tell me about them? I must, he tells me, be very careful so that no abuse creeps in: not numbers but quality is my aim: I cannot have anyone who is unsuitable, and, of course, no evil living person could possibly be admitted. But—I ask you—how can you tell who ought to be excluded? Life inside the monastery is itself the test: a man must enter before he can be recognised as unfit; how can you exclude such a one desiring thus to be put to the test, and how can he be tested unless he be

first admitted? You tell me you exclude all evil-doers and subject all who would enter to rigorous inspection. But do all open their hearts to you when they come? They do not know themselves, how much less can you! Many purpose to lead the religious life integrally, welcoming the common life, wherein none calls aught his own, and where all are of but one mind and heart in God (Acts 4, 32-3). They plunge into the testing furnace—and fall to pieces. How can you possibly know a man who is still unknown to himself? Your purpose is to free the good from all association with the unfit? Persons who talk like that should see what success they have in keeping bad thoughts out of their mind, so that not even the suggestion of evil enters. But I never consent, they say. That may be, but the suggestion entered all the same. We should all like to be able so to control our minds that no evil suggestion should ever enter. Who knows how they get in? But here we are struggling away day by day, each man in his own heart at grips with a crowd. Avarice or lust or gluttony or ambition, singly or together they tender their evil suggestions. He keeps aloof from them all, rejects them and turns away: but how difficult not to be struck by one or other of them. Where can we find security? Not here certainly, not in this life. Our hope is in God's promises; and when we attain thereto, and the doors are closed and the doorposts strengthened (Ps. 147, 13), there, in the heavenly Jerusalem, our security will be perfect, with jubilation abounding and great joy. But now our praise cannot but lack confidence; so that, in fact, as Scripture says, we should *praise no man till death*. (Ecclus. 11, 30).

12. Everywhere mistakes are made. Some, who ought to embrace the religious life, do not; others, who should not, rashly embark upon it. Some, who would praise the religious state, do so in so unbalanced a fashion as to ignore the evils inevitably incidental to it: others condemn it, but their blame is so ill-judged and bitter as to blind them to any good in it at all: and they stress, quite out of all proportion, the evils they see or fancy they see. Praise, no matter of what, if devoid of balance is always bad. People are drawn onward, then find themselves in quite other company than they anticipated, and then—disgusted by the bad people they meet—they part company with the good.

Look into your own experience of all this sort of thing, and learn to profit by it. Take the Church of God: generally speaking it is praised: the Christians, we are told, are fine people, unique almost: the Church is wonderful; all its members love one another and help each other in every way. They are all very abstemious, and spend much time in prayer and the singing of hymns. They are to be found

in every part of the world, praising God and living in perfect harmony amongst themselves. Now someone, hearing this and encouraged by so fair a portrait and unsuspecting there can be any evil where there was so much praise, approaches and enters. Very soon he comes across evil-living persons about whom not a word had been said to him before. Disillusioned at contact with evil, he severs himself from the good. Not infrequently such persons, disappointed and angry, open out into abusive vituperation. Christians?—we hear them saying—do you want to know what sort of people these Christians are? Why—avaricious and grasping; crowding into playhouses and the amphitheatre for every kind of circus and spectacle, and then filling their churches on feast days: heavy drinkers, always *on the make*, envious of others and quarrelling violently amongst themselves. Such bitter critics are quite blind to the fact that, though some may be as they describe them, not all are like that; and that there are good ones, too, about whom they say nothing: just like the reckless enthusiast, on the other side, who said nothing about the evil.

How does Holy Scripture balance up this question of praise and blame of God's Church? *As a lily among thorns, so is my love among the daughters* (Cant. 2, 2). A man listens and reflects; the lily pleases him and he advances; he holds the lily and puts up with the thorns. Such a one deserves praise and wins the kiss of the spouse saying: *As a lily among thorns, so is my love among the daughters*. The case of the clergy is just the same. People praise the priesthood, laying stress on the good lives of their priests, their devotion to duty, their kindness, the endless pains they take over those who are sincere, never seeking their own interest but the things that are of Jesus Christ. But such praise ignores the admixture of evil. Others blame the clergy severely as avaricious, immoral, contentious, picturing them as covetous of other people's goods, heavy drinkers, grasping and boastful. Behind such blame lies hatred, as folly lay behind the praise. Would you praise? Acknowledge that evil is mingled with good. Would you blame? Do not lose sight of what is good.

And the monasteries? What sort of life-in-common is lived there? Oh—the religious are wonderfully holy men, always busy over their prayers and the praises of God and study, and, outside, working with their hands. So is their time spent, free from all private avarice; whatever is given them by benefactors they use as need and charity dictate; no one contrives anything for himself which the others do not share; love and mutual support prevail throughout. Stop! have done with your praise: what do *you* know of what goes on inside? Do not ships strike against each other in stormy weather, even in harbour? A

man, bent on peace and anticipating no obstacles, enters a monastery. He finds some who are unworthy; people whose unworthiness, however, would never have become apparent had they not been admitted. This is inevitable. The imperfect must be tolerated to start with, in the hopes of improvement; and if they are to be tolerated they cannot be excluded altogether. Our friend, then, finds the exercise of patience quite beyond him. 'What', he exclaims, 'has pursued me hither? I fancied this was to be an abode of charity'. Angered by the molestations of a few, he fails to persevere in the fulfilment of his promise, throws up his holy purpose and involves himself in the guilt of an unhonoured vow. Once outside again he joins the ranks of the most envenomed critics, and recounts everything he found most objectionable, but nothing else: and all he says is true. But, for the sake of the company of the good, much that is difficult must be put up with from the imperfect. How much to the purpose are the words of Scripture: *Woe to them that have lost patience* (Ecclus. 2, 16). And what is more he, who could endure nothing, belches out the bad odour of indignation to keep back those who would venture in. 'What sort of people are they?' someone asks him. 'Envious, quarrelsome people', he replies, 'intolerant, avaricious: this one perpetrated such and such a crime, that one another'. Oh, wicked man! why have you nothing to say about the good? You boast about being unable to put up with them, and say nothing about those who were prepared to put up with you and your degenerate ways.

13. How illuminating our Lord's words are, dear brethren, which we read in the Gospels: *Two shall be in the field; one shall be taken and one shall be left; two women shall be grinding at the mill; one shall be taken and one shall be left* (Matth. 24, 40): *two men in one bed; one shall be taken and one shall be left* (Luke 17, 34). Who are the two in the field? The clergy: *I have planted*—says St Paul—*Apollo watered, but God gave the increase* (1 Cor. 3, 6). *You are God's husbandry* (ibid. 9). We are those working in the field—one shall be taken, one left; the worthy taken, the unworthy left. The two at the mill are the laity. Why a mill? Because in the world they are kept to a continuous round of secular concerns, as it were to a mill-stone; and thence one shall be taken, one left. Who are taken? Those who do good works, succouring the indigence of the community, helping the poor, loyal in faith, invincible in hope, vigilant in God's service, calling down evil upon none, loving as best they may enemies as well as friends, utterly true, husband to wife, wife to husband, knowing none other—these are the ones taken. And the one bed? Those who are longing for quiet, with nothing to put up with from anyone, who say: Let us get away from the crowds and

secure ourselves in peace; these are as people looking for bed, rest and no cares. But thence, also, one shall be taken, one left. Brethren, make no mistake about this—if you would avoid disillusionment and live in charity, know that in every way of life in the Church you will find the ‘unreal’. I do not mean that everything is sham, but that shams are found everywhere. Thus there are bad Christians and good ones; and if the bad seem to overshadow the good, that is because they are like the tares in the field concealing the good grain. But the good grain is there; step up and see for yourself; rub it and prove it and taste it.

As with religious men, so, too, with religious women. You find some lacking good order, but is that a reason for condemning their state? Some do not remain hidden, but wander about from house to house, attracting attention and haughty, speaking unwisely and too much, inclined to ebriety. ‘They may be consecrated virgins’, you say, ‘but of what use is physical integrity with a disordered soul? Far better married and humble than religious and proud, for marriage rather imposes a check than nurtures conceit . . .’ and so forth. But again, because some are unworthy are we going to include in our condemnation the many religious women who are *holy both in body and in spirit* (1 Cor. 7, 34)? Surely not—no more than we should be forced to praise, because so many are good, those actually who are not so. It is always the same wherever you turn: *One shall be taken and one shall be left.*

14. But it is high time we finished the psalm: it is quite simple. *Serve the Lord with gladness*: that is for you, for all of you who are tolerant in charity and cheerful in hope. Serve God, not grudgingly and in bitterness but gladly and with love. COME IN BEFORE HIS PRESENCE WITH EXCEEDING GREAT JOY. Facile is the world’s joy; ours must be established in God: not merely tripping over the lips but deep in the soul’s depths: *Come in before his presence with exceeding great joy.*

15. KNOW YE THAT THE LORD HE IS GOD. All know God to be Lord but the psalmist is referring to Jesus Christ whom so many did not think to be God: *Know ye that the Lord he is God*: may the message never fade. You have crucified him—you have scourged him, spat upon him, crowned him with thorns, mocked him, lifted him on to the cross, fixed him there with nails, pierced him with a lance, set guards over his tomb: *he is God*: HE MADE US AND NOT WE OURSELVES. He made us: all things were made by him, and nothing came into being but by him. How then can you be so arrogant and proud? Another made you; and he who made you suffers at your hands.

One would think you were your own creator from the way you boast about yourselves and extol your own achievements and plume yourselves on them. Well for you that he who made you may still perfect you. *He made us and not we ourselves*: we should not be proud: all the good we have is from our maker. Our own achievements? By these we are lost. His work in us? By that we win the crown. *He made us and not we ourselves*. WE ARE HIS PEOPLE AND THE SHEEP OF HIS PASTURE. Each one and all, the flocks and the single sheep. How devoted is our shepherd: he leaves the ninety-nine and goes down to seek the one, and carries it back on his shoulders redeemed in his own blood. Unafraid, he goes down to death for the sheep, because in rising up he will hold it as his very own. *We are his people and the sheep of his pasture*.

16. GO YE INTO HIS GATES WITH PRAISE. The gates imply the entry, the beginning. Begin then with praise, acknowledging that you did not make yourselves, and praising your creator: all your good is from him; evil came in abandoning him. The psalm is called *one of praise*; use it then as such. *Go ye into his gates with praise*. In by the gates go the sheep, not tarrying without, a prey for wolves. How shall we enter? With praise—that is the *open door* for us. As another psalm puts it: *Sing ye to the Lord with praise* (146, 7). For us within, of what sort is this praise to be? Largely an acknowledgment of our human frailty: for such confession matter is never lacking, for hardly can a man's life be so transformed here that nothing blameworthy appears in it. It is right that you should reprehend yourself without waiting for the verdict of him with whom rests the power of eternal condemnation. As you enter, then, praise by confessing your unworthiness. When shall such cease? Only in that haven of rest where we shall be like the angels. But the confession of *praise* shall not cease: there will be no more confession or acknowledgment of sin, but always will you confess to or praise God by acknowledging that he is God, and yourself created by him; that he is your protector and yourself beneath his wing, hidden away in him: *Thou shalt hide them in the secret of thy face* (Ps. 30, 21). IN HIS COURTS WITH HYMNS GIVE GLORY TO HIM. First in the entry, *in the gates*; then when you have entered, *in the courts*, praise God: as you enter, praise by confessing your sins; when you have entered, praise by acknowledging God: *Open to me the gates of justice: I will go into them and give praise to the Lord* (Ps. 117, 19). Does confession end on entry? Even after entry there is confession—but not of unworthiness. Were they sins our Lord confessed when he said: *I shall confess to Thee, O Father, Lord of heaven and earth* (Matth. 11, 25)? His was the confession not of accusation but of praise.

17. PRAISE HIS NAME BECAUSE THE LORD IS SWEET. Look for no cessation of praise: it will be as food for you, at once strengthening and sweet. *Praise his name because the Lord is sweet.* HIS MERCY ENDURETH FOR EVER. Once you have been delivered his mercy towards you will not cease, for it remains in his constant protection of you throughout eternal life. *His mercy endureth for ever* AND HIS TRUTH FROM GENERATION TO GENERATION. This may mean *all* generations, or that of earth and that of heaven. The former is the generation wherein mortal man has his birth, the latter generates unto immortal life. His truth prevails in both; not merely in heaven but also on earth, else we should not read: *Truth is sprung out of the earth* (Ps. 84, 12), nor would the very Truth have declared: *Behold I am with you all days, even to the end of the world* (Matth. 28, 20).

REVIEWS

AWAKE IN HEAVEN. By Gerald Vann, O.P. (Bles; 7s. 6d.)

In *Awake in Heaven* there is unity of thought but there is not unity of expression. One is continually asking oneself for whom is the book written? There are many beautiful passages but it is not a beautiful book, and since the beginning is the most beautiful part one reads on with a sense of increasing disappointment. The beauty of the beginning is glimpsed again in 'What think ye of Christ?' and in passages of 'Dogma and Freedom' and 'Come, live with me', but it is disturbing rather than relieving. One has seen what Father Vann can do and one regrets that he has not done it continually—it is not because it is beyond him. The reason is surely to be found in the making of the book—it has been put together from two series of broadcast talks, from conferences delivered at the University chaplaincy, from papers read at the Plater Dining Club and on other occasions and from various published articles. There have been a few additions and of course there has been a certain amount of dove-tailing, and Father Vann's claim is true, the whole book does form a single argument . . . but he is apparently not arguing all the time with the same person. (To Father Vann, whose great thesis here and elsewhere is that all man's 'making' must make for unity, pp. 74 and 75 and *passim*, this must be a particularly galling criticism, but whether it is justified or not may be judged by reading consecutively Chapters 4 and 5, and the contrast is all the more striking if you start at the beginning of the book.) There are one or two minor criticisms on matter: it is hardly true to define inspiration quite baldly as that 'whereby the biblical writer is guided as to what to put down or not, like a pen in