

HAVING OUR FACULTIES¹

THOMAS GILBY, O.P.

KEEP the good thing committed to thy trust by the Holy Ghost who dwelleth in us,² so St Paul brings out two sides of a relationship. First, ourselves who are told to keep the good thing, literally the deposit granted to us that we ourselves may render it to God; second, the indwelling Spirit, the Gift himself present in person. Correspondingly we may consider a double movement in prayer, the ascent of the mind and heart to God, which is what we do from grace and the virtue of religion, and the coming down of the Spirit who breathes through us so that we are rather acted upon than acting, who *himself giveth testimony to our spirit that we are the sons of God*.³ It is with the first we are engaged in this article, reserving the second until later.

Myself I always pause over the motto on conventual writing-paper which reads 'God Alone'. I can guess what it means, with the reminder that God is neither one particular sort of thing among others nor does he exclude his creation. Perhaps statements in religion which always have to be qualified are like rules which always have to be dispensed from or explained away—we are better without them. When writers who are certainly not pantheists in intention declare that all is God they may be true in a homiletic sense. In a deeper sense, too, modern theologians of grace warm to the teaching of Peter Lombard, the forerunner of the great Scholastic theologians, that charity itself is the Holy Ghost in our souls. After all, much is left out of the doctrine which insists only that grace is a special condition of human nature and a special quality of human activity: it may even decline to the impoverished notion expressed by the child when asked what a state of grace meant who replied, please, it's not being in a state of mortal sin.

St Paul, however, seems to draw a distinction. *The love of God is shed abroad in our hearts by the Holy Ghost who is given unto us*⁴.

¹ A continuation of 'Science in Holiness', *The Life of the Spirit*, xi, pp. 345-57. February, 1957.

² 2 Tim. i, 14.

³ Rom. viii, 16.

⁴ Rom. v, 5.

St Thomas certainly parts company with Peter Lombard. Paradoxically his argument is that slurring over the human response instead of dignifying charity detracts from it, for charity is friendship which is not all give on one side and take on the other.⁵ God gives us the power to give, indeed that seals him as the only full and perfect cause, *causa universalis*, for his is not a swamping causality but a creative and cherishing causality. He makes us us, he makes causes cause, his love makes our love ours, and in his friendship our friendship is born.⁶ *Divine wisdom reacheth from end to end mightily and ordereth all things sweetly.*⁷

I

*I meditated upon the works of thy hands,*⁸ and so we start by glancing at the internal dynamic structure in which the Holy Ghost is lodged. *Know you not that you are the temple of God and that the Spirit of God dwelleth in you?*⁹ Know thyself: that was a maxim of Stoic ascetical teaching taken over by the Christian writers; though it is doubtful whether St Thomas puts an emphasis on introspection and examination of conscience quite equal to that of some post-Reformation schools of spirituality, it is thoroughly in accord with his general method that we should know our abilities and decide what we can do before asserting what we ought to do. God does not command impossibilities, says St Augustine.¹⁰ It is by accepting the facts of our nature and learning from the sound teaching of the Fathers and Doctors of the Church based on the Holy Scriptures that our vocation will be disclosed to us, an ideal better because truer than the strain and nonsense recommended to us by queer death-worshippers or our own underlying puritanism. Virtue, as St Thomas reminds us, consists more in being good than in being difficult.¹¹

In that sense, therefore, let us attend to ourselves, with humour and a sense of proportion. Of course the purpose is that we should arrive at a condition of natural and gracious unselfconsciousness. It is not the same as a state of anaesthesia. This you will not find the accredited authors recommending; indeed the overclouding of intelligence, the *obnubilatio rationis*, was the occasion of their

5 2a-2ae. xxiii, 1, 2. References in this style are to the *Summa Theologica*.

6 1a. xx, 2. xlvii, 3. cv, 5. 7 *Wis.* viii, 1.

8 *Ps.* cxlii, 5. 9 1 *Cor.* iii, 16.

10 *de Natura et Gratia*, 43. Migne PL xlv, 271.

11 *e.g.* 2a-2ae. cxxiii, 12, ad 2. cxxxvii, 1, ad 1. cxli, 8, ad 2.

being standoffish about sex. The unselfconsciousness to be aimed at is not the suppression of you and your awareness, but of your self-centred ego, awkward and all thumbs, preoccupied with your own reactions instead of being at ease. The object of the exercise is to find release, the justification of theological analysis is to inspire devotion. *In my meditation a fire shall flame out.*¹²

Practices all past, afterwards are we set free for intercourse with God. To this the happiest comparison is play, or even fun.¹³ Divine wisdom speaks of this joy: *I was delighted every day, playing before him at all times.*¹⁴ *Take thy pastime*, we are bidden, *and do what thou hast a mind.*¹⁵ The text adds, *but not in sin or proud speech.* The danger is the less likely if we keep to the modest moments of pure joy—the ting-tong-tang of a guitar, a child untying a parcel, the smell of the sea. We do well not to scorn the unpretentious, or mistake the humble for the drab and the meek for the feeble.¹⁶ Not deaf to so many echoes from the Scriptures, when we know how God *exalteth the humble*¹⁷ and learn from our Lord who was *gentle and lowly of heart*,¹⁸ then can we be mindful of his mercy. ‘What of vile dust? the preacher said’—so Chesterton begins a poem attacking those who would despise God’s visible creation, and so also St Thomas speaks of the *corpora vilia* providing the best analogies for the heights of theology; their very unpretentiousness makes for an absence of conceit.¹⁹ You will notice this about the classical authors on the spiritual life, they do not set off to go in for fine writing and they do not seem terrified about falling into bathos. Let us bring the lesson home to the hack-work of Scholasticism.

Admittedly we are not entrancing subjects contrasted with God. Sin is really rather tedious; what interest it possesses is not because of the sinfulness but, as St Thomas notes, because of the surround.²⁰ You might not think so to judge from the disproportionate amount of time and space spent on it by some manualists, especially on its not most important sector. But then, there was more theology in St Teresa’s little finger than in the whole of, well, without disrespect, let us call him Leibig or Schiaparelli. If

¹² Ps. xxxviii, 4. 2a-2ae. lxxxii, 3.

¹³ St Thomas, Exposition de *Hebdomadibus*, Prologue.

¹⁴ Prov. viii, 30. ¹⁵ *Eclus.* xxxii, 15. ¹⁶ 2a-2ae. clvii, 4. clxi, 3.

¹⁷ Luke i, 52. ¹⁸ Matt. xi, 29. ¹⁹ Ia. i, 9, ad 3.

²⁰ e.g. 1a-2ae. lxxii, 1. Ia. xliv, 3. Disputations, I *de Malo*, 4, ad 2; III *de Potentia*, 16, ad 3; *de Virtutibus in communi*, 2, ad 5.

creatures hold boredom in their hearts it cannot be said that the Scholastic apparatus adds much to their fascination. The rigmarole of potencies and faculties and habits and acts and formal objects: do we have to go into all that? Yes, to some extent we do.

The religious value of staying there is slight. *All men are vain in whom there is not the knowledge of God, and who by these good things that are seen could not understand he who is; neither by attending to the works have acknowledged who was the workman.*²¹ Nevertheless we must know creatures if they are going to bear us to their source and end. The Church frowns on recruiting people to give up the world for God before they know something of what they are giving up. *Thus saith the Lord that formed the earth and made it, the very maker thereof, who did not create it in vain, who formed it to be inhabited, I am the Lord, and there is no other.*²² There Isaias proclaims the complete sovereignty of God and warns us to respect the created world: you could scarcely set him down merely as a humanitarian with mildly religious tastes.

The principle cuts both ways; it may not be a question of appreciating a pleasure but of experiencing a sadness. Later on, when we come to consider the Gift of Knowledge, we shall find a sense of pity without patronage for the flaws in creation, a catch of grief in our affection. *Blessed are they that mourn, for they shall be comforted.*²³ For we should have a fellow-feeling with the body of humanity in which we are born and to which we belong. Our Lord himself *called his disciples to him, and said, I have compassion on the multitude,*²⁴ and he was thinking in the first place of physical hunger. Our spiritual life will profit more from joining the queue than staring up at a frieze of figures with expressions at once hieratic and vacant. A friend of mine—he would have been untouched by a sermon in church—became a Catholic after seeing *Broadway Melody of 1928*.

But what has this to do with dabbling in Scholasticism? 'All very well', you may say, 'for those who make a hobby of their spiritual life. Then they like the appropriate catalogue, like small boys with Hornby trains and others with *Reed's Nautical Almanac*, *Wisden*, or the *Catholic Directory*. They make interesting reading for those who like that sort of thing. I don't.' No cause for worry there—a religious calling does not demand ecclesiastical tastes.

Certainly not everybody is called to be a professional theologian,

21 *Wis.* xiii, 1.

22 *Is.* xlv, 18.

23 *Matt.* v, 5.

24 *Matt.* xv, 32.

or even to be acquainted in an amateurish fashion with its technique. And certainly, as we shall emphasize in the course of these articles, there are ways even now of knowing God which cannot be reduced to statements about him, still less about ourselves. Like Hierotheus, who was *non solum discens sed et patiens divina*, not only learning about but experiencing divine things, we may perceive God through friendship and sympathy as well as through information and erudition.²⁵ For those who feel they can there let the matter rest, no more need be said; but there are many who would like to know how it all works, even if they are doubtful about the Scholastic mechanics.

In fact few can afford to dispense with the traditional categories, particularly in that part of theology which deals with human responses. Take, for instance, the distinction between meaning and willing on one side and sensing and feeling on the other. How important it is when we should make an act of contrition and yet are unable to screw ourselves into sensible emotion. The most useful sermon I ever heard in my life was by the late Fr Cortie—a Jesuit and astronomer whose scientific training had done nothing to diminish his humanity—who showed why we should discriminate between this and that psychological act, for one was essential while the other was not.

If this holds true of the *incipientes* whose charity grows by avoiding sin, it is no less true of the *proficientes* whose charity grows with more positive virtues and gifts.²⁶ You are not asked to go introspective or to watch yourself working through the different stages of the spiritual life. Nevertheless you should not be like those who *either sacrifice their own children, or use hidden sacrifices, or keep watches full of madness*.²⁷ Hence some sort of enlightened self-knowledge is necessary for healthy self-discipline, so that you do not try to make your will feel, or what is less of a strain though rather more dangerous, you do not let your feelings take the place of your will. Similarly you will not pin your ideas to images or fancy that your images are ideas; and you will be spared the not uncommon fear that you are not praying because you are not thinking very hard. You will be provided with some sort of working distinction between infused contemplative prayer and acquired meditation, between resting quietly with God and knitting your brows over reading this article.

²⁵ 1a. i. 6, ad 3.

²⁶ 2a-2ae. xxiv, 9.

²⁷ Wis. xiv, 22.

III

No, there is nothing for it but to do what Plato and Aristotle did, and talk of *parts* of the soul. If that is the case, then let us do it in their tradition, a tradition carried on by the great Scholastic theologians. It admits of variations. Thus St Augustine's division of the memory, understanding and will, echoed in the *Penny Catechism*, was the foundation of his mystical teaching on man as the image of God and on the indwelling of the Holy Ghost.²⁸ St Thomas accepted it, but his own working division was somewhat different.²⁹ Then also there are all sorts of other divisions, more or less useful, more or less complicated: Jeremy Bentham enumerated thirteen 'springs of action', including such headings as the Interest of the Spying-Glass, the Interest of the Altar, the Interest of the Gall-Bladder, and the Interest of the Pillow.

The traditional Scholastic division has the merit of being simpler, and also of having been used by many of the great Catholic mystics since the thirteenth century. Sometimes they applied it for themselves and sometimes they relied on their confessor; we may name at once Tauler, St Ignatius, St John of the Cross, St Catherine of Siena, St Catherine of Genoa, St Teresa—none of them easily malleable or standardized temperaments. The first step is to focus on our properly human powers of knowing and loving, for it is with these in our eyes that the spiritual life is mostly engaged. We have other powers which we share with vegetables and animals; none of them is irrelevant, least of all a good digestion.³⁰ If, as sometimes happens, duodenal ulcers appear to be an occupational disease with some religious groups, usually male, then it is unfair to put all the blame on the cook. Fr Aidan Elrington was interested in the correlations between virtue and diet and wrote a paper on the subject in the *Hawkesyard Review*. He died in the garden, as perhaps he would have wished, picking peas for his community at Cambridge.

Normally and directly, however, the spadework for the Gifts of the Holy Ghost is done at the level of consciousness and choice. Generically our powers of knowing are twofold, those that are essentially bound up with organic processes, namely our senses,

²⁸ *de Trinitate*, ix and x. Migne PL xlii.

A. Gardeil. *La structure de l'ame et l'expérience mystique*. Paris, 1927.

²⁹ 1a. lxxvii, 1, ad 1. lxxix, 6, 7.

³⁰ For the principles at work see 1a. lxxvi, 7. xci, 3. 1a-2ae. xxxviii, 5. 1, 1.

and one that is inwardly independent of the body, namely our mind or intelligence. The senses themselves are divided into the five external senses and the four internal senses, of which the imagination and the instinct for what is good for us are perhaps the most important in the life of the spirit: the division is traditional but not sacred. The mind is also called the power of reasoning from its function of putting two and two together, a necessity thrust on us by our present condition yet resented, as it were, by the mind which always seeks to achieve direct and intuitive knowledge.

Similarly our powers of loving are twofold, those that work through and in the body, namely our emotional appetites, and one that is intrinsically uncommitted to a physical organ, namely our will. The emotions, or passions as they are called by the Scholastics, fall into two groups, those that react to emergencies and are governed by fortitude, and those that react to the pain-pleasure principle and are governed by temperance. The former are perhaps the more important in the spiritual life since fears are worse enemies than enjoyments. The will when picking and choosing means to ends is called, analogously to the mind's reasoning procedure, the free-will.³¹

All these powers have various functions, some of which are assisted or trained by habits.³² Some of these habits are good and are then called virtues.³³ Of these some we acquire for ourselves and others are infused in us with sanctifying grace.³⁴ The *Summa Theologica* enumerates more than ninety species, including the Cinderella virtues of *gnome*, a part of prudence which tells us how to deal with exceptional cases, and *eutrapelia*, a part of temperance which makes us gay on the proper occasions.³⁵ In addition to the theological, moral and intellectual virtues there are other habits called the Gifts of the Holy Ghost, of which more later.³⁶

IV

A formidable range of batteries! Fortunately they are not hostile, and the devout soul is not expected to charge into them

³¹ The general scheme will be found set in forth 1a. lxxvii-lxxxiii. Emotions, 1a-2ae. xxii-xlviii. On the precedence of fortitude over temperance, 2a-2ae. cxli, 8.

³² 1a-2ae. xlix-liv. ³³ 1a-2ae. lv-xl. ³⁴ 1a-2ae. lxiii, 3, 4.

³⁵ 2a-2ae. li, 4. clxviii, 2. ³⁶ 1a-2ae. lxxviii, 1, 3.

like the Light Brigade at Balaclava. All the same it is not surprising that attempts have been made to spike them, both by psychologists and by spiritual writers. We shall more accurately apprehend what the powers of the soul are and what they are not if we appreciate their objections.

Until about twenty years ago there was a strong prejudice among academic psychologists against what was called *Faculty-Psychology*. Partly it was a healthy protest against schools which had treated the soul as a piece of machinery which could be stripped down and taken apart into its bits. A living unity was made to look suspiciously like a mere bundle of powers, each of which could be scrutinized separately and in some cases be treated as acting on its own, though it was best to relate them by the principles of Associationism. Our powers were like so many different entities, or mannikins, as Spearman called them. All this was changed under the influence of more dynamic schools of psychology which insisted that the human person acted as a single whole and as such should be studied.

Two points are worth making here. The first, and less important, is that some psychologists of the Unconscious have aggravated some of the worst features of the out-moded *Faculty-Psychology* by treating psychic forces as if they were *things* and by turning a science into a mythology. The use of metaphors is valuable, but they tend to get out of hand, as when the conscience, or its equivalent, is personified as a Mrs Grundy or her equivalent. The second point is that even those psychologists who reacted most justly against the exaggerations of *Faculty-Psychology* have been compelled to discriminate between various human abilities.

However our present interest is with the backwash into theology. Allowing for a time-lag we may notice a similar movement among spiritual writers away from the analytic abstractions of Scholasticism towards a more concrete presentation of the individual soul confronted with the living God of the Scriptures. It is the drama of Jacob wrestling with the mysterious stranger and left sprained but blessed, rather than the puzzle of searching into a system of reasons.³⁷ They too object to the usage of ascetical writers who refer to the religious mind doing this or the devout will doing that, together with the corollary that

37 Gen. xxxii, 24-30.

the prayer of recollection is something like Pelmanism and that an act of the love of God depends on the will summoning up its will-power. Some practical guides which stem from this tradition go even further and almost suggest that an act of charity can be elicited irrespective of what goes on in the rest of us.

What had been neglected was the principle, often invoked by St Thomas, that persons are the true centres of human activity, *actiones sunt suppositorum et totorum*,³⁸ actions are of the whole substance. I am a single undivided substance which may be manifested through various *kinds* of activity. These can be the objects of scientific study, but any given act in fact is more than a *kind* or species, it is an individual event for which the whole self is responsible.³⁹ What acts is *me*, not my soul or my body, still less my powers, and though it is a convenience to talk of them as principles of activity this should not imply any real fragmentation.

I am not a committee of powers, and there is not, or there should not be, a psychological split such as would be opened were there a censor or guardian who watched my reason pursuing a line of thought, my imagination floating away, my sensuality taking charge. Too analytic a spirituality and you may find yourself recommended to make an act of charity; ready now, one, two, three, off you go, as it were into a vacuum. So also, take a deep breath now, pause—act of the presence of God. As if mind and heart can regularly work from a merely verbal stimulus or only from conventionally religious images! The life of prayer is not to be enclosed in a cell apart from the rest of the organism. Attempt it, then do not be surprised if it produces the grrr! of Browning's *Soliloquy in a Spanish Cloister*.

Human activities all the same are not the undifferentiated responses of an undifferentiated subject to undifferentiated objects. Our environment is a universe of things which can be partly classified into really distinct types; that they are not just real types is true, but the arrangement is not merely a logical convenience. Now these distinct objects are engaged by different types of activity on our part, and these in their turn proceed from different abilities. The Nicene Creed is a different kind of formulary from the Declaration of Right and what I owe my bookseller is not like the rest of the money in my pocket; hence my profession of faith is not any sort of affidavit and the payment of a debt is called

³⁸ Thus 2a-2ac. lviii, 2. 3a. xix, 1, *ad* 3, 4.

³⁹ 1a-2ac. xviii, 8, 9.

justice not generosity. Such distinctions ramify throughout all psychology and moral science, indeed through the entire reading of ourselves and our universe. They are well understood when they crop up in ordinary speech, as when Sheridan said of a parliamentary opponent, the right honourable gentleman is indebted to his memory for his jests and to his imagination for his facts.

V

Mystical theology is but moral theology taken to the heights. It is difficult to see how it can be scientific, and not merely a documentation of mystical phenomena, without attempting some analysis and classification of human powers. As the psychologists who attacked an exaggerated *Faculty Psychology* have had to bring back the powers under other names, calling them propensities or abilities, so the spiritual writers who are rightly suspicious of a stilted artificiality still have to work with some of the traditional divisions. What they must then set themselves to do is to show how all are interconnected and unified in one single organism. That is the integrating role of the virtues which unlike the vices do not break out and go their own way as if they were pirate organisms preying on the whole.⁴⁰

Some survey of our powers of activity is but a preliminary. *I will behold the works of thy fingers, What is man that thou are mindful of him? Or the son of man that thou visitest him?*⁴¹ It is a question to be taken formally, and with no risk of identifying spiritual growth with the increase of self-knowledge or even self-control—those may follow as by-products. Christian holiness is not Yoga. Its main intent enlarges the second answer of the Catechism: to know God, love him and serve him. And really, is he not easier to know than we are?—there what a close stranger we hug to ourselves. How baffling, how fugitive, how muddled, how opaque we are: how unrewarding the examination of our motives. That we are is a sort of blind certainty, but what we are, that calls for a *diligens et subtilis inquisitio*.⁴² *Why art thou so heavy, O my soul, and why art thou so disquieted within me?*⁴³ No wonder spiritual masters teach us to turn outwards. How much safer,

⁴⁰ 1a. xlix, 3. 1a-zac. lxxv, 1, 2. lxxiii, 1.

⁴¹ Ps. viii, 5-6.

⁴² 1a. lxxxvii, 1.

⁴³ Ps. xlii, 5.

confident, generous; how much truer and better. *I will go unto the altar of God, unto God my exceeding joy.*⁴⁴

Yet the calling to God's friendship is not to a surrender and then—humanly speaking, a blank. The 'I-Thou' relationship is not just a choice in a crisis; it is meant to last and penetrate all we do. Jesus Christ is not only Lord in the spirit; he is Lord of the world, of all of our little world. *Day to day uttereth speech, and night to night showeth knowledge.*⁴⁵ So grace is expressed in the perfection of the present moment, the perfection of the immediate task. Yes, exclaimed Fr Vincent McNabb of our Lady's Annunciation, she was on her knees—scrubbing the floor.

It is in this temper, then, that we attend to ourselves. *For the invisible things of him from the creation of the world are clearly seen, being understood by the things that are made, even his eternal godhead.*⁴⁶ If we dip into the analytic books on the subject it is not in order to become like the character in *Three Men in a Boat* who read a medical text-book and discovered he had the symptoms of every illness except housemaid's knee. Still, when we read of sins we may remember St Philip Neri looking at the felons going to the galleys, and reflect that we may not be able to complete his sentence, There goes Philip, but for the grace of God.

We are not like pieces which are moved about on a board, but bear powers rooted, thrusting, struggling, sometimes battling deep within us: *I see another law in my members warring against the law of my mind.*⁴⁷ From this very agony St Thomas concludes that there is only one soul in man.⁴⁸ Here are powers strong enough to summon the nuclear energies at which we stand aghast, for what is destruction compared with the will to destroy? Moreover there is more activity within us than appears on the surface: Freud, Adler, and Jung have taught us that, and you can learn of our preconscious knowledge and the presence of God from St Augustine's *de Trinitate*.⁴⁹ Indeed before we recognize him God is there, holding us in being, giving us our powers, wholly causing every mode of their activity, sanctifying us with his grace before we deserve it.⁵⁰

A young Dominican priest—he is now an ex-prelate—was sent to a parish-house to supply for Mass before he had finished his

⁴⁴ *Ibid.*, 4.

⁴⁵ Ps. xviii, 2.

⁴⁶ Rom. i, 20.

⁴⁷ Rom. vii, 23.

⁴⁸ 1a. lxxvi, 3. See 3a. xviii, 2, 3.

⁴⁹ *lib.* ix, x. See 1a. lxxxvii, 1.

⁵⁰ 1a. viii, 3. xliii, 6. xlv, 7. civ. 1, 2. cv, 5. 1a-2ae. cix, 6. cxii, 2, 3. cxiii, 2, 3.

studies or received jurisdiction to administer the sacrament of penance. A woman sought out the prior: 'Oh, the poor father', she cried. 'I saw him just now at the bottom of the church and I asked him to hear my confession and he said he was sorry but he hadn't his faculties. Oh, the poor father, and he looked quite nice and sensible to me he did who would have thought it!' Well, the faculties of which we are talking are more profound than canonical qualifications. They are parts of the dynamic constitution of our very being, and sometimes to be recognized as such if we are to bring *into captivity every thought to the obedience of Christ.*⁵¹



LET NOT YOUR HEARTS BE TROUBLED

B. M. FREDERICK

PRAYER means turning our hearts and minds to God. No two persons converse with him in identical ways; even in corporate prayer we each infuse the same words with our individual needs and aspirations, and private prayer, whether vocal or meditative, is essentially personal. But we all have hearts and minds and, broadly speaking, the same problems: and the greatest of these is aridity. No one has ever advanced in the spiritual life without experiencing times when devotion seems non-existent, prayer distasteful or humiliatingly difficult, meditation moribund and discouragement an ever-present temptation, but though our books warn us of these trials our own experiences are different from anything we expect to undergo.

At first the spiritual life is straightforward. We know our faults and weak points and strive earnestly to eradicate them, and we make visible progress. We feel that we are doing well (as indeed we are) and prayer becomes increasingly attractive, our Lord becomes more real, we are more intimate with him and find delight in inventing small ways of pleasing him. If we have a gift for meditation pictures spring to the eyes of our mind and resolutions to our lips and our Lord whispers the sweetest words

⁵¹ 2 Cor. x, 5.