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Virtue is not in fashion. Not even the word appears in most catechetical or theological writings. For us today it carries a musty smell of moralizing; it suggests a puritanism which we have good reason to mistrust, for we no longer want the prohibitions and obligations imposed on us by society to be the immediate criteria of our conduct. Even when it is the prohibitions and obligations imposed on us by the Church which are in question, we no longer feel that the quality of our Christian lives is to be judged according to our capacity to conform to the patterns of behaviour imposed on us in this way.

This is, however, not the only reason for our mistrust of virtue. We also react against its suggestion of the cultivated soul, the ideal of the 'righteous man' whose virtues are his adornment. And that is indeed what virtue meant at the beginning of our culture: the Greeks were so taken by virtue because it was the spiritual equivalent of physical beauty. Against this, on the one hand, we feel that this ideal is too self-centred: other people and the mystery of being and of the world seem to become mere pretexts or instruments for our personal perfection. On the other hand, we have also learned to distrust the clear conscience: Hegel, Marx, Nietzsche, Freud, Heidegger and Sartre have all, in their turn, unmasked the illusions of the cultivated soul. And Christians have reason not to turn deaf ears to these voices, since they echo the warnings of Kierkegaard, Luther, St Augustine and St Paul: it is not works that save, but faith. The acquisition and practice of virtue almost irresistibly suggests self-justification by the law, to the point of making us hesitate about following Christian tradition and calling faith, hope and charity virtues either.

In this situation, the question is not, of course, whether we should do our utmost to resurrect a term and an idea on the ground that they occupied a distinguished place in a bygone age of Christian culture and practice—although, where tradition is concerned, it is no bad thing to ask whether one is not throwing out the baby with the bath-water. No, the real question is to ask ourselves whether our attempts to give an account of our experience as men and as Christians are not lacking something. For Aristotle, virtue is what a man needed in order to conduct the business of being a man; and for St Thomas Aquinas, it is what a Christian needed in order to conduct the business of being a Christian. The business of being a man, the business of being a Christian: *that* is what interests us. And virtue interests us only if it is relevant here.

*Patterns of behaviour, maturation and virtue as a learning-process*

For anybody who has been more or less deeply influenced by the sciences of man, and particularly by psychology, the fact that our moral thinking, whether at the theoretical or at the practical level, so completely overlooks the notion of virtue is paradoxical. This is not because psychology itself is much concerned with virtue: the term and the idea are as foreign to psychology as they are to theology and catechesis. The reason is that everything makes the psychologist think in terms of patterns of behaviour, of the acquisition of these patterns, of deviations from these patterns, and so on. Likewise everything makes him think in terms of functions, of the genesis and development of the personality both singly and overall, each stage of development of these functions taken singly or together being characterized by the acquisition of new patterns, new tasks, new objectives, etc. This is true even of such apparently simple functions as those of movement or balance; it is even truer of more evidently complex functions such as perception, the gaining of an image of one's own body or of one's identity. And this also goes for sexuality, language, relationships to others, socialization, etc.

Even if we are not specialists in psychology, we have become so used to thinking of the different aspects of our personality in such terms that we have difficulty in realizing to what extent man's understanding of himself in this way is radically novel. This has two consequences. On the one hand, we are quite lost when we have to deal with an anthropology, a morality or a spirituality which are quite foreign to such an account of man—and we have to say that our traditional Christian spiritualities and moralities are in this case. It is not that they ignore the dimension of development; they do, however, rest upon much too static a conception of the various functions of the psyche. On the other hand, and as a result, we can no longer understand ourselves or a reality offered to us as a model of living—such as the Christian life, for example—if it cannot be expressed in the terms and in the light of experiences which psychology has helped to shape and which have become our own in such different fields as knowledge, sexuality, affectivity, relationships, etc.

This explains the paradox that most theologians who have acquired some practical and theoretical knowledge of psychology seem to be more at ease with a moral theology such as that of St Thomas, where the notion of virtue occupies so important a place, than with much more modern moral theologies, even those that date from Vatican II or after. They find these latter more congenial on many points; but on one decisive point they find them gravely lacking and therefore incompatible with the exigencies of their psychological theory and practice. Let us take the concrete examples of the theology of peace or of religious liberty. Contemporary theology is rich on these subjects. But for the most part it contents itself with piling up

materials culled from the Bible, from tradition, from the magisterium and from the theologies of the Fathers, of the Middle Ages, etc. They conclude by indicating the ideal of peace or religious liberty and showing how well it fits in with the Gospel. But it stops there, as if its task were finished.

Now the very valuable service which the attitude of mind that comes from the practice and theory of the psychological sciences can render is to make us rediscover what moral theology should never have forgotten, namely, that the true task of the Christian and even of theology starts where contemporary theology stops. For peace is something that has to be achieved. And the same goes for freedom. Peace and freedom are first and foremost ways of living. And as long as we have not been told how to set about this, we have missed the essential. Ethics is a practical science; part of its business is to indicate ends, but it must indicate them as *practicable* ends. Making peace involves a complex of behaviour and a large number of psychological and social functions, each of which is subject to laws: from the most unconscious aggressiveness to intra-national and international organization. A true theology of peace includes not only explaining *why* one is *obliged* to make peace in the name of the gospel but also discovering *how* one *can* do so. And this means making explicit the different psychological and social functions involved, discovering and assuming their laws, and formulating the options implied in Christian peace (or religious freedom) according to the laws of these different functions.

Virtue is not merely a *technique* of behaviour, but it is that too, especially if one uses the term in the sense given it, for example, by Aristotle: virtue is truly the *art* of conduct, a deliberated and efficacious habit of conduct. And this is why it is no good presenting man with his vocation to be a man, or a Christian with his vocation to be a Christian, without helping him to discover the techniques and art which will enable him to attain the objectives proposed. It is a question of qualifying a man for the business of being a man, of qualifying a Christian for the business of being a Christian, and so of enabling him to gain the necessary apprenticeship.

This is why a moral theology like that of St Thomas, at least so far as its method and objectives are concerned, meets these exigencies more satisfactorily. It is a striking fact that, in his *Summa* for example, St Thomas devotes much more attention to what we call moral theology than to what we call dogmatic theology. Above all, this moral theology does not stop at presenting charity, faith, justice, chastity, etc., as simple objectives; within its own perspectives and resources, it is very *practical*—not in the manner of a modern and casuistical practical ethics, but in the sense of an art of behaviour very sensitively alive to the differentiated qualifications a man needs to acquire in order to conduct the business of being a man and a Christian. A simple glance at the passages in which St Thomas

treats of the various virtues suffices to show that he deals briefly enough with each virtue in itself, as an end to be achieved, and that he dwells at much greater length on the qualifications necessary for the actual realization of these ends. The conclusion to be drawn from this observation is, of course, not that we must resurrect or even adapt St Thomas's moral theology to the necessities of our own time, but rather that we must meet the same exigency—and this for two reasons. In the first place, this exigency is inherent to moral science as a practical science; and in the second place, it arises imperiously and legitimately from modern man's experience of himself and from the self-understanding he gains under the influence of the sciences of man.

*Not only the Why but the How of learning*

Virtue is not, however, simply a technique of conduct; it is an art of the good. It is not only the art of doing well; it is the art of doing right. This classical distinction is critical: it introduces a new dimension which seems to move ethics into a world in which the psychological sciences have nothing to teach us. There is a very real problem here. It is the case that the various sciences of man do not claim to teach us to do right, but merely to teach us the laws and conditions required for the good functioning of the personality in its different parts and as a whole. It therefore becomes tempting to think that everything that is of the order of the good, of the specifically ethical, is foreign to them. This position is not entirely false, and we shall come back to it. But we must define the issue if we are to avoid all too frequent misunderstandings.

Let us, for example, take the classical distinction in moral theology between *actus humani* and *actus hominis* (*human acts* and *acts of the man*). Man has functions which animals also have: all his biological functions, and a certain number of psychological functions, both in regard to his knowledge and to his affectivity and even in regard to relationships with others and socialization. Behaviour in this order is truly human conduct, whence the term *actus hominis*; but it is not the activity of what is uniquely and specifically constitutive of man, of his intelligence and will. Which is why *such* activity is termed *actus humanus*.

The psychological sciences are far from denying some such distinction, but they do invite us not to think of it in too schematic a fashion. The relation between the two levels distinguished in this way are much more intimate and complex than could be imagined before they were submitted to a minute scientific study. Even if thinkers like Aristotle and St Thomas went further than many in their affirmation of the nexus between these two levels, the modern sciences of man compel us to go even further and not to be content with their conception of these relations. We can, for example, no longer be satisfied with speaking about the psychological, unconscious

sociological, etc., dimensions of behaviour in terms of simple conditions. The image of condition suggests what American marketing men call conditioning: the packaging. Freedom, intelligence, will, as spiritual faculties, on this view of things become the contents of a packet wrapped up in a whole series of packaging. By dint of unwrapping layer after layer—the psychological, the unconscious, the sociological layer, etc.—one ends up by uncovering freedom, unveiled and pure at last. But in such a case one would in fact not find anything at all: not because there is no such thing as freedom, but because there would no longer be a human being at all. Body and spirit, conscious and unconscious, etc., are not inter-related in the external sort of way suggested by such terms as instrumentality, condition, even participation.

Two important results flow from this. On the one hand, what the psychological sciences have to teach us about man's psychic functions cannot be exterior to any field of force which would be exclusively that of morality and of the good; what they have to teach us about our functions are not a matter of a simple condition or groundwork or instrument of moral conduct. Where man is involved, even in the case of *actus hominis*, 'doing well' is intimately connected with 'doing right', the art of doing well is not irrelevant to the art of doing right. On the other hand, and precisely for this reason, what the psychological sciences have to teach us cannot be restricted to the sphere of *actus hominis*: all this lore affects the *actus humani*. To think that in order to preserve the originality of functions that are specific to man, the functions which have been called spiritual, it is necessary to withdraw them from the laws which govern the well functioning of each part and of the whole, is very naive to a psychologist, even mistaken, as being contrary to everything which he has discovered about man's psychic life. It is as necessary to acquire working skills in the sphere of the *actus humani* as it is in the sphere of the *actus hominis*; both necessities are much more intimately connected than is often supposed, and the demands which they make are in the end justified by the same reasons.

The originality of the moral good in relation to mere well functioning does not therefore entail *either* that the order of the good does not require the acquisition of functional skills in the sphere of the good, *or* that such ethical functional skills have nothing to do with the exigencies of mere functional perfection. The fact that virtue is an art, even a technique, of the good does not prevent it from being a technique of diverse operational functions involved in the action in question; on the contrary, it means that virtue must be such a technique. And when it is a question of the Christian virtues, the supernatural character of the good makes no difference. For if the supernatural goes beyond the natural, it is not by way of withdrawing it from the laws of the natural. The fact that faith is supernatural does not mean that it escapes from the laws of understanding, any

more than charity escapes from the laws of affectivity or chastity from the laws of sexuality. Here again virtue is no more than the possession of a certain pattern of behaviour, and its acquisition is nothing more than the acquisition of this pattern. And once again moral discourse cannot remain content with moving people to discover how good charity, faith, etc., are; it must go on to sort out the complex of differentiated patterns in question. Likewise, moral education cannot remain content with encouraging people to pursue the good of virtue, it must also teach them how actually to acquire this pattern. It is by no means evident that the present ineffectiveness of Christian morality is due solely to men's bad will or to the novelty of the Christian message; it may also be due to the fact that we bother so little about the *how*, in the belief that we have said everything when we have explained the *why*. Virtue is the art of the *how*. This art of the *how* is, of course, entirely shaped by the *why*; but talking about the *why* is not in itself enough.

*Learning as learning from and learning with*

We are, therefore, now in a better position to see why the image of human behaviour which results from the psychological sciences compels both theoretical and practical moral discourse to set the greatest store by the notion of virtue and to articulate the laws and issues of the different qualifications which a man must acquire and possess in order to enable him to conduct the business of being a man. And the same principle applies to the Christian in the business of being a Christian.

There is, however, a difficulty, especially as regards the Christian life. And this difficulty faces the classical notion of virtue as acutely as it does the representation of human behaviour which arises out of the psychological sciences: both seem to be centred exclusively on the development of the subject and the pursuit of his perfection—whether this is a matter of moral perfection or of perfection seen as the optimum development of a man's various psychic functions. Both are preoccupied with balance, self-fulfilment, maturity, and so seem to be egocentric. There is a problem here even from the purely natural point of view: openness to others and the mystery of things and of persons does not seem to find a place in this scheme. And from the supernatural point of view, the problem is even more grave: Christian life is a gift, it consists in receiving the gift which another, God, makes of himself. And it is not only this life which is received from another, the very qualifications for living this life are also received: the Christian virtues are *infused*. Neither the classical discussion of virtue nor the problems arising out of the psychological sciences seem to do justice to this decisive aspect of the matter.

Now there is one respect in which we must be quite uncompromising: the goodness and the happiness of the Christian life (to limit ourselves to this aspect, although we should also have to demonstrate

the same thing in regard to the purely natural plane) are a *received* goodness and happiness. The good which a Christian has to do and to live out is goodness coming from somebody else. We could go so far as to say that he can and must do good because another, God, has done him good. The impulse and starting-point of the good he does and the goodness he lives out is the good God has done him by loving him as he does love him and by giving himself to him in the way he does give himself. Goodness is the trace of another's passing, the imprint of the good which another has done a person.

To insist on this does not, however, mean that we must do away with the category of virtue and qualification; on the contrary, it underscores its importance. For this trace left in us by another's dealings with us is nothing if it is not operational and a dynamic of conduct. And this is because it is the consequence of another's *action*. God's dealings with man is an action on his part, an activity; it is conduct, good at work. It is God's action which is alive in us. God does not stop short at putting man in a certain condition, he also energizes him. We may well have neglected the dynamic aspect of the biblical and patristic notion of man as the image of God. What St Thomas took from the Greek Fathers was that it was first and foremost in making man the principle of his own actions that God made him in his own image, because he enables him to act on the model and inspiration of God's action on his behalf. And it is indeed operational functions which ensue from God's action in man. The fact that they are received from another in no whit alters their operational structure, subject to their own laws and objectives, with their own genesis, differentiation and integration. On the contrary: if we want to speak of God's action in us, this action must become action in us. The passing of another within us sets us going. The passover of God sets man *en route*. Virtue is first of all a moving force, a dynamic, the trace of another's movement towards us, and so Christian infused virtue is the dynamic with which a man finds himself equipped as a result of another's dealings with him. To think that in order to respect the otherness of the Other who is the source of supernatural life, it is necessary to withdraw it from the régime of the operational dynamics of man, with all that this implies in the way of genesis, development and structuring, is to make a mistake about what it is that constitutes the originality of this supernatural life. The Christian life has nothing to gain from such a manoeuvre; on the contrary, it has everything to lose. For on such a view we could no longer think of it in terms of a dynamic force which is concretized in forms of behaviour whose laws and structures it behoves us, under the movement of the Spirit, to discover, in the same way as ordinary human life is concretized in forms of behaviour whose laws and structures we must discover.

And once again the methodological and even the epistemological demand which the psychological sciences make upon us tend in the

same direction. This is not because psychology has any special competence to speak to us about God, or about his dealings with man or the way in which these dealings set man on the road. Psychology knows nothing about God's doing man good or about this becoming man's life. On the other hand, it is very much its business to teach us that this is how things work even at the natural level. Everything that psychology has to teach us about the constitution and development of the personality shows us to what extent the actions of others are constitutive of our personality and what is most subjective and personal in that personality. To a great extent, and precisely so far as what is most personal to him is concerned, man is shaped and constituted by what other people do in relation to him. This is true already at the strictly biological level, where an individual is what he is in virtue of the genetic endowment he has received, but it is even truer at the psychological level. And it would be easy enough to show, by means of psycho-analysis, for example, that a person is constituted by the words which others say about him, by the words (real or mythical) which others put in his mouth. But here again such words, such dealings, such encounters, are crystallized in operational structures, in certain dynamics and patterns of behaviour. And once again this is because they are themselves the consequence, the imprint of something which in the person who originates them is itself a dynamic, operational structure, pattern of behaviour. Psychology has, no doubt, nothing to say about the existence of a God, it does not say that this God does man good and that for this precise reason man lives with a life which is the very life that animates the action of God towards man. But it can at least tell us that even the ordinary natural life of man is already the product of the life which animates the dealings of the people who constitute our being. It can also tell us that such dealings of other people come through in us in the shape of operational dynamics and structures. So, if there is a God, and if this God does man good and wants man's good and finds joy in doing all this, then the life which ensues in man must, like any other life, find concrete expression in functions and behaviour.

This is all that Christian virtue is about. The only point of a theology or a catechesis or a practice of the Christian life is to bring this to light. We tend to think that it would be anachronistic to do this by way of talking about the virtues. The sole purpose of this article was to suggest that this supposition might be questioned. Man's experience of himself and the way in which he articulates his experience under the influence of the psychological sciences seem to demonstrate that the supposition is not valid. God's dealings with us, the way in which he summons and constitutes us, will become alive in us only by means of that art of the good which we call virtue—even if, in fact especially if, this good is in the first place the good which another does us and the good which he discovers in us.