

because it is bad to name Jesu in mind, but if he thinketh of some thing and holdeth this meditation, which is only his own habitual exercise, as a special visitation of our Lord and thinketh it more than it is. For know well that a naked thought or a naked imagining of Jesu or of any ghostly thing, without sweetness of love in the affection or without light of knowledge in the reason is but a blindness and a way to deception if a man holdeth it to be more in his own sight than it really is. Therefore I consider it safer that he be humble in his own feeling and keep this thought in no esteem until he can, by the habitual use of this thought, feel the fire of love in his affection and the light of understanding in his reason. Lo! I have told thee a little of this matter as it seemeth to me, not affirming dogmatically that this is sufficient and that it is the truth, for if thou thinkest it to be otherwise or if any other person enjoyeth by grace the contrary to what I have written here, I will stop speaking and give place to him. So long as I have truth to live with it is enough for me: I need not feelings.

*Translated from the Thornton Manuscript
by HILARY FROMBERG.*

ALPHA AND OMEGA

BY

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ALPHA AND OMEGA—these, the first and last letters of the Greek alphabet, are used to signify that Christ included within himself all. He is the beginning and the end, the sum total of all things, from which all creatures derive, to whom they all tend. This title is true of Christ because he is God from whom all creatures derive and towards whom they all tend. God is the sum total, the beginning and the end. But he is not the sum total or the beginning and the end in the Eastern sense that creatures are an emanation from God, that history is the slow return into God of all that came out.

We all derive from God as things made from nothing by the act of his power, we tend towards him as creatures who behave as he designed us to behave, and as godlike men with grace who will see God as he is in himself.

There is, however, a heresy rampant, derived from false ideas of the beginning and end of man. It takes the form of a false mysticism identifying us with God; it would also eliminate all use of the senses in its approach to God, eliminate even the incarnation. It is an attractive theory, firstly because it flatters us, and secondly because it seems to be the sublimest culmination of existence. What

could be more flattering than to think that we become God, what more sublime as an end?

Metaphysically this theory is untenable. God has made us, that is, given us a personal existence; and in so far as we are, we are good. To be absorbed into God would mean our ceasing to be, it would be an annihilation of a good, which being of its nature spiritual, was of its nature meant for immortality. Further, our absorption into God is no gain to God, for God is infinite. The net result of that operation would then be: our extinction and absolutely no change in God.

The origin of this theory goes far back into the history of philosophy and of religion. The East has ceaselessly poured forth the idea that matter is evil and that therefore we must escape from it in order to reach happiness. Here Zoroastrianism, Hinduism and Buddhism, in both its Hinayanan and Mahayanan forms, agree. man must escape from the body. There is antagonism between spirit and matter—therefore this ceasing to desire, this excess of mortification, this longing for the ecstatic, even this escape from being.

The interesting thing about these dizzy theories is that they are based on a truth, namely that there is a tension between mind and matter, the body dragging the spirit down. But it is the conclusion drawn that is incorrect. The tension shows a disorder, but not that matter, or the body is essentially evil. We must take both into the Kingdom of God. It is not a case of the triumph *either* of the spirit or of the body, but of a triumph of both, only in due order. The Resurrection of the Body is not a quaint survival, but a deep and divine truth. We are creatures of mixed nature, mind and matter, soul and body; we are the links between two worlds, neither angel nor beast, but both. One cannot help recalling the telling phrase of Pascal: 'L'homme n'est ni ange ni bête, et le malheur veut que qui veut faire l'ange fait la bête'. (*Pensées*. No. 358.) 'Man is neither angel nor beast, and the misfortune is that he who would act the angel acts the beast.'

The Eastern Sages not only discovered the fact of the Fall in us—without seeing its cause or its true nature, but exaggerating—they also saw that we were meant for divine things. But here again they went to extremes, thinking us not merely equal to angels, but even capable of divinity. How near the truth this is, and yet how abysmally far can only be seen by comparing this their flight of desire with the revealed reality, a reality seemingly less yet, in fact, all, compared to nothing. For Nirvana was not unjustly described as a void, even though later thinkers turned it into the Absolute. For, as we have seen, he who would be absorbed into God is seeking annihilation. Either he remains in being and is

therefore distinct from God, or becomes God and loses his identity.

But we are meant for better things than our present precarious state, than this groping condition in which all attracts but nothing satisfies. The soul cries out for God. God has answered the call.

God's answer is what the Catholic Church calls sanctifying grace, and never was a word less adequate to carry its meaning. Sanctifying grace is a God-likeness in our being, a transformation of our being so that it becomes capable of sharing in the life that God himself lives, that is knowledge and love of his infinity. We are made as like God and as near to God as can be without losing our own identity and consciousness.

We are 'made partakers of the divine nature'. (2 Peter 1, 4.)

'We are now the Sons of God. . . . We know that when he shall appear, we shall be like to him: because we shall see him as he is.' (1 John 3, 2.)

'I am the Way, the Truth and the Life', Christ himself said.

All that is true, and nothing could be conceived more exalted. But there is yet one more attempt on the part of the 'dualists' to abandon the human side of this plan. They say that we should abandon all the sense side of our thinking, abandon indeed the Incarnation and *a fortiori* all saints and liturgy, in fact 'faire l'ange' as Pascal put it ages ago.

Why is this wrong? God created the world and saw that it was good, created us and saw that we were good. When St Augustine was wrestling in his mighty mind with this heresy, which in his day was called Manicheism, it was to the text of Genesis just quoted that he turned. And to it we turn also. Creation, being the act of God, is good. Our bodies, the world of sense and of sound, of sight and touch, are all essentially good. They must all be made to worship God. Nature praises God by being, and we by seeing its essential goodness, and by using what God gave us to use.

Our bodies and our senses are good even if they are perverted, for they were made by God. They are our natural means of getting to God; and he sanctified them, and proved this point for ever beyond cavil by taking flesh himself. Consequently so long as the senses help us to know God, we use them; whilst the life of Christ, which is the life of God dressed in human clothes—'in habit found as a man' (Phil. 2,7)—cannot ever be cast aside. We know that God is love by Christ's love in his dying for us, we know God is Truth since Christ claimed to be the Truth. He died for the Truth.

Never are we meant to be permanently alienated from our bodies. There are moments when perhaps God takes our minds into his own hands and infuses concepts independently of all sense perception. God is at liberty to do so, but we are not at liberty to presume

that he will. When he does, if he does, then we let be; at other times we struggle along as best we may. That our senses fail us at such moments is a failure; in heaven they too will be illumined.

There is however one condition of prayer or communing with God which is devoid of sense satisfaction, and indeed almost of sense content, and that is the period of dryness, called by St John of the Cross the Dark Night. There are two sides to it, that of the sense and that of the mind.

A time comes when the familiar pictures, images, imaginations, actions and emotions cease to do their function of encouraging acts of the will, namely acts of union with, or love of, God; at such a time it is perfectly legitimate to abandon the use of all such, except those which have a sacramental value, the sacraments themselves and the humanity of Christ, and chiefly Holy Mass, for these of themselves increase grace. That is the teaching of the Church. 'Unless you eat my flesh and drink my blood you shall not have life in you.'

Apart from such things, and with the advice of a confessor, it would be right, for the time being, to stop using what ceases to aid.

The dark night of the spirit is different. Here we have a condition more common among good lay folk than is perhaps generally realised. The dogmas of the Church dressed in their familiar words and associations become in early manhood jejune; they lose their attraction for the heart; there seems a dissociation between them and the will to believe.

If this comes through riotous living, through slackness or through toying with pride, then such a period of dryness is anything but the mystical Dark Night of the Spirit. But if the layman, or the religious, or the priest, is earnest and conscientious, and not sinning mortally nor very often venially, but by frailty mostly, and yet the ordinary spiritual concepts seem void, then maybe he is in the Night of the Spirit.

Two courses of action are presented to the soul, either to hang on or to slacken. The former results in agonies of mind, darkness and groping, particularly over some factual dogma such as the Holy Eucharist, or some remote one such as the Virgin Birth, and only to be relieved after months of struggling, nay years; but to be relieved in real truth by great peace and joy, great insight and love. The other course is to abandon all at the beginning of the road. It is by trial and darkness, by courage and endurance, through these Nights, and through these only, that the soul reaches union with God; all else is embracing a ghost.

The Cross is not a work of art beautiful and rare, but a stark and terrifying reality. We must carry it if we wish to share in the Kingdom of Christ.

This Darkness will not endure, and the symbols of God and of his truths that have been collected and sifted through the ages, will grow again in the soil of the soul refreshed by the frosts of a spiritual winter: the symbolism of the Mass, of the Holy Eucharist, of candles even, those glimmering and fragile symbols of our equally fragile faith. Whilst the dogmas and dogmatic facts will have a richer and deeper content, a new and more ethereal light shining upon them, now no longer the light of natural admiration for a beautiful thing, but the true light of faith, hidden and slender, but so beautiful as to make just earthly beauty seem almost ugly.

Christ is the Beginning and the End, the Alpha and Omega, Christ the God made Man, made visible, for us to feed our senses, those senses which at first take too much to themselves and then are purified; for us to feed our minds, which again take too much self delight and again in their turn are purified, not abandoned, for Christ is the Alpha and Omega, Christ knowable by sense and mind.

THE BOOK OF JOB ¹

BY

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THE books of the Hebrew Bible may be divided into three groups: the Torah, the Prophets and the 'Writings'. This latter part is made up of works composed, collected or published for the most part after the return from exile to Babylon. One of the books it contains has as its title the single word *Job*. It is the name of a person who from the very first lines is presented to us as a just man, a believer, one who is rich and fortunate in life. The reader then leaves earth to catch a glimpse of what is taking place in heaven. Job is accused by Satan of self-interest in his piety. Yahweh allows Satan to afflict Job in the first instance in his material possessions and his family. Job accepts this trial. Still sceptical in the face of this proof of disinterestedness, Satan obtains from Yahweh permission to strike Job in his person, by disease. Job again submits. Three of his friends arrive to comfort him: Eliphaz the Themanite, Baldad the Suhite and Sophar the Naamathite. In their presence Job begins to speak. The prose narrative then ceases abruptly to give place to *poetic dialogue*.

¹ Being the first chapter of a book, *Job*, published by Les Editions du Cerf; here translated by K. Pond.