

EDITORIAL

WHEN we review our periodic confessions, apart from our possible regret that they have been less regular than we could wish, we often experience a deeply felt sense of dissatisfaction not merely that they appear so automatic, but that in some indefinable way they fail to cover our lives as a whole, that they penetrate only part way beneath the surface and do not really reach down to the very roots of our being. We examine our consciences with reasonable care, we retail our list of specific sins with a sincere intention of eliminating them by God's grace from our lives, our act of contrition fulfils all the conditions laid down in the moral theology books. Yet a feeling is left over that there is still in us an actual and inveterate state of sinfulness, which can hardly be accounted for by any positive sins that we recognize and can classify, and which does not therefore appear to be dealt with by the sacrament of penance. We may even be tempted to ask ourselves whether this weekly or monthly routine is really worth while, since it seems to involve so much repetition and so little visible progress in virtue.

That all this should be so is not unnatural. We are fallen human beings, and though we are redeemed and in a state of grace, grace does not automatically eliminate all the effects of original sin. The chief effect, which it may have greatly curbed, but has not rid us of, is the tendency for the self in us to be constantly asserting its claim to autonomy; to a right to go its own way, to acknowledge no authority but its own inclinations and innate desires. This is our bad self, and it is bad because it is radically false to our true self, a constantly asserted denial of the fundamental truth of our created being; that we are free, and that only in God's service can we realize the perfection of our freedom. To renounce that service totally will lead in the end to a complete and final slavery to evil.

A partial refusal of God's service, whatever the form it takes, places obstacles in the way of the grace that God offers us. In those who are sincerely trying to give him their service, this partial refusal is generally the result of a self-love, opposed to obedient love, which is only dimly and confusedly perceived, if

indeed it is perceived at all. Frequently it takes a purely negative form; things not done because we are blinded, by our innate self-pleasing tendency, to what is in fact God's will for us, and to the consequent necessity of carrying it out. We are people with two areas in our lives; one, the events of which are consciously under the immediate direction of God's will, and the other where events are seldom if ever considered directly in relation to that will, but are governed by the human will alone, exercised in practice as autonomous and responsible only to the untutored feelings and desires of our fallen nature. Growth in holiness, which means progress in loving God by growing perfection in obedience to his will, consists in the reduction by grace of this latter area, till our life becomes more and more possessed by the area consciously ruled by God's will and subject to the power of his grace.

Long ago we received in Baptism the basic endowment of sanctifying grace, together with the virtues of Faith, Hope and Charity and the gifts of the Holy Ghost: Wisdom, Knowledge, Understanding and the rest. At Confirmation God gave us an increase of these gifts, made apt for the adult spiritual life upon which we then entered. Baptism and Confirmation took place in the relatively distant past, and often, perhaps, for lack of explicit teaching concerning them, we do not realize sufficiently the continuous and ever present part played, in our daily growth in holiness, by the gifts of the Spirit we then received. These gifts are designed by God for the completion and perfection of the basic gift of supernatural life, and particularly of its expression in the exercise of faith, hope and charity. Without them our supernatural life of grace cannot be perfected. Through their power we are acted upon by the Holy Spirit rather than enabled ourselves to take action. He works in us, as it were, by these seven different modes of operation, his is the whole of the action, to which we can only respond freely but spontaneously; for we are unable, even under grace, to contribute towards their work in us by our own direct initiative. We are worked upon, rather than ourselves working. Our basic life of sanctifying grace is perfected by the operation of these gifts; our holiness is completed for us.

Yet not entirely without our co-operation. The obstacle to the action of the gifts in us is self-apart-from-God. A self which is ever seeking autonomy, ever seeking to evade our dependence

upon and responsibility to God by complete obedience to his will, at every point in our lives. Growth in holiness then depends upon our efforts, under the power of God's grace, to eliminate the obstacle of self-seeking from our relationship to him and so from all our human relationships. The removal of this obstacle makes room for the fuller working in us of the gifts of the Spirit. It enables us to see more and more, by the power of the Spirit, what God is, and our lives and all they contain, especially our relationship to persons and things, more and more as God sees them and less and less as self apart from God, in its blindness, sees them distortedly or fails to see them at all.

Our Lord has, as we know, set us a very high standard in this matter of our human relationships. He has told us that to possess eternal life we must love God with our whole heart, our whole soul, with all our strength and all our mind—and our neighbour as ourselves. These two loves are in fact one and both together require the utter concentration of all our powers. Christ used the parable of the Good Samaritan to make clear who our neighbour is, and he set the lesson in this particular context to show that since those to whom we are naturally hostile and whom we meet casually by the way, come into that category, all closer associations come also within its scope (Luke 10, 25ff).

The first step then towards removing the obstacles to the working within us of the gifts of the Holy Ghost is to make our relation of charity to those around us a very much more positive one. It must include those we dislike, those who are our enemies and who may have injured us or whom we ourselves may have injured, those who dislike us and whom we are most inclined to hate; we must love them with a positive love that seeks every opportunity of willing their good and carrying that will into effect. To avoid them and exclude them as much as possible from our lives is not charity and is no solution of the problem set us by the obligation of loving our neighbour as ourselves. Our relationship of charity with those around us will of course include also those we love and those to whom we are attracted by natural affection and liking. Here all possessiveness and jealousy, all getting for self to the detriment of giving what God wills must be excluded. The gift we were given in Confirmation is the means by which all this can be accomplished, not of ourselves but by the working of the Holy Spirit in us. To have knowledge of

these gifts and the particular efficacy and scope of each, as the theologians analyse them and spiritual writers describe them, is to realize more fully what God wills to do for us by means of them, and is a deep incentive to take the necessary steps for their acceptance to the very limit of our capacity to be perfected by them.

With this end in view we have made *The Sevenfold Gift* the general theme of the February number. The article with the title *Science in Holiness* is the first of a series upon each of the seven gifts severally which will appear at intervals. The article on *Confirmation* is a continuation of the similar series on the Sacraments which began in October last with *Baptism*. We all of us have a responsibility, in this matter, primarily to ourselves, but many of us as priests, teachers and above all as parents have a parallel responsibility for the young whom God has placed in our care. The meaning of the Sacraments of Baptism and Confirmation and the nature of the gifts they confer should never be left to be taken as a matter of course once the pre-Confirmation instruction has been given. It should be continuously and explicitly taught from the beginning, not in the abstract but in connection with personal relationships, the necessity and obligation of prayer and of the need of sorrow for sin. The knowledge of them can thus become, from an early age, a powerful means to the creation by grace of a vital centre in the spiritual life of the soul, living and dynamic because the heart and will are wholly *committed* to the following of Christ.



SCIENCE IN HOLINESS

THOMAS GILBY, O.P.

THE onlookers were amazed after the Apostles were filled with the Holy Ghost; they wondered, *saying one to another, What meaneth this? Others mocking said, These men are full of new wine.* With the commonsense answer, *These are not drunk as you suppose, seeing it is but the third hour of the day,* St Peter went on to give his hearers a dogmatic discourse on the Incarnation: it was not an uplift exhortation about moral values