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ties, both in themselves and in regard to the 'amounts' with which individuals **are** therewith endowed, thus **con-**tributing **valuable** assistance to the study of individual differences of intelligence **and** character.

Such, then, in a brief outline, is the course psychology has taken in the last hundred years. What its future will be we can **but** conjecture. That it has come to occupy an important position in our present day culture cannot be gainsaid, however much in some quarters at least it **may** be regretted or ignored.

AIDAN ELRINGTON, O.P.

'THE CHRISTIAN VIRTUES

IN his recent booklet on *The Catholic Conscience*, Fr. Joseph Keating, S.J., states that 'the chief obstacle to the conversion of the world to the Catholic Faith is not the opposition of its enemies, but the unworthiness of those **who** already **possess** it,' and he goes on to **ask**. 'Why are Catholics not conspicuously better than those less bountifully endowed?' May not the answer lie in part in a relative lack of emphasis on the practice of the simple Christian virtues, and a certain absence of precision in working out the practical application of these virtues to the circumstances of everyday life?

The problem is, of course, the attainment of a true balance; we need a perception of the relative importance of the different factors of the Christian life. A discussion of this sort is apt to seem ungracious in the midst of so much that is excellent, yet it may be argued that, just as the activities and outlook of the individual tend to become unbalanced and call for adjustment, so also does the Catholic body in this country need from time to time to review its position and restore its equilibrium.

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External circumstances are constantly changing, and in this matter of the Christian virtues the attitude of the world differs greatly from what it was in the not distant past. As a sequel to the general lack of confidence in religious doctrine, it has become customary to doubt those things which have been commonly associated with religion; and aided by the ingenuity of the playwright, the novelist, the scientist and the philosopher, each of the Christian virtues has been examined with suspicion, and speciously undermined. Whereas belief in them was formerly undisputed and regarded as axiomatic by nearly everyone in this country, to-day that is by no means the case. Thus it is evident that lesser emphasis was needed when both Catholic and non-Catholic had in this respect a similar ideal, than when the Catholic ideal can no longer be assumed to be that of the non-Catholic; for the minority is inevitably influenced by the majority amongst whom it lives.

Although the names and meanings of the Christian virtues have been learnt at school, and although they are frequently mentioned in sermons, nevertheless there are many sincere and devout Catholics who fail noticeably to comprehend their application to the incidents of daily experience. Not that perfection in performance is to be expected: we all fail to live up to our ideals, but it seems that the ideal itself is not present as a recognized guide to personal conduct.

Every man and woman, every boy and girl, is concerned daily with the Christian virtues: nothing can be of more universal application. It is equally obvious that other important matters, such as sterilization, contraception, divorce, the evils associated with commerce and industrialism, and the secularization of education, have a more limited contact and a narrower appeal. Adolescent children, for instance, can hardly be expected to have a lively interest in these latter subjects, or in many others which form the subject-matter of Catholic books and articles; and yet they are at an age when an intellectual interest in Christianity would be of great value to them. Well-written discussions of the practical application of the Christian virtues

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could, on the other hand, be brought to their notice; and in view of the intimate touch with their own lives and experience which would thereby be created, a genuine and fruitful interest might be anticipated.

Furthermore, by emphasizing the Christian virtues we accentuate the positive aspect of religion. Persons of vigorous and active temperament are apt to envisage religion as a prohibitive and therefore a negative thing, with unfortunate results both to themselves and to the progress of Christianity. A small fraction only of the lives of most layfolk can be given up to devotional exercises: as to the rest of their lives, it is easier to say precisely what religion forbids, than it is to assert for any individual what positive action should be taken; and on that account the prohibitive aspect is apt to be over-stressed. The person so fortunate as to be possessed of vigour and initiative naturally finds no appeal in negations; but Christianity is not in fact a negative thing. No one really wants the knight to spend his life in avoiding sins: his main undertaking is to get on with the crusade, to fight the good fight—an essential part of which is the practice of the Christian virtues. Indeed, it is only by stressing the positive that we may hope for abstention from evil.

There is a sense in which the success of all Catholic enterprises and movements is dependent on the widespread exercise of the Christian virtues to an extent which **can** only be achieved if their practical application is thoroughly understood, and takes a prominent place among the active ideals of the average layman. For unless the human agents possess in a high degree such virtues as patience, perseverance, gentleness, humility, gratitude, affability, prudence and fortitude, the success of any undertaking is endangered; and therein lies part of the truth contained in the dictum that the first step in the reform of the world is the reform of oneself.

The reform of the world, moreover, can only be obtained by persuading the non-Christian that Christianity is a desirable thing. Now the non-Christian normally admires and appreciates those who thoroughly exercise the Chris-

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tian virtues; because, in the first place, the virtues are excellent in themselves and exhibit humanity in its noblest form; and also because natural honesty respects consistency in conduct. But if he sees no more of these virtues in the conduct of the Christian than in that of the non-Christian, he is not only deprived of the persuasive influence which would otherwise operate, but he is actively repelled by what he conceives to be inconsistency between profession and practice. We may warmly commend his hatred of hypocrisy; such hatred is an eminently Christian thing. That, through lack of charity or insight, he is often unfair in the attribution of hypocrisy to ourselves, we cannot remedy; but we may remember that to his **mind** our churchgoing, devout practices and profession of faith do not excuse, but on the contrary accentuate, any failure in the exercise of the virtues.

Constant contact with Protestantism has influenced the minds of Catholics in this country in two different directions. In some matters the Protestant standpoint when defective has been too readily adopted or condoned; but in other matters a Protestant exaggeration of a good thing has tended to some excess of caution in the proclamation of its true value by the Catholic body. Since in our present age many Protestants have argued that what a man believes is of little moment so long as he leads a good life, it is possible that the Catholic has allowed his mind to be somewhat deflected from proper emphasis of the Christian virtues in his equally proper insistence on the importance of true belief.

It is sometimes asserted that the average educated Catholic does not read serious Catholic literature. If there is truth in this assertion, there must be reasonable causes. I suggest that, on the one hand, the subjects chosen for books and articles are often of secondary importance, or of very limited appeal; while the many broad matters in which everyone is concerned, such as the Christian virtues, are seldom discussed. On the other hand, the manner of writing, in many instances, is not designed for the average reader: it is either technical, and lacking in simplicity of

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expression; or it underestimates the rational capacity of the normal layman. His intelligence, nevertheless, may safely be assumed; and he is ready to respond to a straightforward discussion of those matters which for him are major issues.

Many people of the present day, whether rich or poor, or young or old, are in a mood to which the emotional type of writing does not appeal in matters of religion, even though this may be in contrast with their attitude in other phases of life. I should, therefore, recommend the matter-of-fact tone used by Professor McDougall, the well-known psychologist, in his *Character and the Conduct of Life*, although that large and expensive volume, with its long quotations in French, is obviously intended only for well-to-do persons of linguistic ability. But Professor McDougall, from his non-religious standpoint, sees to-day the need for the sophist, in the earlier meaning of the word; and observing 'that many men desire to live wisely and to live well, preferring good to evil,' his book is an attempt 'to aid sonic men and women to reflect profitably on the conduct of their own lives,' and also 'to aid some of his fellows in a task of primary importance which none of us can altogether escape; the task, namely, of so influencing others, more especially young people, that they shall be better, happier, more successful, for their contact with ourselves.' And since he asserts that 'the wise conduct of life is now a more difficult matter than in any former age,' I am reassured in my belief that the Christian virtues need especial emphasis and explanation in the light of modern conditions.

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