

no one could see him. At the moment it departed he gave up his soul to God. And Maximilla the wife of Aegeas took his body down from the cross and buried it honourably.

Tradition is agreed that St Andrew was put to death at Patras by the Roman governor. There are various fragmentary accounts of his martyrdom, and three longer narratives, all deriving probably from a more ancient document of the 3rd century or even earlier. Details can be found in *The Apocryphal New Testament* translated by M. R. James (Oxford 1924), where a reconstructed version of the Passion of St Andrew is given. In the 13th century Blessed James of Voragine, O.P., retold the story as part of his collection of lives of the saints known as *The Golden Legend*. The version given above is drawn mainly from *The Golden Legend*, with a few slight additions from Dr James's edition. The Office for the Feast of St Andrew (Nov. 30), in the Roman and in the Dominican breviary, draws extensively upon the address to the Cross.

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## THE TRUE BASIS OF RELIGIOUS LIFE

### *Summary of the discussion by THE EDITOR*

THE discussion consequent on the challenging article of Père Nicolas in the July and August LIFE OF THE SPIRIT has centred round two main issues. The first is concerned with the general view raised by Fr Scott-James (September) who suggested that the French Dominican took for granted the subjective emphasis of the post-tridentine spirituality. The true basis, he implied, should be centered on *objective beatitude*, the end which gives meaning to the whole action of religious life. The love of God in himself must be set before the young religious, rather than the perfection of the religious himself. This is the goal if he is to avoid strain and break-down.

Against Fr James's thesis it has been argued that St Thomas himself, sufficiently pre-Tridentine and objective to satisfy most, constantly regards the religious life as a school of perfection; and as perfection in his theology stands for charity, the love of God itself, 'the school of perfection' carries no subjective stigma with it. It is a slur too on the Council of Trent and the theologians who have since considered religious life. Fr A. Valentin draws attention to the teaching of 'that great master, Cardinal Pierre de Bérulle:

First as to what the spiritual life should *not* be.

'Let us not regard ourselves. Should we contemplate a dead thing? For we are dead, and we have no true life save with Jesus Christ in God'.

Next, what it is.

'My sisters, incessantly fix your eyes on Jesus—you must offer and give yourselves to him—you should be naught but a sheer capacity for him—filled with him'. So again, 'We ought to love patience and gentleness more because they conform us to

Jesus Christ the patient and gentle, than because they make us patient and gentle'.

But Fr Valentin agrees to the general need to cease the discouraging search after perfection. Fr G. Flanagan agrees that it is a question of wrong emphasis on the idea of perfection, but he takes up the cudgels in defence of the great Council, which was compelled to insist heavily on discipline in view of the appalling licence, crass ignorance and rebellious illuminism of the time. The discipline was, however, misinterpreted as time went on, for it tended to become

a routine which suited the absolutism characteristic of the growth of the idea of the divine right of kings. This became all the more established in later times when the wealth of Puritan Britain and America gave them the opportunity of improving their outlook not only on their own countries but to a very considerable extent on Europe as well.

An Anglican novice-master also writes in the same sense, pointing to de Caussade as an example of a master of objective spirituality since Trent, but insisting that the treatment of the spiritual life should always *begin* with awareness of God as with St Benedict, rather than the negative treatise on mortification of later writers. St Benedict, he affirms, is not concerned with mortification (even in St Paul's more general use of the term) so much as 'to provide means by which "we may by a straight course reach our Creator".' He sums up the matter in the words of S. M. C.'s novel *Brother Petroc's Return*: 'God dwells in the centre of a pure heart—we may reach that purity and prepare a place for him by cleansing away all obstacles. Or we may cleave to him by faith, hope and charity, fixing our gaze on him, and by the very intensity of that gaze remove all that is contrary to him'.

Fr James may be mistaken as to the part played by the Council of Trent. But there can be little doubt as to the fact of the over-emphasis he describes. With the world of thought in the West turned utterly subjective, with Descartes and Pascal as masters of mind and heart, it was inevitable that the character even of life with God, the life of grace, should be affected. Père Nicolas claimed to be returning to the traditional doctrine of religion as found in St Thomas. But he did not take this change of emphasis sufficiently into account. The criticism is that he did not reach back beyond the influence of the 'perfectionist' school of thought. This is important because with the change of emphasis there has come a change in terminology. Père Nicolas does insist that 'Perfection' means simply the love of God, charity; and so for St Thomas all the vows and religious observances are ordained simply for fulfilment in the love of God. This is indeed a revelation to most people today, particularly for those who struggle to explain the 'State of Perfection'. The idea of human perfection has become static in its subjective aspect, it is the integration of a man's

personality, when all his powers are gathered in unity and harmony. Père Nicolas brings out clearly that perfection consists in reality in an act of love, which of course itself remains always perfectible, capable of further intensity. To seek perfection in the sense of self-completion, integration, is evidently a different thing from seeking to empty oneself in a surrendering act of the love of God. Subjectively 'Be ye perfect as your heavenly Father' suggests that the comparison lies in being *self-contained*, which may be interpreted as *satisfied* with self, self-satisfied. Love is perfection and perfection is love.

Père Nicolas has rightly insisted on this illuminating doctrine of the perfection to which the religious is dedicated. But there runs through much of what he has written a suspicion of a distinction between love and perfection—perfection is the *effect* of love, and in order to be perfect a man must therefore love God. The suspicion may be slight in view of the categorical identification of the two elsewhere in the article. The chief criticism is therefore that he did not make sufficiently clear this change-over in emphasis, and was apparently not sufficiently aware that 'perfection has come to mean something so different that St Thomas's word is incomprehensible to most moderns.

The second series of letters concerning Père Nicolas's article went more deeply into the matter itself. The article has been attacked mainly in its attitude to the severity of the rule and the fulfilment of observances. The question raised by Fr James has of necessity to be settled before facing this one, because we have to seek the cause of the apparent weakening of health and stamina in present generations which brings Père Nicolas to suggest a mitigation in 'observances'. If the strain comes from a wrong focus rather than from an undermined physique, then any reform which tends to mitigate the strenuousness of religious life will only hasten the final collapse. A Dominican father writes:

'St Francis de Sales whom l'abbé Bremond terms the saint of devout humanism founded the Visitation Order precisely to give a chance of living the devout life in community to those "of courageous hearts but of feeble health". Yet a superioress of the same Order can assure us today that this purposely mitigated rule of the 17th century is now considered too austere for modern constitutions. . . . We are not a little surprised to hear Fr Nicolas tell us that: "Obedience, humility, perpetual constraint, mortification, the interior tension of the effort to overcome self, tend to an atmosphere which weighs like lead on some natures in themselves generous and called by Christ to the highest union with God. This is perhaps the cause of that psychic fatigue to which modern temperaments are so liable and which is created or aggravated by too much constraint". The Pope might conceivably dispense certain exterior observances such as the monastic tonsure and even perpetual abstinence if proved detrimental to apostolic vigour, but he

will unquestionably reply, "Non possumus" to those who complain of "too much constraint" or "physical fatigue" engendered by the practice of obedience and humility, etc. . . . Psychical fatigue or neurosis may just as well come from the interior conflict caused in the generous soul which longs for wise direction, dislikes wilful singularity, fears excessive self-assertion and yet is compelled by unfavourable circumstances to lower his ideals. To sacrifice what is clearly essential in spiritual direction handed down from apostolic times in order to pander to the modern cult of softness and of almost complete independence of all tradition is to court disaster. St Teresa of Avila puts it in her forthright way: "I do not think that God will admit to his friendship a lover of his own ease is madness". The real answer to the problem lies in this, that *every religious* should feel bound by his or her profession to tend *consciously and perseveringly* to perfection. . . . St Thomas (2. 2. Q 186 ad 1) states: "He who enters religion does not make profession to be perfect but to endeavour to attain perfection, just as he who enters the schools does not profess to have knowledge but to study in order to acquire knowledge. . . . Hence a religious does not violate his profession if he be not perfect but only if he despises to tend to perfection". He continues (ad 2): "All, both religious and seculars, are bound in a certain measure to do whatever they can (i.e., to love God with their whole heart). Yet there is a way of fulfilling this precept so as to avoid sin, namely if one do what one can as required by the conditions of one's state in life, provided there is no contempt of doing better things which contempt sets the mind against spiritual progress'.

There can be no doubt that since the beginning of Christianity there has never been a time when young people were so generous and yet so undisciplined. This apparently is the conclusion of all those who have joined in the present discussion. Those who offer themselves to religious Orders today are thirsting for penance, are anxious to surrender everything to the service of God. Several correspondents have drawn a parallel between this and the generosity displayed by young pilots, blitzed families and daring commandos during the war. The young person in love with our Lord can and does take on mortifications quite as strenuous as any of previous ages. The stamina is there; the physique of modern times has not greatly deteriorated; and there is no reason to mitigate the strenuousness of regular observance.

But the question is whether these youngsters can 'stick the pace' for the length of a life-time. The heroism called forth by the war made demands for brief though complete sacrifice. Religious life demands a life-long martyrdom; and perhaps that is where health will break down under the strain. For the present age is an age of undiscipline when men will freely choose to do the heroic thing, but will resent being made to do it by a superior. To say the least,

this weakness in modern education tends to dissipate the power of the spirit of generous sacrifice. From the theological point of view it takes the very heart out of the voluntary mortifications and acts of generosity, for obedience in the will is the source of true exterior sacrifice. This paradox is more likely to produce a nervous tension than any lack of 'physique'.

Any religious order as it continues its existence will gather more rules and observances to deal with the changing conditions of its life and activities. Inevitably the customs and accepted ways of behaviour accumulate; and, though in themselves they may exercise a very benificial influence on the soul that accepts them in all true obedience, they may in fact be too numerous and detailed for the modern child of paradox to assimilate. It may, therefore, be desirable that the observances be reduced to the fundamental ones which characterise the beginning of a new Order. An old religious of 84 years is among the correspondents on this point; and she writes:

'What does he (Père Nicolas) mean by "physiological change of the 20th-century man"? Cf. the nerve shown by the commandos, airmen, civilians, old people, women and young children during the blitz. We know the use of disinfectants, the value of fresh air and cleanliness; surely health should have improved. Girls in general seem much stronger than their fainting and delicate Victorian ancestors. They are better educated and critical and can appreciate their rule better, and have better judgment for following the Holy Spirit. Hence 10 Commandments, 3 vows, Rule, Constitutions, are necessary and sufficient. God will certainly give the grace to keep these if he gives the vocation. If any change be made let it be in the abolition of minor customs that have accumulated under individual superiors'.

The great danger always is the formalism of exterior obedience, as another correspondent points out. But this applies to the old ways and new spirit equally. The old habit of observances will often be satisfied by the accomplishment of the external routine. While the young are often carried away by the romantic appeal of external actions and instruments like sleeping on the floor, keeping long vigils, wearing hair-shirts and taking disciplines.

It comes back, therefore, to the question of how to train and supernaturalise the heroic impulses so manifest in the young men and women of today, and how to do it without crushing enthusiasm and initiative. Père Nicolas was right to return to the consideration of the root of it all, Perfection, the Love of God, Obedience and the Service of God. All this opens wide vistas for future articles and discussions in *THE LIFE OF THE SPIRIT*.