

supposing they were to flourish, they would not be true Christian virtues. Action and devotion in the faithful are the expression and, as it were, the realisation of their faith. The cultivation of this virtue is thus of the first importance; and because it has its own nature, its development is likewise a definite work, depending on special rules. It will be realised that those we have enunciated do not cover everything. They leave room for more detailed methods which each one's own needs and experience will dictate to him. But if the readers of the present article will only make trial of a concrete application of the suggestions put forward, we should be surprised if the latter did not prove their efficacy.



THE LIFE OF GRACE : II

BY

HENRI DE RIEDMATTEN, O.P.



WHILE Christianity was claiming to have found true wisdom, secular philosophy was still seeking it with all its might. Since Plato with his amazing intuitions had constructed a system of philosophy directed towards the Possession or contemplation of the Unchanging, a current of philosophy had been trying to take the realities

of metaphysics by storm and enjoy them, if only for a moment, at the risk of neglecting the patient labour and slow deduction championed by Aristotle.

After painting his splendid picture of the universe, from the One to the lowest degree of being, matter, Plotinus sets up an ideal for the human soul. 'There are as many ways of living possible for the soul as there are levels of reality: at the bottom, life in the world of the senses, whether it be the life of pleasure, in which the soul is entirely passive, or the active life, the rule of which is given by the social virtues.' Higher up comes reflection, in which the soul gives itself up to its autonomous activity, judging and reasoning. The soul is now in command of itself and about to fit itself for reaching intuitive thought; it 'goes up to the level of the understanding', i.e., the level of essences, presupposing nothing before them and being the data of intuition. But the soul can sometimes go higher still, until it comes to the First One; but here there is no longer any question of an intellectual vision or an intuition, since

one cannot grasp anything that is not determined; the question is rather of a sort of contact quite impossible to express . . . Experience alone—and according to Porphyry, Plotinus achieved it four times—enables one to speak of this state.¹

Whatever the exact nature of these ecstasies of Plotinus may have been, the description of his effort is a witness to the intensity of intellectual life in the early centuries of the Christian era. Never, perhaps, has the human mind thirsted so much on the natural level for contact with God or taken such energetic steps to try and appease its desire. Platonism had the great merit of believing in the reality of the metaphysical world, the reality of God and of spirits. Being more a spirit than a systematic conception of things, by this belief it prepared men for Christianity and could help them to come to it. And so, without stopping to consider the first great contacts between the wise of this world and the new wisdom brought in by Christianity (there is the case, for instance, of Clement of Alexandria), we come at once to St Augustine.

We know that the life of St Augustine was a passionate search for happiness and for happiness through truth: 'rejoicing at the truth', *gaudium de veritate* (*Conf.* 10, 13). He sought this happiness and truth in various directions and his efforts were finally turned to the spiritual level properly so-called by the writings of the neoplatonists. These revealed to St Augustine that the destiny of man is the destiny of a spirit, that it can be elucidated and explained only by knowledge and love of the Absolute (*Conf.* 12, 9.13—17.23). The ground was thus prepared for grace and grace did indeed come. St Augustine is in this respect an excellent example of the thomist axiom that what grace does to nature is to raise it, not to destroy it. If he had made up his mind to throw overboard everything that was in contradiction with the folly of the cross, he was not to forget that Christ is the Word and that the God he was enabled to touch and possess already by faith and charity was the selfsame that every human mind longs to touch and possess.

For Augustine there is no purely natural wisdom; the whole of nature is turned towards supernatural wisdom. It has lost it, certainly, and nothing but regeneration in Christ can give it back. Yet it is this original orientation which explains the whole organism of nature, and all its efforts outside the influence of grace. Wisdom is complete obedience to the movement of illumination proceeding from the Word, and Christian contemplation is still contemplation of ideas. only in it the obstacles in the way of his action 'which

¹ Cf. Bréhier: *Histoire de la philosophie*, i. 464-465.

enlighteneth every man that cometh into this world' are removed. 'In obedience to grace every idea, every intelligible truth falls directly into place in the rising line leading to the perfect knowledge of God, *perfecta Dei cognitio*, the supernatural end of the regenerated soul.'²

But if faith yields its certitudes and gives up the truth, it does not satisfy the demands of the soul right from the start. It provides a sound plan, but the possession which will bring beatitude has yet to be acquired. We are sure that there will be beatitude in the next world but even now there can be a participation in it, and the whole man must undertake this search for God afresh. Knowledge and love, and all human activity, guided by these will do their utmost to travel as far as possible on the road to happiness. Nothing can be neglected.

The noblest part of us, that understanding which, according to Augustine, is constantly and directly enlightened by the Word, could not stand outside the supernatural life. Far from it. Hence a statement like this: 'I will not forsake the authority of Christ in the least thing, for I find none worth more than this. But I must thrash this out with my reason in every detail; for my *disposition* gives me an impatient desire to apprehend the truth *not just by believing it but by understanding it as well.*' (*Contr. Acad.*, 1, 3, c. 20, 43). Or this: 'I wanted to see with my understanding what I believed' (*De Trin.*, 1. 15, c. 28, 51). Without a doubt, many people will never be capable of displaying activity like this and for them faith will be enough, but for those who can make an intellectual effort, to refuse or even neglect to let them make it would be to go right against the law of human life. 'But if he does not want to, and considers that we need only believe what in fact we ought to understand, *he does not know what is the good of faith*' (*Epist. ad Cons.* 120, c. 2, 18).

What attracts St Augustine above all in knowledge is that it gives us fruition of God, enjoyment of the object. 'Here is truth itself. Embrace it if you can and enjoy it, and delight in the Lord and he will give you your heart's desire. What do you desire more than beatitude? And where can there be more of that than in the enjoyment of truth which is unshaken, unchangeable and full of every good?' (*De lib. arb.* 1. 2, c. 13, 85). So our intellectual effort all tends towards those moments when we possess and relish Wisdom. Nothing is without use for that end, all the sciences and all specu-

² Maréchal, *La vision de Dieu au sommet de la contemplation d'après St Augustin*, NRT, 1930, p. 105.

lation will be used for it, and there will be nothing, either, with any value in itself outside this ascent towards Happiness. But before we can enjoy we must above all love; hence all our effort takes place under the influence of charity. As charity is a gift from God our seeking will all the time be accompanied by assiduous prayer. As charity makes demands in the way of purification and perfection, all the moral virtues will collaborate and each will play its part in the advance towards God. We see, then, that if St Augustine proclaims so insistently the right and duty of the understanding to do its proper work in the supernatural life, he sees in it for all that no more than one instrument among others, more excellent perhaps but incapable of attaining an end by itself.

Augustinian theology bears the marks of this subordination. As we have seen above, the highest enjoyment of the supreme God in this world is found in mystical wisdom. Now in this wisdom the human mode of operation has given place to the divine. God has taken the initiative, the gifts have full play and, more especially, charity is acting not only as the driving-force of cognition but even as the medium of it. So it is clear that the highest point of our life is not to be found in an operation natural to our minds like that understanding, *intellectus*, which according to our definition the believer is seeking. Consequently, philosophy and theology are now tending not towards a perfection they could themselves provide but towards that provided by the wisdom of the saints. Hence their function lies principally in manifesting and keeping before the mind the attractiveness of the object of the wisdom of the saints. Doubtless they will be doing a work proper to them, but it will be marked by the movement communicated to them by a superior agent. A movement is specified by its end, the master imposes his form on the servant. Philosophy and theology are entirely turned towards a point where the principal part is played by love and so for St Augustine are affective sciences. By the term 'affective sciences' medieval theologians denote that unique kind of intellectual effort which they all, down to St Thomas, follow the great doctor of Hippo in seeing as merely one stage in the soul's search for union with God. This is the sense in which Richard of St Victor's fine observation on the theologian's effort is to be understood: 'What if it be not given to me to reach the place I am making for? What if I stop short in my tracks? I shall still be glad that as far as my strength allowed I have run and laboured and sweated in my search for the face of my Lord. Even if it turns out that I faint because the road is too long and rough and hard, I shall have done something

if I can truthfully say: "I did what I could. I sought her and found her not, called her and she did not reply."³ The same note is struck in some of St Teresa's exhortations, where she tells her daughters to dispose themselves for infused prayer, as far as it is in their power, and not to be disconsolate if they do not get it. 'If contemplation and mental and vocal prayer and tending the sick and serving in the house and working at even the lowliest tasks are of service to the Guest who comes to stay with us and to eat and take his recreation with us, what should it matter to us if we do one of these things rather than another? I do not mean that it is for us to say what we shall do, but that we must do our best in everything, for the choice is not ours but the Lord's. If after many years he is pleased to give each of us her office, it will be a curious kind of humility for you to wish to choose; . . . Be sure that, if you do what lies in your power and prepare yourself for high contemplation, with the perfection aforementioned, then, if he does not grant it you . . . it will be because he has laid up this joy for you so as to give it you in heaven.'⁴

³ Richard of St Victor: *De Trinitate*. P.L. 196, col. 916

⁴ St Teresa: *Way of Perfection*, ch. 17 (*Complete Works*, ed. E. Allison Peers, 1946, ii, 71).



THE RE-FORMATION OF THE SOUL

BY

CONRAD PEPLER, O.P.



NE of the most fundamental ideas in the understanding of the ascent of the Christian towards God is that of transformation into Christ. But it is a difficult idea to grasp. So easily transformation—the taking on of a new form—slips into an identification which would be a type of pantheism. Otherwise it remains as a mere simile, suggesting that the lover of Christ becomes *like* Christ, simply because he performs the same sort of actions.

Another way of stating the same difficulty is to be found in the discussion concerning the nature of the unity of the Mystical Body. What sort of unity characterises the one Body of Christ on Earth? A formal unity? That would identify all the members with the head and they would lose their own personalities. Or is it simply a final unity arising from the fact that all are aiming at the same