

should be received as the spiritual food for souls, whereby may be fed and strengthened those who live with his life, who said, "He that eateth me the same also shall live by me", and as an antidote whereby we may be freed from daily faults and be preserved from mortal sins. He willed furthermore that it would be a pledge of our glory to come, and of everlasting happiness, and thus be a symbol of that one body, whereof he is the Head, and to which he would fain have us as members be united by the closest bonds of faith, hope and charity.' (Séss. xiii, cap. 11.)

The most Blessed Sacrament of the Altar is in a very special sense the Sacrament of Love. The Last Supper was the chosen moment for its institution, leaving an undying memory of our Redeemer as the divine lover in his last will and testament. Only the divine Love could have found so efficacious a means of sustaining the soul's supernatural life. 'He that eateth me the same also shall live by me.' The very purpose of this Sacrament is to prevent the love of God in the heart of man from growing cold by giving it a lasting strength, ardour and intensity. As Our Lord said, 'He that eateth my flesh and drinketh my blood abideth in me and I in him'. The very purpose of the Christian life is to be brought into union with God, but this cannot be without a love that is sustained and fortified by him who is the living Bread.

THE WORSHIP OF LOVE

BY

CONRAD PEPLER, O.P.



NE of the more important aspects of the growth of the spiritual life is the way in which the higher stages, far from leaving the lower entirely behind, do in fact reproduce the earlier virtues and activities in a new milieu; a higher synthesis is reached. Thus it would be a mistake to imagine that merely because progress in grace means first the predominance of the moral virtues and then the theological, that therefore such virtues as religion, obedience and various forms of asceticism fade away in the wings as faith, hope and charity take the stage. There are some who consider that they have reached a degree of perfection where obedience hardly applies; love predominates so that they are free from the hindrance of the moral virtues, particularly from the inconvenience of having to do what with other men they are told. They feel themselves above the law.

But in fact these ascetic virtues are raised to a far more perfect and instinctive mode by the grace of unitive prayer and the flowering of the gifts of the Holy Ghost. We have only to follow the movement of the passion and death of Christ to recognise this. The obedience of 'nevertheless not as I will but as thou wilt' is transformed on Calvary itself into the complete and utter surrender of his whole spirit—'Into thy hands I commend my spirit'. The abandonment to the will of God is typical of these higher forms of supernatural life and it is the perfection of obedience. Or again the promptitude which is the property of the gifts of the Holy Spirit is a promptitude by which a man reacts 'instinctively' without deliberation to the special movements of God's will; it is again the perfection of obedience.

Similarly the act of the virtue of religion which shows itself fully in worship and sacrifice cannot be transcended. The child of God, however wrapt in the loving embrace of God, yet remains a creature with the duty of creaturely worship as well as that of filial love. We have already noted the subtle and significant difference of language between *The Cloud of Unknowing* and the *Epistle of Privy Counsel*, which, though both undoubtedly by the same author and both about the same state of prayer, yet speak, the one simply in terms of love, the other in terms of offering and worship. But we may take the *Epistle of Prayer* in its theological treatment of *Devotion* as the bridge linking the two.¹ For 'devotio', taken as it is here directly from St Thomas, is the innermost and central act of the virtue of religion and itself shares in the *promptitude* which is also the property of the gifts. In this way it may be considered as the connecting link between what is strictly ascetical and what is strictly mystical. As the author of these treatises suggests, devotion is in a sense independent of the external act of religion which may so easily be abused, such as 'fasting, waking, sharp wearing and all these others'. Devotion in itself is the act of a man's will handing himself over promptly and fully to the service of God; and therefore it implies not only that a man serves God interiorly by choice, but that he does so with alacrity and with desire. And no man undertakes an arduous service with alacrity unless he also loves him whom he serves. That is why the moral act of devotion requires for its exercise a special influx of the theological virtue of charity, so that our author, after referring to St Thomas's definition of devotion and St Bernard's demand that the service of God 'should be done swiftly and gladly', goes on to speak at some length of 'reverent affection', a phrase which admir-

¹ The chronological order of these works has not been definitely determined. It would be convenient theologically to regard *The Cloud* as coming first, *The Epistle of Prayer* second, and *The Epistle of Privy Counsel* third. But that may be only an *a priori* plan.

ably combines the ideas of service or worship and love.

And all these other things, as is fasting, waking, sharp wearing, and all these other, they are needful in as much as they are helply to get this (reverent affection), so that without this they are nought. And this without them is sometimes sufficient at the full by itself, and is often times full worthily had and come to of full without any of the others. . . . All this manner of working before said of this reverent affection, when it is brought in by these two thoughts of dread and of hope coming before, may well be likened to a tree that were full of fruit; of the which tree, dread is that party that is within in the earth that is the root. And hope is that party that is above the earth that is the body (trunk) with the boughs. In that hope is certain and stable, it is the body; in that it stirreth men to works of love, it is the boughs; but this reverent affection is evermore the fruit. (*Epistle of Prayer*, Gardner, pp. 81-3).

And he goes on to say that this fruit must become full ripe and fall from the tree so as to be offered to God for his own sake 'and not for his goods'. There can be no doubt after reading this that the theological virtues are closely interwoven in the texture of true devotion. St Thomas shows that 'meditation' concerning God's goodness and generosity as well as concerning one's own infirmities, is under God's grace the cause of devotion, so that it is evidently bound up with the life of prayer—the higher one's prayer the greater is its effect in devotion and 'reverent affection'. And such prayer and devotion produce a true interior happiness—'God shall be knitted with the ghostly glue of grace on his party and the lovely consent in gladness of spirit on thy party'. (*ibid.* p. 88).²

Having before us this teaching on the place of devotion in the mystical life, it is not difficult to understand the references to worship and to offering in the *Epistle of Privy Counsel*. In the state reached by the soul by 'noughting' itself and by being raised to the 'naked intent' upon God, there would seem at first to be little opening for worship. The soul is not to consider itself, neither as to its sins nor as to its good qualities; there is therefore nothing created upon which it can fix its attention in order to offer it to God. In the abject poverty of the 'nought' it has nothing to offer. Nor can it praise and worship God for anything that he does to the soul; for in this state the naked intent rests exclusively on the 'isness', the Being of God, and does not look at any of his attributes or activities. Nevertheless the soul remains a creature, and however close be her union with God

² The whole of St Thomas's question on Devotion (II-II, 82) should be read in this connection. It is interesting that St Thomas distinguishes the part played by charity from that of devotion in the cleaving unto God '*per quamdam spiritus unionem*'; and that *The Epistle of Prayer* concludes the treatment of 'reverent affection' by quoting and applying the words of St Paul *Qui adhaeret Deo unus spiritus est cum illo.* (p. 88).

within the depths of his triune life, she still retains the duties of the dependent, the servant of the Lord. In the union which is here described—'this work'—when the soul is stripped of all she has save the naked intent, she remains aware only of her own being and the divine Being; and therein is revealed this pure and absolute dependence which will always keep her affection *reverent*.

For he is thy being, and in him thou art what thou art, not only by cause and by being, but also he is in thee both thy cause and thy being . . . evermore saving this difference betwixt thee and him, that he is thy being and thou not his. (*P.C.* c. 1, p. 181).

With this preparation the soul can approach God with the single thought of being and offer to him the worship of a lover, offering being to Being.

That that I am, Lord, I offer unto thee; for thou it art. (*ibid.* p. 182).

Such is the prayer of oblation which the soul can utter without introducing a sense of multiplicity into her relations with God. Religion is said to be only a 'potential part' of justice because the element of otherness which should separate the participants in a just transaction, cannot be fully realised in the relationship between man and God. In the union of love this truth is most clearly revealed. The soul is God's. It has nothing to offer except the dependence of its being. The author quotes from the Book of Proverbs, 'Worship thy Lord with thy substance' (3, 9) and he interprets this not as referring to possessions of a worldly sort, but simply that

thou do whole worship to thy Lord God with thy substance, offering up unto him plainly and wholly thine only self, all that thou art and such as thou art, but generally and not specially—that is, without special beholding to that that thou art—so that thy sight be not scattered nor thy feeling defouled, the which would make thee less one with thy God in purity of spirit. (c. 3 pp. 188-9).

This 'whole worship', the author goes on to say, becomes a 'continual sacrifice of praising' first of all for God's own sake and then for self and for all one's 'even Christians', and it is therefore closely linked with Christ's sacrifice which was offered that all might become one with God again (pp. 190-2). Brought in this way to the foot of the crucifix and taught to regard the central Offering of the whole world in terms of love, remembering at the same time how Christ is sung of as the '*Victima caritatis*', it is not difficult for us to discover these heights of prayer in the offering of the Mass which is identical with that of Calvary. The author here makes no mention of this unique act of worship. But the reader should not stop short with him in his analysis and description of this prayer of union, but should go on to apply the teaching to practical things of daily life, and particularly

to the most practical of all prayers the offering of the Mass, for, as St Vincent Ferrer said, the Mass is the highest work of contemplation that is possible.

If we compare this teaching about the 'continual sacrifice of praising' with St John of the Cross's writings, we shall find that his language is far more in line with that of *The Cloud* than of the *Epistle of Privy Counsel*. He writes often of the touch of being to Being, substance to Substance when the soul has become God's bride. But he refers seldom to any kind of act of religion as such. In the *Spiritual Canticle* he writes of the fruition of all the virtues in this union: 'In many of these visits the soul is conscious of all her virtues within her spirit, since He has given her light; and then with wondrous delight and fragrance of love she gathers them all together and offers them to the Beloved, even as a bunch of beautiful flowers. . . . The soul offers herself together with the virtues, which is the greatest service that she can render Him' (Stanza 16, Peers ii, 275). But the Mystical Doctor does not seem to have worked out in any detail the nature of this service of love or reverent affection which reproduces the moral virtues in the new realm of the theological. He writes in language very similar to the passage from the *Epistle of Privy Counsel* already quoted: 'The soul that is united and transformed in God breathes God in God with the same Divine breathing with which God, while in her, breathes her in Himself'. (ibid. st. 38 p. 176). And he refers this to the priestly prayer of Christ asking for this union of love to be realised in his Apostles: 'That they may be one and the same thing in Us'. All this hints at the great depths which remain hidden beneath the obscure expressions which these writers use to convey some idea of the way of union in the fulness of charity. It is to the credit of the author of *The Cloud* that he has gone so far in showing the synthesis between worship and love. He even goes one step farther:

And thus shalt thou knittingly, in a manner that is marvellous, worship God with himself. For that that thou art thou hast it of him and he it is. And although thou hast a beginning in thy substantial creation—the which was sometime nought—yet hath thy being been evermore in him without beginning and ever shall be without ending, as himself is. (*P.C.*, c. 4 p. 195).

The soul seems here to be linked so closely with the Word as to be drawn into the intimate communings of the Trinity, as indeed she is by participating in the divine life. But the Word, of course, can only be said to offer worship metaphorically since all the divine persons are equal. Yet in so far as all things are made in the Word and represent the Word in the created aureola round about the Godhead, the Word may thus be said to worship in the creatures which reflect

him and yet worship. And in this 'activity' of the Word the soul which has entered the union of love most intimately shares.

We may safely conclude therefore, that anyone who has reached the stage described by the author of *The Cloud* has attained to a perfection which is one of the most whole and most holy to which he can attain in this life. With this perfection of obedience to God's will in the promptitude of devotion he is already governed largely by the gift of Wisdom. He is no longer merely directed by long and arduous rational speculations but by the sudden movement of the spirit.

All this shall be done suddenly, listily and graciously, without business or travail of thyself. . . . This sweet subtle working which in itself is the highest wisdom of the Godhead graciously descending into man's soul. (*P.C.* cc. 4-5, p. 196).

This is 'the point of perfection', as he calls it in the *Epistle of Prayer*, that perfection of man's soul which is 'nought else but a onehead made betwixt God and it in perfect charity'. (*P.C.*, c. 7, p. 210). It is perfection because it includes all in one, prudence in wisdom and religion in love, and is worked directly by God himself.

Almighty God with his grace must always be the chief stirrer and worker, either with means or without, and thou only . . . but the consentor and the sufferer. (*ibid.* p. 212).

So perfect indeed is the working of God in the heights where means and diversity have been set on one side that the 'proximate potency', the immediate capacity to be thus raised to God is brought about by him in the work itself. 'Ableness to this work is one to the work itself' (*Cloud*, c. 34 p. 85). In the very desire for it the soul has it, and God has given both the desire and the union. The distance, to speak metaphorically, between potency and act have been reduced to the minimum, so that the man who thus prays remains a creature and yet lives in the ever present, eternal act of the life of God. This is the perfection of praise and worship, the reward of all the service and worship of the moral virtues, of all the sufferings and victimisation through which the soul must first of all pass. All human virtues and all human praise are turned into divine activities. 'In this new life', says St John of the Cross, 'which begins when the soul has reached this perfection of union with God . . . all the desires of the soul and its faculties according to its inclinations and operations . . . are changed into divine operations. And as each living creature lives by its operation . . . the soul having its operations in God, through the union that it has with God, lives the life of God'. And he describes the operations of the faculties of memory, understanding and will as they now work in the divine manner. (*Living Flame*, ii, 33-4, Peers, iii, 157-8).