

REFLECTIONS ON THE
VENI CREATOR

LET us consider this hymn of the Church as a beautiful summary of the Holy Spirit's mission in the New Law, according to the promise of Our Lord, by Whom He was sent. His mission is to complete not only the work of Redemption, but all creation, though concerned chiefly with the sanctification of the individual soul; and thus the *Veni Creator* is a petition for direction of our mind in the way of truth, and our affections in the way of charity:

. . . Mentis tuorum visita
Imple superna gratia
Quae tu creasti pectora.

Yet important as this is, we do not stop there; but are led on to still greater truth, the most sublime Mystery of faith—the very life of God. For the procession of the Third Divine Person is the necessary life of God (creation is the not-necessary life *from* God).

Of the Divine processions in the Nature of God, that of the Holy Ghost is to us the most mysterious and elusive. Its infinite delicacy is somehow too refined for our small human mind to find a concept to hold it. Whereas with the Father and Son, we are able immediately to borrow ideas and words from creatures, as 'paternity' and 'sonship,' in the Procession of the Holy Ghost we have no concrete idea to assist us. This to some extent accounts for lack of devotion to the Spirit of God: the world cannot receive the Spirit of truth, said Our Lord, 'because it seeth him not nor knoweth him'; and yet, by His undying presence and the character of His mission He is in a sense nearest to us—having charge of our souls by inhabitation.

But if we remember Him as the *Instinct of God*, we shall perhaps better realize the presence of this Divine Force in

our souls; for this is a concept less remote, which nevertheless embraces life and operation (*quaëdam vitalis motio et impulsio designatur*).

Fons vivus, ignis, caritas
Et spiritalis unctio.

From Apostolic times the Holy Spirit has been called the *Donum*—the Gift of God, because His invisible mission in our soul is the fulfilment of Christ's promise. Thus He is in Confirmation, when He comes in a special way to unfold His seven Gifts; for we need these Gifts in order to live the full Christian life, and to refine our soul in its spiritual progress.

Though our words for this Divine Person are very abstract, they are none the less descriptive: 'Fountain of life, fire, and love' are not unrelated to the Instinct of God, and suggest the Spirit's life-giving love: *Emitte Spiritum tuum et creabuntur*. In our efforts to reach a true concept of the Godhead, we must have the assistance of creatures; but we abstract our ideas from the supreme rank among creatures—the spiritual faculties of mind and will. In us, the breath of love (*respiro*) is passing, and an accident; but in God it is the necessary eternal act of His Essence and a Divine Person. For we cannot place accidents in God, since there are no such limitations to infinity.¹ These *actiones immanentes*, as St. Thomas names them, are necessary functions within the Divine Nature: just as it is impossible for God not to be; so it is impossible that the Divine Essence should be otherwise than It is. The Procession of the Holy Spirit is immanent action; and by 'immanent action' we mean an operation whose effect is perfectly completed in term and expression within the being.

¹ Infinity as such contradicts what is of 'time' and 'place'; its sphere is eternity.

Spiratio—breathing—is the word used to designate this Procession; but if we consider *Creator Spiritus*, we have a further extension of this concept (though still of course very inadequate), for although creation belongs to the whole Trinity—to the power of the Essence—it is the Spirit's invisible mission to complete creation: He breathes into it the breath of life; He animates and sanctifies as the Instinct of God by His unfading presence. *Auferes spiritum eorum et deficient.* To our souls, St. Thomas says He is the Gift (*in quo*) of sanctification of which the Son (*per quem*) is the Author.

Tu septiformis munere
Dextrae Dei tu digitus
Tu rite promissum Patris . . .

The seven Gifts of the Holy Ghost are the keys by which He tunes our souls to the tone of His wisdom. Are they necessary? Unless we are to go through life out of harmony with sanctifying grace, it would seem they are necessary indeed—over and above sanctifying grace and the theological virtues; but we must *allow* God to tune our soul in the way of grace. He will not force us. Gradually, and somewhat painfully, the soul becomes responsive to the slightest motion of the Divine Instinct under the tuition of the Gifts, and in our exercise of them. Let us not forget that our sensitiveness to His touch is to be developed on our knees, in our confessions, and is part of the sacramental grace conferred. The sincerity of amendment and the intensity of our contrition is measured by piety and filial fear; the latter checks the rashness of our carnal and spiritual impulses, and is the principle of the virtue of humility.

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'Love,' says St. Thomas, 'has the nature of first gift, and since the Holy Ghost proceeds as love, He proceeds as

First Gift.' We first love a person before giving to him; and 'God has first loved us.' The Spirit of God is Personified love Who diffuses His love over creation from the tiny impulse in an *amoeba* to the powerful volitions of the angelic nature. *Unus Spiritus donum in omnibus*, says Hilary (*De Trinitate*, Lib. II).

By four of the Gifts He works on our intelligence. Wisdom perfects the quality of the judgment of our speculative reason about divine things, and in their light about the things and actions of this world. Though it is no easy matter always to prefer uncreated wisdom to the ever-present allurements of time, this gift helps us to see that it is worth while. In accord with such supernaturally perfected judgment, under the influence of the Gift of Counsel, we put the things of God before the things of the world in actual deed. The Holy Spirit gives us special insight into the needs of particular situations and brings us to act accordingly.

Accende lumen sensibus
Infunde amorem cordibus.

Whilst *knowledge* unfolds to us the natural world with its mode of being in proximate causes, it is the light of *understanding* which plays on the borders of soul and sense. In a way, this gift is at once the most delicate and most susceptible; for it perfects the speculative reason in its apprehension of truth—especially in matters relating to God and the human soul. By the gift of understanding, the Holy Spirit opens up the eyes of the soul to the immaterial world of grace, and enlivens our perception of His own all-permeating presence. Through it, too, He whispers truth about the divine economy of creation; and through the darkness of faith gives us a glimpse of the Mystery of the Godhead—the Vision, that in eternity will hold us in beatitude. The interrelation of cause and effect are now seen to be decrees of Divine Wisdom; and the wonders of creation—whether it be the artistry of a spider's

web or snow-tipped hills under crimson sunset—now, by the light of understanding, bear visible traces of the Spirit's art. Nor do we stop here: soon we shall realize that nature herself is but the magic door which opens out on to the horizon of the glorious infinity of God; before this, even the awful inconsistency of the problem of evil will gradually fade into the inscrutable need that 'these things must be.'

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Infirma nostri corporis
Virtute firmans perpeti.

Despite the royal armour of these Gifts, we still have to fight against our frailty. The luminous rarity of the gift of understanding is easily impaired and, by spiritual sins, gradually lost. Material sin—sins of weakness—does not destroy the light of understanding if immediately repented. But it is suffocated by a muddy conscience; that is, by any subtle bending of reason to justify our sins against the judgment decreed by wisdom.

Three of the Gifts have a special function in ordering the passions of the soul. Although on a lower plane, the cultivation of our *passiones* is extremely important; for this part of our nature must have due exercise, use and satisfaction, and it is precisely in meting out what is due to the sensitive appetite that we err. By *fortitude* we are strengthened against fear; against the daily fears interwoven with life, and especially final despair. Of the Gift of filial fear we have already spoken. It is by fortitude that the Holy Spirit sustains us in grace when temptation threatens to overwhelm the soul with despair: when all seems lost—even life itself, and all that it cherishes, fortitude enables us to go on just the same, calm and undisturbed, as if nothing was amiss. By this gift especially the Divine Instinct, as it were, clasps in His hand the soul about to give up the struggle. The Sacrament of Confirmation seals that clasp for eternity. For as the Sancti-

fier, He is of man the most intimate friend. In holy silence He does His work in our soul—just as He animates and conserves all creation with invisible dexterity. The clasp of His hand is not recognised, because He never lets us down. Only we ourselves can undo it, by conscious preference of our will to His; that is by mortal sin; and then not ultimately—unless death should overtake contrition. Pride alone withstands His workings with the Gifts, for it stupefies the soul's responsive functioning. Even with the angry, malicious man, and with the sensual, He can pull the strings of repentance, before which the malicious man melts and the lustful crumbles with remorse. But pride is the mother of impenitence, and the greatest enemy of the soul . . .

Hostem repellas longius
Pacemque dones protinus.

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'As it is natural,' says St. Thomas, 'for the appetitive powers to be moved by the command of reason, so it is natural for all the forces in man to be moved by the Instinct of God.' That is a magnificent statement of what man ought to be; and what spiritual depth it holds! I should like here to stress or perhaps try and develop the right meaning of the word 'natural.' It is a mistake to suppose, as sometimes happens, that grace does not construct *with* nature; for what we often regard as 'natural' is really perverted nature. That our sensitive powers, our emotions, do not always respond to the ways of grace is a defect due to original sin and subsequent actual sin. As a separate entity the sensitive appetite, biologically unrestrained, follows its own law. Thus the animal kingdom follows with noticeable exactness the law imposed upon it by God. But man who is rational as well as animal has only to follow this law conditionally; that is, conditioned by reason and grace which are the superlative laws of his nature—taking nature in its human composite

connotation and raised state. For it is natural for the lower order to be subservient to the higher and as use is said to be 'second nature,' so too with grace. It is, therefore, rightly said that man's passions operate most naturally when they move and respond to the promptings of reason and grace, in so far as his total nature is concerned. Thus it is natural to desire to know God, and to acquire, even in this life, proportionate knowledge of Him; of His Unity, and of His Trinity. Not only knowledge of the existence of God as a vague fact, or philosophical truth, but a much more personal knowledge; that of absolute distinction of co-equal Persons in the same identity of substance ('I and the Father are one'). So much is this knowledge of obligation, that ignorance is blameworthy—not of course invincible ignorance of the Mystery, but vincible ignorance of the truth.

It is through union with the Instinct of God that we come to know the Father and the Son; and it is *piety* which develops sympathy with God as our understanding deepens and charity increases. For piety orders our attitude to God and divine things, and our behaviour to our neighbour in charity.

Per te sciamus da Patrem
Noscamus atque Filium
Te utriusque Spiritum . . .

We pray to know God, which is the vocation of every intelligent being, whether of the angelic, human, or any other grade which might exist. Though in this life it is better to love what is above us than to know it, since thereby we are united concretely to the loved object. But though we can know God, we can never fully comprehend Him, because our understanding is not big enough *per se*—nor could it be—to hold comprehension of infinity. Yet through the soul's union with the Divine Instinct in love (for the loved One is in us by spiritual union) we can, through the grace of borrowed vision, attain a profound

understanding of God sufficient, according to our measure, for perfect beatitude. *Per te sciamus da Patrem.*

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St. Thomas tells us with admirable lucidity something of how God will show Himself to us. 'The separate substance,' he says (that is, the Divine Life or Essence), 'is Itself united to our intellect as its form, so as to be both that which is understood and that whereby it is understood.' And for this reason, 'because by whatever other form our intellect were informed, it could not be led thereby to the Divine Essence.' None other but the Uncreated form could give perfect knowledge. Again, he says, 'since the Divine Essence is pure act, it will be possible for It to be the form whereby the intellect understands; and this will be the Beatific Vision.'

Our Lord said to Philip, '*qui me videt et Patrem*'; so, too, who sees the Son, sees the Spirit through Him. 'No man cometh to the Father, but by me.' The Father is the Principle (*a quo*) in the Holy Trinity, from Whom the Son precedes by generation (*per quem*) which begets identity of Nature and unity of Essence. In the Trinity is the supreme order. The Father is Principle after the manner of order and authority in the Persons (not in the Nature). 'The Father is greater than I.' But He is not the *cause* of the Son, as we understand cause in science; for cause is said in reference to effect, to which it is superior. The Divine Instinct is breathed forth from both, necessarily, *per modum amoris*; and the highest concepts we can use for the Holy Trinity are the acts of intelligence and will; which, although oceans away from comprehension, contain within their depth a small but true reflection of the Truth, by the very reason of their being.

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Whilst it is natural for man to rise to a knowledge of the existence of God, we need the Gifts of the Holy Ghost

to attain to any appreciation of the Trinity, or be moved and enraptured by the thought of the Persons. For the Gifts act on the theological virtues, which decide our degree of glory in eternity. But only the full Vision in the next life will result infallibly in beatific love. Here mere knowledge often leaves us cold, and we must be content with crumbs of *charisma* from the Gifts; for the *charisma* pertains to the effects of the Gifts, in developing and refining of our soul in its progress through Christian maturity—its *aetatis perfectio spiritualis*, especially by wisdom and piety. The *charisma* of the Holy Spirit shows the beauty of the spiritual and moral order, and is that ripeness of grace expressed in outward as well as interior piety; it is something more than just ethical perfection. So, too, all true Christian refinement and nobility is the cult of the Gifts. By these it is that the Spirit with His own hand moulds and educates our souls for eternity:

. . . Nobisque mittat Filius
Charisma Sancti Spiritus.

RUBY FAY, T.O.S.D.

FRANÇOIS

‘UNDER this simple baptismal name have appeared the documents of a short life which might have been that of a Saint or of a man of genius, perhaps both.’

It was no less caustic a critic than André Thérive who made the statement and wrote six columns in *Le Temps* to prove it.

François¹ really needs no such tribute; the facts are self-evident. Even our national temper which views with shrinking, if not with actual dislike, additions to the cate-

¹ *François*. By Auguste Valensin. (Plon, Paris.)