

surroundings? We should not be justified in drawing definite conclusions in the absence of precise information.

To the praise of St Teresa, let us point out that a weakness which is usually a life-long handicap was conquered by her as far as one can conquer an incurable infirmity, and that she made an unexpected use of it as the means of reaching sanctity.



## A TECHNIQUE OF SPIRITUAL LIBERATION (II)

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### III

#### THREE MAJOR DEMANDS OF THE CONTEMPORARY WORLD

**T**HREE admitted facts of our actual times impose themselves on us more imperiously than the rest.

First is this need for experience which we touched on towards the beginning of this article. We have said that it needs to be kept within legitimate limits. Then everyone will take care not to be satisfied with notions which have no spiritual value, any more than with observances which are followed because they are prescribed or recommended but which are, in consequence, burdens: they must become the means of liberation. The actions of the clergy and of the faithful, the functioning of institutions should lead to an increasing experience of *lucidity, coherence, control and peace*. Every spiritual man knows, with an immediate intuitive certainty, that these are normally the criteria of an authentic spiritual experience. Let us put it that in other times one could leave the 'spiritual senses' in penance to the extent of opposing the *effective* and the *affective*, and imagining a charity which was not *affective*; today there could no longer be a question of living the Christian life without a certain sense of its success—success in its own order, which is, let us repeat, that of faith and hope, but which must no less, normally, be 'palpable to the heart'. In this we certainly are not going as far as the ancients, so simple in their savouring of experience, the Greek Fathers for instance, St Gregory the Great and all the medievals of the West.

The second of the important facts which concern our purpose is

that we live, in every respect, in a time of *inflation*. Our notions, acquired in a theoretical, precocious, uncritical fashion, are formidably swollen by comparison with our *real* knowledge; they are full of contradictions and pose us with a crowd of disturbing riddles. Attractions multiply on all sides to excite as many contradictory desires. Our circumstances carry responsibilities which we are not able to fulfil, duties which we cannot even measure, although we surmise them in a more or less anxious way. The overwhelming onslaught of impressions precipitated upon us wears us out. The activity of our reason, getting more and more abstract, dissociates itself from a sensibility getting more and more desiccated (and also more and more sensual and subject to the passions). It is indispensable that we should put our elementary activities together again in a correct way, and that is to say especially that we should reharmonize ourselves with the rhythms of the universe. Men's occupations in other times used to conform so well to these rhythms that they had for the majority a spontaneous *initiatory* efficaciousness. The artificial character of modern life obliges us to give too great importance to the exercises one performs in one's spare time. Sport is in this sense a reaction to the artificiality of our life. It is not enough; there is another reaction necessary, that of a more contemplative orientation, which must open us again to certain lived clarities, to certain modes of being, at once very humble and of incalculable compass and import. Thanks to them we shall, as St Francis de Sales said, *live life itself well*, which will always be the most important exercise. Three words, tentative and approximate as they are, touch perhaps less inadequately than most on the reality which we must learn again to experience: they are interior *density*, interior *dimension* and *rhythm*. Let us try to find what modes of behaviour will reconstitute us in such a way that we preserve ourselves better from inflationary devaluation, in our judgment, our desires, our actions, so that we disguise less under an abundance of compensatory tokens the lack of *substance*.

For it is a question of having complete integrity for the task which is imposed on us, that of confronting the third of the major demands which the world of today makes—and makes brutally—upon the spiritual man. This is the obligation to acquire the famous '*supplément d'âme*', the reinforcement of soul, which Bergson used to talk about, to contribute towards giving it to

the world. Many of our contemporaries are in search of it in their speculations, and it is most certainly essential, indeed fundamental; they are asking themselves what duties the world which is coming into being imposes on man, into what actions in every order (scientific, economic, social, political) the challenge of his destiny should be translated. Still, *seriousness* is tragically lacking in all this. The fact that ideologies, collective passions and routines are more powerful than manifest realities leaves room for fear that men are travelling towards suicide, madness and other forms of disintegration rather than towards a higher mode of life. They do not want to *see what they see*. When, for instance, they envisage the eventuality of total war, or when the French fail to reform the educational, administrative, political and social system which is obviously leading them to disaster, we may despair of men and their future. All the more reason for each one of us to fill in the chinks in his armour, to remake the texture of his mind. It is in all orders at the same time, and according to the extent of each individual's and each community's power—according to each man's and each woman's capacity—that the work must be carried out, stimulated by the necessity 'to live more fully in order to live at all', and by the hope that, in becoming more alive ourselves, we may bring it about that our fellow-men, in their turn, become more alive.

In the inflation of theoretical studies, of inquiries without any vital response, of discussions which are liquidated by the triumph of vested interests, the advance which is least considered is the setting free of the real personality, the opening of the heart. The man of today has very rarely any other line than that of practical action or that of science or intellectual speculation. He needs the '*supplément d'âme*' as an individual as well as in the use of the formidable powers with which he is equipped. But, first of all, it is necessary that the spiritual man should advance *in his own life, which is that of the 'heart'*, giving consistency there to the evangelical beatitudes. They are the '*supplément d'âme*'. How then is one to dispose oneself best for their successful activity, in the interior life and in one's contacts with other people? Not at the level of verbal and fanciful considerations, but in the reality of the living person, body and mind and 'heart', 'heart' fulfilling itself certainly in clear and distinct ideas and in affections, but first, and always, in the deep, simple life which is indissolubly attention and

love. The techniques of mental and spiritual liberation, which are to be found in men's traditional heritage, and also depth-psychology, have certainly a great deal to teach us in this direction. If ever there was a case when it was necessary to 'tend to the truth with one's whole soul', and indeed with one's body too, this is it. It needs a total seriousness, and what we generally do, we folk who apply ourselves to the life of the spirit, is, frankly, lacking in seriousness. Far from engaging in generous action towards definite ends, we float about in near misses and inconsistencies. How shall we *compose* ourselves best, in order to *construct* ourselves?

'Live more fully'? Many dream of the possibility for men of higher states of consciousness. And after all why should certain disciplines not set free in us spiritual energies more or less inhibited which would be able to face, *holily*, the formidable demands of the world which is coming into being? In any case, whether or not this is a vain Utopia, Christians must reopen their 'hearts', reawake their minds, conform to the beatitudes even the behaviour of their bodies. If humanity did arrive in certain privileged persons at a higher mode of consciousness, there would be necessary a general climate much more really that of the Gospels. If, on the other hand, it is not to advance in this way, the virtues, put as they are to greater proof than in easier times, must be developed under a surer régime, a régime of the 'heart' and the mind and the body. Here we must grope humbly, being satisfied at first with the most elementary things, forcing nothing. One does not tug at the ears of corn to make them grow more quickly. But we must cultivate the fields. At the moment, they are, in general, lying fallow.

And let us not forget that every effort must tend towards men's spiritual unity—not, to be sure, in syncretism or by contamination, but by an advance towards the fulness which is in Christ. 'To renew all things in Christ' (Eph. 1, 10) implies that Christians, 'entering by their fulness into all the fulness of God' (Eph. 3, 19), should strive towards a prophetic advent, a coming in their own hearts of all they wish to see accomplished according to Christ. How will those who do not know that Christ has come for their salvation reach a *real* knowledge of this mystery if they do not find in us Christians partners in whom their genuine aspirations and legitimate certainties are already fulfilled in a

surpassing Christian form? Conversation has scarcely opened with the Far East; we must, to be sure, remain in it men of clear thought and entire faith, but no true understanding will be possible unless we rediscover, restoring them in some measure in our own lives, the intuitive values which have been sterilized in the West during recent centuries, the sense of certain spiritual realities attested even in experience, without which man appears to the Oriental to be looking backwards. At the same time, also, we shall be able to become partners again with the Christian East, where these realities have remained more alive than with us.

This is the immense labour of the new man, in the Gospel's sense, the man who is growing to the stature of the world of tomorrow. To *understand* infinitely more things, and infinitely greater things, to love more widely, to put into operation more redoubtable powers, to confront perhaps a mad society, this will not be all: it is going to be a necessity for spiritual energy to be set free in us, to be disciplined and to become effective.



## THE NATURE OF ACCIDIE (II)<sup>1</sup>

JOHN CASSIAN (A.D. 360-448)

MANUAL LABOUR AS A REMEDY

TO THE embers of such faults, then, he now hastens to apply a suitable remedy, and laying aside the apostolic power which he recently called into play, he turns once more to speak with the heart of a kind father or a gentle physician, and, as speaking to his children or his patients, he presents the medicine of health with words of salutary counsel, on this wise: 'Them that are such, we command and exhort in the Lord Jesus that with quietness they work and eat their own bread' (2 Thess. 3, 12). He has cured with the one salutary precept of work the causes of such terrible sores which spring from the root of idleness, in the manner of some most skilled physician, and he knows also that the rest of the ailments which sprout up from the same soil will straightway vanish away, when once the primordial disease has been destroyed.

<sup>1</sup> Cf: the November issue of THE LIFE, page 189.