

## RELIGIOUS LIFE AND THE GIFTS

This extract is from a 15th-century MS. *Laud miscell.* 330<sup>1</sup> on the religious life, written probably for Benedictine nuns, relating the external and interior life to the seven gifts of the Holy Spirit in an unusual order. The first chapter occupies almost half the work with a rambling commentary on the whole of the religious life, rule and customs as worked out under the guidance of holy fear. Of the other more brief chapters, the last two dealing with the higher gifts seem worthy of transcription. The unknown author's originality of approach and tender devotion, his shrewd insight into character and the directness and charm of his language raise the piece above the commonplaces of religious exhortation, so that it is still attractive and convincing to the simple of heart to whom it was dedicated four hundred years ago. The spelling has been modernised.

—C.K.

**R**ELIGIOUS Sister, seven informations I read in holy writ to teach a simple soul for to dispose her heart to grace. The first is that Samuel, the prophet, teacheth us to make ready our hearts when he saith thus: 'Preparate corda vestra domino'. [1 Reg. 7, 3.] He saith: 'Make ready your hearts to God'. The second is that Solomon teacheth us to keep our hearts to God when he saith: 'Omni cum custodia serva cor tuum'. [Prov. 4, 23.] He saith: 'With all manner of busyness keep thine heart to God'. The third is that the book of Maccabees teacheth us to open our hearts to God, where it is written thus: 'Adaperiat dominus cor vestrum'. [2 Macch. 1, 34.] 'Our Lord', he saith, 'open your hearts to him'. The fourth is that Saint Paul teacheth us to stable our hearts to God, when he saith thus: 'Optimum est gratia stabilere cor'. [Heb. 13, 9.] 'The best thing to stable the heart, is grace'. The fifth is that Solomon teacheth us to give our hearts to God, when he saith thus: 'Justus cor suum tradet ad vigilandum diluculo ad dominum qui fecit illum'. [Ecclus. 39, 6.] He saith: 'The right-wise man shall give his heart for to wake (watch) to our Lord in the early morning'. The seventh is that Jeremy the prophet teacheth us to lift up our hearts to God where he saith thus: 'Levemus corda nostra cum manibus ad deum'. [Lam. 3, 41.] He saith: 'Lift we up our hearts

<sup>1</sup> The evidence for a Benedictine origin seems to arise from the emphasis on stability. On Fol. 22 we find: 'In profession thou art wedded to God in as much as thou hast made to him a byhest (promise) of obedience, of stableness in thy religion and also of true turning of manners'. This recalls the Benedictine formula of profession. There is no mention of poverty and chastity in this context.

with our works to God'. The seventh is that Joel the prophet teacheth us to cut<sup>2</sup> our hearts where he saith thus: 'Scindite corda vestra'. [Joel 2, 13.] He saith: 'Cut your hearts'.

Lo Sister! seven things be rehearsed of the heart, that is to make it ready, to open it, to keep it, to stable it, to give it, to lift it up, and to cut it. These seven, without the seven gifts of the Holy Ghost, may not perfectly be performed; the which be these, for to begin at the last to the first. . . . By the gift of the dread of God the heart is made ready; by the gift of kunning<sup>3</sup> it is kept; by the gift of pity<sup>4</sup> it is opened; by the gift of strength it is stabled; by the gift of counsel it is given; by the gift of understanding it is lifted up; by the gift of wisdom it is cut.<sup>5</sup> . . .

(Fol. 61) . . . *How and in what wise a minchen should lift up her heart to God by the gift of understanding.*

The gift of ghostly understanding is needful to thee for to lift up thine heart to God. First thine heart must be lift up by holy meditations. Solomon saith thus: 'Cogitatio eorum apud altissimum'. [Sap. 5, 16.] Thus Sister, set thy thought and meditation in Almighty God and his precepts. As Solomon says in another place: 'Habe cogitatum tuum in praeceptis altissimi et in mandato eius assiduus esto'. [Eccli. 6, 37.] He saith: 'Have thy thought in the bidding of God, and because that it is not only enough to think on his bidding unless working follow, therefore 'be also busy in his precepts'. Thou thinkest well and art busy in the precepts of God when thou art not avoided<sup>6</sup> from them by none encumbrance of deadly sin. . . . Now peradventure thou askest me: 'What and I think on my sins, is my thought not lift up to God?' I shall tell thee. There is two manner of thinking of sins, one is with repentance for to sorrow for them, another is with pleasure for to delight in them . . . when thou thinkest on sin repentantly then is thine heart above sin . . . and lifteth up the heart to God. . . .

. . . Many there be that think in their heart, but few with their heart. He thinketh in his heart that thinketh vanity. Also he that thinketh and considereth not what he thinketh, thinketh not with his heart, for his heart runneth where it will, there is nothing so flitting as is the heart. Sister, think thou therefore with thine heart wisely and discreetly, that it flit not about. Then may I say of thee that thy thought is on God or else on thy sins repentantly, that is

<sup>2</sup> cut, i.e., rend (Joel 2, 13).

<sup>3</sup> Knowledge and so throughout.

<sup>4</sup> At this time the sense of compassion had not been differentiated from 'piety' and 'pity' is used in both senses.

<sup>5</sup> This preliminary section is quoted as being unusual and fruitful for consideration.

<sup>6</sup> Separated: the old sense of avoid.

praising to God, and the relief<sup>7</sup> (or the remnant) of thy thoughts make a great feast to God in thy soul. What be those reliefs which be left? Truly peace and joy of heart. These be the reliefs of that blessed table that David spoke of when he said: 'Fuerunt mihi lacrimae meae panes die ac nocte'. [Ps. 42, 3.] He saith: 'My tears have been to me loaves both day and night'. When thou repentest thee of thy sins thou layest forth the table of penance and all that is left of that feast is joy and peace of heart. This is a blessed table, and these be blessed reliefs and blessed be all those that eat of the bread of such tears. Lift up, Sister, thy heart, and cast up all thy thoughts in God, and he will nourish thee with these loaves of tears that thy soul may be fed with them.

The second thing that lifteth up the heart is hope, as Solomon saith: 'Qui sperat in domino sublevabitur'. [Prov. 28, 25.] 'He that hopeth in God shall be lifted up'. Well may hope be called a lifter-up of the heart, for as the prophet Isaias saith: 'Qui ambulat in tenebris et non est lumen ei speret in nomine Domini et innitatur super Dominum suum'. [Isaias 50, 10.] 'He that goeth in darkness and hath no light, he should hope in the name of Jesus and fasten him upon the mercy of God and he shall be lift up. . . .'

The third thing that lifteth up the heart is desire, for a clean desire is hunger of the heart. Desire maketh the heart hungry for to have our Lord. Our Lord is the meat<sup>8</sup> of a clean heart, but this meat is above us, thither then must we lift up our heart, there that our meat is. Such an hungry heart in desire, our Lord likeneth to an eagle, as he saith to Job: 'Numquid ad praeceptum tuum elevabitur aquila, et in arduis ponet nidum suum? in petris manet in praeceptis silicibus, inde contemplatur escam suam.' [Job 39, 27-28.] He saith: 'Whether an eagle shall be lift up at thy biddings and make his nest in high places? in stones he resteth and in broken flints, from thence he looketh after his meat'. By this eagle thou shalt understand: the which is a solitary bird and flyeth high, and seeth subtilly; a solitary contemplative soul, that is departed from the love of worldly conversation, in whose flight is understood contemplation, and in whose sight is understood subtle understanding. Our Lord asketh of Job thus, whether such a contemplative soul shall be lift up at his bidding? as though he said: 'Nay Job not at thy bidding but at mine, for the grace of contemplation cometh from me, and when she is so lift up by contemplation at my bidding, then shall she make her nest by desire in high heavenly things. . . .'

The fourth thing that lifteth up the heart is a right intent,<sup>9</sup> such as had St Paul when he said: 'Nostra conversatio in coelis est' [Phil. 3, 20.] 'The intent of our conversation is in heaven'; for he in-

<sup>7</sup> Relief = remnant. <sup>8</sup> Always with the sense of 'food'. <sup>9</sup> intention.

formed<sup>10</sup> all his intention to win heaven's bliss; thus shouldest thou do, Sister. . . .

These be the four lifters up of thy soul. . . . Four causes there be why thou shouldest lift up thy heart. The first is for thine own country is in heaven above and of kind<sup>11</sup> every reasonable creature hath a special love to his own country. This world thou mayst well wit, is not the country of thy heart, for therein thou mayst find no rest but rather trouble. In heavenly things I hope thou findest great rest, by that thou mayst well know that heaven is thy country and thine heritage, king's daughter, and a place of ghostly rest.

The second cause why thou shouldst lift up thy heart is because thy treasure is there, and thy treasurer also. Every good deed that thou dost, if thou do it for God's love, thou puttest it in Christ's hutch, and thou makest our Lord thy treasurer; then by reason where thy treasure is there thine heart should be: 'Ubi est thesaurus tuus ibi et cor tuum erit'. [Matt. 6, 21, not exact.] Make none thy treasurer but God, for he will at the last yield manifold double for a little.

The third cause why thine heart should be lift up, is because thou hast an heavenly Father, King's daughter! Heavenly children accord well to an heavenly father and therefore thou sayest when thou prayest: 'Pater noster, qui es in coelis'. In heaven he is, that thou prayest to. Therefore sister, to such an heavenly father, be an heavenly daughter, seeking, savouring, speaking and desiring heavenly things.

The fourth cause why thou shouldst lift up thine heart is because all perfection and fullness of all good is above us in heaven, where thou shalt find all the good that thou desirest. There thou shalt find health without sickness, youth without oldness, full love without hatred, freedom without bondage, fairness without deformity, abundance without necessity, peace without trouble, sikerness<sup>12</sup> without dread, knowledge without ignorance, glory without confusion and joy without sorrow. Lo sister! to this place wherein all joys be, thou shouldst lift up thine heart and say as St Austin saith: 'O heavenly Jerusalem, house of full great clearness, he receive me into thee, that made both thee and me. Amen'.

(Fol. 64.)—Capitulum septimum.

*How and in what wise a minchen should cut her heart by the gift of wisdom.*

Because I have declared thee how thou shouldst lift up thine heart and why, now shall I in this last chapter, by the grace of God and thy devout prayers, tell thee how thou shalt cut thine heart, as the prophet saith: 'Scindite corda vestra'.<sup>2</sup> He saith: 'Cut your hearts!'

10 set. 11 by nature. 12 security, certainty.

The cutting of the heart that very<sup>13</sup> contrition causeth, I shall not declare in this place, for that cutting is known well enough of every clean heart, only of the cutting that (be)longeth to the gift of wisdom. When it is dissevered from all manner of carnality and when it is so purged from all manner of unlawful affections and made pure, then it savoureth<sup>14</sup> Christ Jesu, and all thing that is not in Christ Jesu or not for Christ Jesu is unsavoury to such an heart. . . . Thou shalt understand that an heart made fat by the gift of ghostly love is departed from the flesh and all manner fleshly loves, from all manner unordinate and carnal affections. And so it is departed by the knife of ghostly wisdom, the which I call ghostly love, from all the fellowships, companies and manners of fleshly lovers. This is that sharp knife and that charity which Solomon speaketh of 'Est dilectio Dei honorabilis sapientia'. [Ecclus. 1, 14.] 'The love of God is a worshipful wisdom'. And it is of so worshipful wisdom that it causeth all thing to a clean soul, for to savour and to be felt, as they be. For this word sapientia, wisdom is no more for to say but a savoury feeling in his soul, that feeleth and savoureth ghostly everything as it is, that is sins (as) bitter, temporal goods foul, and spiritual ghostly, dear to God and precious. Wherefore Saint Bernard saith thus: 'Thou hast found plainly ghostly wisdom when thou wailest and sorrowest virtuously thy sins, and settest little by all worldly desires and desirest with all thine heart everlasting bliss: if thou savourest thus ghostly all things as they be, thou hast found plainly ghostly wisdom'.

Nevertheless thou shalt understand in this place, that wisdom is taken for the knowledge of the sweetness of God and had, as it may be, in this life by experience. To the which experiential sweetness enduceth us the prophet David when he said thus: 'Gustate et videte quoniam suavis est dominus'. [Ps. 34, 8.] 'Taste and see how sweet our Lord Jesus is'. First he saith taste and afterwards he saith see! for the taste of God bringeth a soul to the knowledge of God. Why saith he 'gustate', 'taste'? Truly for that whatever sweetness thou have of God in this life, it is but a tasting before (of) the sweetness that thou shalt have in bliss. Of this tasting St Austin had experience when he said to our Lord thus: 'Lord, otherwhile<sup>15</sup> thou leddest me into a ghostly affection, that never I knew afore. into a marvellous sweetness; I (know) not what: and if that sweetness were complete in me, I (know) not of what thing it might be, but if<sup>16</sup> it were heavenly bliss. And then anon, within a short while I fall down into my grievous and ponderous fleshly body that I bear about; and anon I am sopped up of mine old bodily customs. Then I weep and wail,

<sup>13</sup> true. <sup>14</sup> tastes, apprehends, with a sense of pleasure. <sup>15</sup> sometimes, at times.  
<sup>16</sup> unless.

for I would abide still in that sweetness and I may not; and in my flesh I abide and I would not; over all I am a wretch, good Lord see to me!

Take heed, Sister, to the words of St Austin. He saith that he was led into a ghostly unused<sup>17</sup> affection, into a marvellous sweetness, he (knew) not what, and he was anon thrown down into his corruptible body from that blessed sweetness. This unused ghostly affection may well be likened to ecstatic love. Ecstatic love is such a thing that it alieneth<sup>18</sup> the soul far from her mind into the love of that thing the which it loveth. This ecstatic love otherwhile is taken for good love, as Saint Denis saith who calleth ecstatic love, such love which bringeth a lover all whole into the use and profit of that thing that is loved. With such love our Lord loved us, giving himself all whole into our use and profit.

Ecstatic love also is taken in another wise, it is taken otherwhile for alienation of the mind by love, as be all such fleshly lovers that wax mad for love, the which is caused of overpassing desire of the heart and of affliction of thought set upon fleshly love. . . . Nevertheless for to prove ghostly ecstatic love by the condition of natural ecstatic love, thou shalt understand that there be many tokens to know when ecstatic fleshly love worketh in amorous fleshly creatures. Amongst all, seven there be that I shall declare unto thee. . . . The first token of such lovers is that they covet much and speak little and also speak their words unperfectly. Right so ghostly all spiritual lovers speak many sentences of love that cannot be understood hardly of any but of such that be ghostly lovers, as they be. Christ's Spouse in the Book of Love rehearseth many such unperfect and defective speeches. Among all such is one: 'Dilectus meus mihi et ego illi'. [Cant. 2, 16.] 'My love to me, and I to him'. But (unless) these words were more openly declared, it seemeth right unperfect, for she telleth not what her love is to her, nor what she is to her love. But like as Aaron spake for Moses, so must ghostly reason speak for our affection, and fulfill the unperfect words of a loving soul, and say this: 'My love to me is able, and by his mercy I am made to him able'. Or thus, 'My love to me is meed and reward of all my labours, of all my sorrows and fatigations, right so, I am the rest of his labour, sorrows and fatigations, the which he suffered for to ransom me; and therefore like as he suffered diseases<sup>19</sup> and tribulations for to have me, so shall I gladly suffer diseases and tribulations for to have him'. Or thus: 'My love to me lived and for me died, so shall I live to him and for him shall I die'.

---

17 unwonted, unusual. 18 estrangeth; taking out of itself; with something of the classical meaning of madness. 19 dis-ease, discomfort.

Lo, Sister! that thou mayest know how many declarations a loving soul needeth for to have expounding of her defective and unperfect words, yet many more (there be) than here be expounded to a loving soul, for the shortest sentence of love is open enough to her.

The second token of an ecstatic lover is dryness of all the bodily limbs. And that is because the heart is sore applied with all the bodily might<sup>20</sup> to that thing that it loveth. Right so to our ghostly God is in a manner dried up from the humours of fleshly lusts. Of purpose, a loving soul for the great passing love that she hath to this, I find a figure in Holy Writ, where I read thus: that our Lord departed the Red Sea by the blast of a great burning wind. By this Red Sea is understood fleshly lust. It may well be called a sea, for what that ever it pretendeth of any manner of sweetness, it endeth in bitterness. . . . By this great wind and burning is understood a fervent love in God that drieth up in manner all carnal affections in a clean soul. With such a great burning wind, the holy Apostles on Whitsunday were burned with love. . . . By that wind thou shalt understand the Holy Ghost. . . .

The third token of an ecstatic love is hollowness of eyes. All ecstatic lovers have hollow eyes. For the eyes follow the spirit drawing together to one place where they suppose that love is most fervent. Right so the inward eyes of a loving soul, the understanding and affections be sunk into the heart, for all that such a soul seeketh is withinforth, all that it loveth is inward and not outward. Also the ghostly eye of such a loving soul is sunk in, for to see that nothing be in the conscience which should displease her lover. Our Lord cometh when he toucheth the soul with love and devotion that she never felt afore, and he goeth when he withdraweth devotion, because a soul should know her infirmity, thinking that such devotion cometh only of God and not of herself. Also he withdraweth such special devotion, that when it cometh again it might be kept more daintiously. Many there be that have such special devotion and sweetness of love, but oftentimes they put it away from them by idle occupations, idle words, and other secular desires the which besemeth not to them, and oftentimes receive outward solace immoderately; and also they say their service of God without hearty intention; and showing too much tenderness to their carnal friends. All these things put away special ghostly sweetness.

The fourth token of an ecstatic lover is dryness of his eyes and lack of tears unless it come of some special thought or remembrance of his love, insomuch that neither death of friend nor loss of temporal goods may in no wise make such ecstatic lovers for to weep. . . . Right so fareth a loving soul; she is not sorry for no manner of thing

<sup>20</sup> powers.

nor cannot weep unless it be for that thing that she loveth. Lo, Sister! if thou love God tenderly thou makest none nily<sup>21</sup> sorrow for nothing, unless it be for that thing that belongeth to love of our Lord Jesu, for though all thing were lost from thee, thy principal lover Jesu is safe to thee.

Two things there be that make lovers for to weep, one is his songs of love, another is the fear that they have lest they lose their lover. As for the first, a lover that is far from his love singeth songs of love in mind of his love. So, Sister, must thou do; in as much as thy love is far from thee in this life, sing songs of love! Songs of love I call the songs of holy Church, such songs thou must sing devoutly in mind of thy love, melting in sweetness of devotion. Such a lover was St Austin when he said thus in his Confessions: 'I wept plenteously in hymns and songs sweetly sounding in the voice of holy Church'. [Book ix, sect. vi.] Thus do thou, Sister, in mind of thy love.

Some there be that sing in holy Church as a bell ringeth in the wind, more for praising of their fair voice, than for any special love of God. What do they but fill the ears of the people with noise? and well may such singing be called noise! Good sister, fill not only the ears of others, but specially with devotion the ears of him that biddeth thee thus: 'Sonet vox tua in auribus meis'. [Cant. 2, 14.] 'Sing', so saith our Lord in the book of Love, 'that thy voice may devoutly sound in mine ears'. I wot well that singing stirreth the people to devotion, but yet thou shouldest have such devotion in songs of holy Church that it sound rather in God's ear than in man's ear. Therefore when thou shalt sing, sing as St Paul saith: 'Psallas spiritu et psallas mente'. [1 Cor. 14, 15.] He saith: 'Sing in thy spirit and sing in thy soul'. Thou singest well in thy spirit, that is in thy ghostly strength when thou singest with devout melody of thy bodily voice. Thou singest well in thy soul, when thou singest savourily in ghostly understanding of thy soul.

The second thing that maketh a lover for to weep is fear that he hath for to lose his love. So wept David and Jonathan when they should separate asunder, but yet David wept much more for he loved more. Right so dread of separation, which is a manner of death, maketh a devout lover for to weep.

The fifth token of an ecstatic lover is an inordinate pulse. Every amorous lover hath either too slack a pulse or too swift a pulse after diverse apprehensions that he hath of love. A slack pulse he hath when he is in doubt of her whom he loveth. He hath also a swift pulse when he hopeth to have her whom he loveth. Thus it fareth

---

<sup>21</sup> Nily = inly, inward.



in a loving soul. The pulse of a loving soul is affection, the which is swift when a soul hopeth to have him whom she loveth. Such apprehensions of love had David when he said: 'Cor meum et caro mea exultaverunt in deum vivum'. [Ps. 83, 3.] 'Mine heart and my flesh have great joy in God'. By the heart thou shalt understand thought, and by the flesh affection, his thought and his affection joyed so much in God for love that it skipped out ghostly, from itself into God.

Also the pulse of ghostly affection in an amorous lover goeth slackly, when a soul considereth her sins and the peril of ghostly death, perceiving how others more mightier, more stronger in virtue have fallen into sin. Therefore sometimes the affection of the soul went swiftly for love and then it goeth slackly for dread of falling.

The sixth token of an ecstatic lover is when all his thoughts and all his mind is turned deeply into the heart so far forth that there may no noise draw such a lover from his deep thought, but only when he heareth any word moved of his love. For it is the condition of an amorous fleshly lover, speak to him of what thing thou list, unless it be of his love, he knows not what thou meanest. And speak to him the least word that thou canst of his love, anon he wot well what thou meanest. Why is this, trowest<sup>22</sup> thou? Truly for all his thought and mind is inwardly set upon her. In the same wise a loving soul that loveth our Lord cannot understand secular words, worldly tales and worldly tidings, for it toucheth not her lover. But if anything be moved to her of Christ Jesu, her lover, or of such thing that (be)longeth to him, she understandeth it quickly, for her mind is full set upon him and of him she list<sup>23</sup> to hear and of none other.

All the questions and demands<sup>24</sup> that such an one shall make, shall be of love, as Solomon saith in the voice of ghostly lovers in the Book of Love: 'Numquid quem diligit anima mea vidistis?' [Cant. 2, 3.] She saith: 'Saw ye not him whom my soul loveth?' It is the manner of ghostly lovers for to hear and ask tidings of their love, Jesus. Sorry then, may they be, that have a dull wit to understanding of ghostly things and a pliant wit for to understand worldly things and worldly tidings. It is a very (true) token that such a one wanteth the love of God. Therefore, Sister, be not likely awaked out of thy lovely sleep, by no worldly tales, but only when thou hearest any word or question of thy love Jesu!

The seventh token of an ecstatic lover is that when the heart of such an amorous lover is so y-knit and fastened to her that he loveth, that when that ever he seeth anything that is like to his love, in

<sup>22</sup> dost thou think? <sup>23</sup> desireth, is pleased. <sup>24</sup> requests.

her absence, he is anon from<sup>25</sup> himself in a manner of woodness.<sup>26</sup> In the same wise a loving soul, when that ever she tasteth, be it never so little, of the excellent goodness and sweetness of God in this life, anon she is from herself and she beginneth to speak she knows not what. As St Peter did when he was with our Lord on the mount of Tabor and saw him transfigured into a clearness of great shining light; anon, he was from himself for joy and said he wist not what, when he said thus: 'Domine bonum est nos hic esse, faciamus hic tria tabernacula, tibi unum, Moysi unum, et Heliae unum'. [Matt. 17, 4.] 'Lord, it is best to abide here; let us make here three dwelling places, one to thee, another to Moses, and the third to Elias'. Truly he wist not what he said when he said so. For as Doctors say, he heard how our Lord said before, that he should suffer death in Hierusalem, and yet he said that it were best to abide there! By this thou mayst understand that Peter was from himself, for he was ghostly drunk of the sweetness of Christ's presence and therefore he asked there for to abide. He had forgot that time what Christ said before how he should suffer passion in Hierusalem.

Of one thing take heed, he desired no dwelling place for himself but for others. In token that all such that be so ghostly drunk, be more liberal and large to others, in heart, than to themselves. He said not, 'to me one', but 'to thee one, to Moses one, and to Elias one', he reserveth nothing to himself and that was a great charity, which seeketh rather the ease of others than of himself. Also he wist not what he said for he was so drunk with love that he weened the joy that he saw had been the same joy that shall be had in heaven. And that was not so, but a likeness thereof.

For as the Prophet saith: 'None eye may see in earth that excellent joy in bliss the which our Lord hath ordained for them that love him'. [1 Cor. 2, 9.] That joy that loving souls shall have shall be to them an open clear knowing of perfect love and of the goodness of God, and siker possession of everlasting bliss. To the which bliss and joy that never shall have end, bring us he that bought us on that rood tree. Amen.

Sigh and sorrow deeply,  
weep and mourn sadly,  
pray and think devoutly,  
love and long continually!<sup>27</sup>

<sup>25</sup> out of, besides.

<sup>26</sup> madness.

<sup>27</sup> This little verse is often found written at the end of the MSS.