

and like Guardian Angels
 they lose not their peace
 when their charge fails
 in spite of all their efforts
 they lose nothing of their prayerfulness
 for all their sorrow."

Their whole life
 is a life in God
 who "is love
 and therefore a life of love of man
 inexhaustible imperishable
 a life in God
 who is inscrutable and incomprehensible
 and therefore a life of adoration
 of adoring reverence
 for His secret ways
 in the souls of men
 a life in God
 who is the sublime freedom
 of His Own Divine Majesty
 and therefore a life of majestic freedom
 freedom in surrender
 freedom in acceptance
 "the higher freedom of the spirit
 to find God without trouble
 devotion and peace of soul
 in God
 the spirit of prayer in all things"
 "the freedom of God's Children"
 God
 in all
 all
 in God.

THE END.

THE UNITY OF THE SPIRITUAL LIFE

By H. C. GRAEF.

"Perfection is one . . . All men are obliged to tend to perfection, to the one and the same kind of Christian perfection, but each one according to his vocation, state in life, grace of God, personal fervour". The unity in diversity of the spiritual life could not be stated more forcefully than in this quotation from the new book by the American scholar Pascal P. Parente.⁽¹⁾

1) Pascal P. Parente, S.T.D., *The Ascetical Life*. (B. Herder Book Co. 1944)

Divine grace, the foundation and sap of the spiritual life, is one—but men are different, and as grace does not destroy, but perfects, nature, its workings will differ according to the different individuals on which it acts. Yet, the Divine Author of nature and grace never works haphazardly. His creation is ruled by Law, a law which has nothing to do with the modern passion for planning, coercion, and equality, but which is an organic order, in which each being is governed according to its nature. Therefore the spiritual life is governed by its own laws. These are, however, more difficult to discover, especially as they, also, have their exceptions, which are always more striking than the normal developments. The subject becomes even more complicated if we consider that, in the spiritual life, the normal term of development, viz., heroic sanctity, is so comparatively rare that it appears almost abnormal. Yet our Lord Himself has made perfection the aim to which all ought to tend: "Be ye therefore perfect, even as your Heavenly Father is perfect!" From this tremendous command—and it is a command, addressed to all, not a counsel, envisaging only the few—there is no escape. But as God Himself desires our perfection, he has also pointed out the means by which we should attain it. The first and foremost, accessible to all men whatever their station and circumstances, is prayer, which our Lord himself taught by his example as well as by his reiterated commands that we ought always to pray and not to fail, and his Apostle after him, who asked the Thessalonians to pray without ceasing.

Yet, though all spiritual teachers are at one in recommending prayer as an indispensable means of perfection, the science of prayer, which has aroused so much interest in recent times, has become a matter of considerable controversy between rival schools of thought. Parente, on his own testimony, seeks to mediate between the warring camps ranged behind the authorities of Poulain and Garrigou-Lagrange respectively. But his efforts seem to make confusion doubly confused; for, not content with distinguishing between the two kinds of acquired and infused contemplation, he bases himself on Surin and postulates two kinds of unitive way, the ascetical and the mystical, 'ordinary' union belonging to the former, 'mystical' union to the latter. And, further, though he admits in his introductory chapter 'that there is both a distinction and a continuity, between acquired and infused contemplation, between asceticism and mysticism' (p. 15), in the later part of the book he insists that 'mysticism has nothing to do with asceticism proper, just as infused contemplation has nothing to do with acquired contemplation' (p. 234). This latter pronouncement seems to us an unduly dogmatic assertion. It breaks up the unity of the spiritual life,

making of mysticism something like an odd growth superadded to the ordinary structure of the organism of grace, as Parente frankly admits when he says: "Mysticism is something more than divine grace" (231). Yet he gives no definition of it beyond the statement that "mysticism is a knowledge of God by love" (p.233), which would not seem to contradict, but rather to support, the view that it is the full development of the life of grace.

Perhaps the author might have been led into less serious difficulties if he had not taken the differences, but the unity of the spiritual life as his working hypothesis. For, whatever divisions we may make for the easier understanding and classification of the Spiritual Life, it is an organic spiritual unity, just as the living human body is an organic natural unity. As this natural life develops from infancy to maturity, so also the supernatural. Development means growth, and both physical and spiritual growth of man in the fallen state is accompanied by suffering. In the natural process of growth the most easily recognizable transition is that from the child to the young man or woman, frequently accompanied by crises of varying severity; a period, which may serve to illustrate, in the spiritual life, the transition from the meditative to the contemplative stage, the "night of the senses" having its parallel, on the physical plane, in the difficulties of puberty. On both planes, the natural and the supernatural, there seems to be a break, the appearance of the young man seeming as different from that of the little boy as the prayer of contemplation from the meditation of the beginner. Yet the boy is the same *person* as the young man, though, in some way, another; but their otherness is but the natural effect of the development of the organism—it has been there *in potentia*, and, at its appointed time, has become a reality *in actu*. Thus, even in the meditative stage, the soul, informed by supernatural grace, is potentially already contemplative, but only after she has lived through the "dark night of the senses" can this potency become actual.

This, however, does not mean that every person in the stage of meditation will cross the threshold to contemplation as necessarily as the normal boy develops into a man. For in the physical sphere reigns the law of necessity, but in the supernatural as in the moral spheres the law of freedom, to use a seemingly paradoxical expression. Therefore the normal development of the spiritual life may be impeded or even completely broken up not only by a neglect to use the given graces to the full, but also by the inscrutable Will of God, who may, for reasons known to him alone, refuse to give graces strong enough to overcome the difficulties of natural temperament, outward circumstances, or

other factors, impeding the normal spiritual development; a fact for which there is some parallel even in the natural spheres where hereditary influences or external accidents may arrest the normal physical or mental development of a child. But apart from these cases, which, however frequent, ought to be considered abnormal, the normal tendency of mental prayer is to become ever more simplified and to diminish ordinary mental human activity, an apparent void being thus created. This, however, is indeed, only apparent, for the *horror vacui* is as much a law in the supernatural as in the natural sphere. According to St. John of the Cross this seeming void is in reality the unfelt Divine activity which takes the place, in the soul, of the human activity hitherto predominant.

It seems that in this scheme of the spiritual life there is no place for that "acquired" contemplation so frequently mentioned by Parente and other modern authors. But perhaps the controversy on the existence or otherwise of acquired contemplation is largely a question of terms. It seems clear that between the stages of meditation (including the so-called "affective prayer") and the prayer of quiet, usually considered the first stage of mystic prayer, there is an intermediary stage, frequently called the "prayer of simplicity", which would correspond to the "Dark Night of the senses" of St. John of the Cross. In it man is incapable of doing anything, on the other hand God's presence is not felt, as it is in the "prayer of quiet". Thus this stage seems to be very "dark" or "simple"—but both expressions seem to visualize the same experience. Now St. John of the Cross regards this stage as transitory, leading up to higher and better things—but this would not preclude that many souls come to a standstill there, just as others are arrested at meditation, or, on a higher rung of the spiritual ladder, at the prayer of quiet—which, according to St. Teresa, is the final stage of many contemplative religious. There is, however, another, and perhaps more plausible, view, which regards "acquired contemplation" as a kind of modified meditation. It is distinguished from ordinary meditation by a greater unification, which dispenses with discursive thought and concentrates on one point which is, as it were, the centre of a gentle circular movement, constituting this particular mode of prayer. The activity would thus still be mostly human, not, as in infused contemplation, Divine. But, whatever view we may take, there would be no reason to deny that many holy souls, whether impeded by a naturally more active temperament, or by a refusal of greater efficacious graces, come to a standstill on the very threshold of the mystic life properly so called. It is, however, of interest, that no other than Poulain states as an historical fact that all canonized

Saints known to him, martyrs only excepted, and including even the most active Saints of the Society of Jesus, have had the higher "passive" states of mystic prayer. This testimony would indeed seem to support our thesis that the spiritual life is a unity, developing from the meditative prayer of spiritual infancy to the mystic states characteristic of heroic sanctity. That this life of prayer differs in details according to the nature of every individual, that the mystic prayer of a St. Vincent de Paul is different from that of a St. John of the Cross, is a proof rather than a contradiction of our view that the spiritual life is essentially organic. For only machine-made products are exactly alike, but both natural and supernatural organisms are the more differentiated, the higher they are, without losing their unity, which is organic, not mechanical.

Thus the spiritual life, from the first gropings after God of the child soul or of the newly converted sinner to the transforming union of the mystic with his Beloved, is one living unity, the unfolding of the seed of grace into the resplendent flower of charity hymned by St. Paul in his great canticle of Love. The flower looks, indeed, different from the seed, and, again from the little green shoot from which it develops—but for all that it is contained in the seed, and it would be bad botany to assume that a new principle must be superadded in order to explain the loveliness that springs from the humble brown grain. And if God produces such marvellous transformations in the natural order without breaking the unity of vegetative and animal life, why should He not do the same in the order of grace? Therefore we would liken the life of grace to the seamless robe of Christ, beautiful in its unity and simplicity, and as the vesture of the Lord that was made resplendent on Thabor, destined to be transformed into the life of glory in the eternal city whose light is the Lamb.

A TREATISE ON THE INEFFABLE MYSTERY OF OUR REDEMPTION

BY

LUIS OF GRANADA, O.P.

(*Translated by a Nun of Stanbrook.*)

CHAPTER IV (*continued*).

3 .

The benefit and dignity conferred on man by God through this sovereign Mystery.

So wonderful was the means chosen by Divine Wisdom for our salvation that from every point of view we shall always learn how appropriate and suitable it was and what blessings it brings us. Firstly, the Eternal Father thus provided us with a most perfect