

THIRD SECTION

A RELIGIOUS STATE

EVERY Profession places us in a certain state. In this respect the Tertiary Profession resembles all the others ; but whereas most men, in virtue of their profession, are established in a secular state, the Tertiary is fixed in a religious state.

What do you mean by a religious state, I shall perhaps be asked. Are not those who bind themselves by the three great vows the only ones to enter upon that state ? If, on the other hand, you stretch the meaning of the word, ought you not to say that all men on becoming Christians are brought into a religious state ? What special place is reserved for Tertiaries between ordinary simple Christians and those to whom the name of religious is usually restricted ?

I should like to answer these questions, not categorically, but by expounding the principles which give a key to the problems.

Actually each Christian from the day of his baptism is placed in a religious state. He belongs for ever to that religion of which Our Lord Jesus Christ is the supreme pontiff.

From the moment of His conception Our Lord was ordained priest. By the very fact that the Person of the Word assumed a human nature, that human nature was set apart from other men, entirely dedicated to God for all eternity, and furnished with power to draw up to Himself the homage of the human race and to make the divine benediction descend upon us.

It is by the sacrifice of the Cross that the religion of Jesus Christ is fully expressed. As the sacrifices of old

were but the figure of that sublime sacrifice and a preparation for it, so also the sacrifice of the Mass is its commemoration and its extension throughout the world until the end of time. Now it is one of the purposes of the sacramental system to place Christians in a state in which they can take part in the eucharistic worship which constitutes for them the centre of true religion. That is effected more particularly by the three Sacraments which imprint an indelible character upon the soul.¹

I. THE SACRAMENTAL CHARACTER AND THE VIRTUE OF RELIGION

The sacramental "character" or seal gives us something like a reflection of the priesthood which His hypostatic union conferred upon Jesus. From our baptism, and increasingly up to the highest point in Holy Orders, we are set apart by this "character," we are dedicated to Christian worship and we are endowed with powers to take part in it.

Thus distinct from other men, the Christian is established in a state which he will never leave. He has not received just a nominal, external, revocable charge. Even as in olden times slaves and soldiers were branded with the effigy of their master or their chief, his soul bears an impression which will never pass away. Grace, which also affects the immortal soul, may be lost through sin. But no sin, however great, can efface that character. For whereas grace is a personal thing, the possession of which is subject to the fluctuations of the free will, the character participates in the immutability of the priesthood of Our Saviour, of which it is the reflection in ourselves. Priest for ever, Christ holds us henceforth in His hand, as beings placed at His service and qualified by the character to be His instruments.

If there is a state of the soul which truly deserves the name of "state" it is surely this one. Where else can

¹ *Summa*, IIIa, q. 63.

such stability be found? It is a religious state. By the sacramental character which has been imprinted for ever upon her, the soul finds herself really consecrated to God, following Christ Himself. She bears in her intelligence a power resembling that possessed in its plenitude by the Sovereign Priest of the Christian religion. In the Cenacle He spoke the words that anticipated the great Sacrifice of the Cross which the Mass perpetuates. "This is my Body . . . given for you : this is my Blood . . . shed for many."

"Do this for a commemoration of Me," added Christ. And the apostles, thus chosen to act as He acted, repeated His words while reproducing His gestures. Thanks to the sacramental character which they had received from the Saviour, they entered as it were naturally into His great priestly activity—always real though unseen. They could be observed to adopt His attitude, they could be heard to pronounce His words and they re-enacted the same sacrifice under His influence as the one High Priest. Every Christian priest continues this apostolic function. Even when he is not actually engaged in performing the essential rite of the Christian faith, he is qualified to offer to God the homage of men and to impart to them the divine grace which flows from the various sacraments and even from the simplest of his blessings.

If the priest has received the sacramental character or seal in its plenitude, every baptized Christian has received a measure of that power, which is strengthened by Confirmation. Are we not participating in Our Lord's priesthood when we enter intelligently and devoutly into the sacred rites which are being celebrated by those who direct our Christian worship? In the great religious society, priests are, so to speak, authorised by Our Lord to act in His stead : but every baptized soul is at least a shareholder in this spiritual society and is entitled to his portion of the good things amassed by Christ Jesus for the common weal.

But when Christians, and particularly priests, have been thus set apart from the rest of men, it is of vital importance that they should maintain this distinction in every way, that their souls should rise to the height of the consecration they have received, that they should be worthy of their title, and make good use of the powers with which they are endowed.

The sacramental character calls for the virtue of religion. This virtue becomes more and more necessary as we rise higher in the hierarchy and are more deeply stamped with the image of Christ. It does not suffice to play a part in the Christian religion : we must have the spirit of the part. We must become closely conformed to Him Whose gestures we copy and Who throughout His life honoured His Father. Ought we not to be living always as persons who lately, this very morning, celebrated or attended Mass and who will shortly do so again ?

All men, even the least logical among them, are naturally astonished when a priest or even an ordinary Christian has not the sanctity required by his religion. Worldly men are indeed over severe in their censure of those who, like themselves, are only human beings, and who have to struggle against the same obstacles caused by sin. Those very critics, when it suits them, declare the obstacles to be insuperable. Here also they exaggerate and run to the other extreme. With the grace of God we can triumph over sin. If we recognize those difficulties we also know that the sacraments, in consecrating us to Christian worship, bestow upon us the grace of virtues and of gifts, and so perfectly adapt this grace to our needs that it can cure all the ills that result from sin.

Certain masters of the spiritual life, who have closely followed the counsels of the divine Master, have laid special stress upon the great virtue of religion, which is strengthened particularly by sacramental grace, and they have striven to make their disciples proficient in this virtue, to the end that sentiments conformable to

their religious character should continually fructify in their souls. Moreover, as this virtue of religion occupies a truly central place in the spiritual life, as it receives the direct influence of the three theological virtues and holds sway over all the moral virtues, it must necessarily be the means by which the whole of life can be perfectly organized.

The history of religious Orders proves the excellence and the fruitfulness of this conception.

II. THE VIRTUE OF RELIGION AND THE THEOLOGICAL VIRTUES

The virtue of religion teaches us to turn to God ; it does not unite us directly to Him, like the theological virtues that have God Himself as their object, but directs to Him certain interior and external acts which we accomplish in order to express our recognition of His incomparable excellence and to assume the attitude of a servant before His beneficent authority.

Through faith we cleave to God's truth, through hope we rely upon His power, and through charity we love Him in Himself and for Himself. Thus, by the exercise of the theological virtues we embrace God, we live in Him.

The virtue of religion finds its material scope outside God, but it engages itself therein only with a view to Him. Its immediate aim is to offer Him worship, to do Him honour. Because of this character, which distinguishes it from all other moral virtues, it comes near to the theological virtues. Being concerned with presenting our homage to God, it comes more directly under their influence, and it even mingles with those high virtues by instilling the note of religious respect into the acts of our faith, our hope and our love.

In the very first article of his treatise on religion, St. Thomas, under the pretext of etymology, stresses, without seeming to do so, this close connection between the three theological virtues and religion.

He says that religion, according to Cicero, comes from *relegere*, which means to re-read. Religion makes us re-read continually, as though in a cherished book ever open before the eyes of our soul—re-read and meditate upon God Himself.

“In all thy ways think on Him,” the Wise Man advises in the Book of Proverbs. “I set the Lord always in my sight,” said David. “The Lord is in this place and I knew it not,” exclaimed Jacob in a great outburst of religious feeling.¹ As the result of continually thinking of God by faith we become like Moses, of whom the Epistle to the Hebrews says that he seemed to see the unseeable.

Since the days of Moses a wonderful grace has been given to the world. The Word became flesh. The great divine book has been translated into our human language, with the illustrations we needed to make us understand it and savour it. Men have had a tangible revelation of what God is. “We have seen, heard and touched the Word of life,” wrote St. John. “I am Who am . . . think of Me always.” Our Lord, in speaking to St. Catherine of Siena, used the same description of Himself that God had given to Moses. But to-day we are impressed with the conviction that a great tenderness, an encouraging sympathy, shines in the divine glance which rests upon us and in which we read the thought of our Creator and Redeemer—His idea for our life.

When she was six years old, St. Catherine of Siena saw Our Lord in the sky above the Church of St. Dominic. Clad like the Pope, He was looking at her and blessing her. All her life long she kept before the eyes of her soul that first page of the divine book which symbolized all that God expected of her. It was to be her vocation to dedicate herself to the service of Jesus in the person of the Sovereign Pontiff, the head of the Church, through the medium of the Order of Preachers.

In that upraised Godward glance, expressive of

¹ Prov. iii. 6 ; Ps. xv. 8 ; Gen. xxviii. 16.

sovereign respect, together with absolute dependence, in that meditation on God, religion acts under the immediate influence of faith. But we shall see that it is no less intimately linked with charity.

St. Augustine thought that the word "religion" was derived from *reeligere*, to re-elect. And since God is always the subject-matter of religion, it is God Whom our religion makes us continually re-elect. After having chosen Him in the first instance as the One Being, beloved above all else, we choose Him again every time we discover a fresh or a deeper motive for our love : we also choose Him again with a keen sense of regret and new resolution when we have neglected to seek Him, or when, through serious sin, we have turned away from Him. "Father, I have sinned against Heaven and before thee : I am not worthy to be called thy son : make me as one of thy hired servants." "Thou art still my son," replies the father. But the son will be only all the more eager and affectionately desirous to serve One who wishes to be both his father and his Lord. That alacrity for the service of God is devotion—the fundamental act of the virtue of religion which the fervour of charity increases more and more.

Like the son who had strayed away from God, but still more surely, will the son who has remained faithful find his devotion increasing as his filial love grows stronger.

In response to the action of some secret spring, both brothers will feel themselves impelled to be constantly watching for what is pleasing to God : they cannot do enough to honour Him and to carry out His will : "Always ready to serve Thee, dearest Lord !"

Joined to the interior sentiment which realizes the essence of religion in spirit and in truth, will be found, at the proper times, those various outward gestures through which the body expresses the disposition of the

soul and pays its own tribute of worship. Some men make an offering to God of the material possessions which they could have used, and even sacrifice things that they greatly cherish. Others again not content with presenting their offerings day by day, pledge their future beforehand by vows.

These are very noble acts of religion, instigated by the love of God, by charity.

If we accept an alternative etymology, also suggested by St. Augustine, religion would appear to come from *religare*—to bind. Our religion does actually bind us to Almighty God. Conscious of our own weakness and of our great need of help, we attach ourselves to Him, we seek to be allied to Him above any other. And we do well, because He is the indefectible first principle, the immovable support, thanks to which we shall never succumb. “It is good for me to adhere to my God, to put my hope in the Lord God.”¹ The work of the theological virtue of hope is to bind us to God, just as to re-read Him is the office of the virtue of faith, and to re-elect Him the function of the virtue of charity. And here its immediate outcome will be the practice of assiduous prayer.

Next to the devotion described above, prayer occupies the most prominent place amongst the acts of religion. Whereas by the former our will was devoutly submitted to God, now it is our intelligence which subjects itself to Him, imploring the help required. Prayer is a religious act, but it is one directly inspired by hope.

Through the sacraments also, provided they are received piously, as well as through prayer the soul has recourse to divine Omnipotence, the great motive of our hope. Frequent use of the sacraments belongs, as a primary essential, to the practice of religion.

Thus the virtue of religion is enabled by its proximity

¹ Ps. lxxii. 28.

to the theological virtues and their influence to carry out perfectly the acts that are peculiar to it.

III. THE VIRTUE OF RELIGION AND THE MORAL VIRTUE IN THE RELIGIOUS STATE

Apart from the acts which strictly belong to it and are spontaneously generated by it, the virtue of religion, taking precedence of the other moral virtues, can make a perpetual liturgy of all the acts of our life—whatever they may be. “Whether you eat or drink, whatsoever you do, do all for the glory of God.”

The term “religious” might conceivably be applied to any man who periodically worships God by approved acts, such as assisting at Sunday Mass. Nevertheless, the name of Religious, St. Thomas tells us, is confined to certain men who devote their whole life to the worship of God and, in order to do so, detach themselves from worldly entanglements.¹

The name of “religious” is eminently suited to them : in them is realized the true type of the “religious.” For they are not content with taking part, perhaps every morning, in the sacrifice which our sovereign Priest renews at the altar, nor yet with supplementing it occasionally by some particular offering or even some particular vow. They offer themselves as a holocaust to God, reserving nothing for themselves either for the present or for the future. Whatever they may possess is sacrificed to Almighty God. What can possibly be left to one who has completely abandoned for God all earthly possessions, all bodily enjoyments and even his free will? Here we have the three vows which are the foundation of the religious life in its full sense. They constitute in themselves a twofold outstanding act of the virtue of religion : a sacrificial holocaust in which the victim is completely consumed, and vows which pledge all the rest of life. They offer up all for ever.

¹ *Summa Theologica*, IIa IIae, q. 81, a. 1, ad 5.

Thanks to this offering which withholds nothing, thanks to this promise which pledges the whole life, all acts from that time forth are invested with a religious character. They are religious from their very source, the will, which has been consecrated by the vow of obedience and which controls the whole.

To the vows is added an organized system of regular life, in order to ensure their practice and perhaps even their perfection by separating the Religious more entirely from the world and by allocating every part of his day to the service of God. It is a system which has ripened slowly under monastic tradition, and which has been modified by every Patriarch to suit the Order he has founded; the habit, the enclosure, silence, choral office, study of sacred science, works of penance, modes of eating, of taking recreation, of going to sleep. These things are called "observances," and to grasp the true import of the word we must realize that originally "observance" was synonymous with "respect." It is not a question of carrying out, willy nilly, a string of orders, but of doing it to give honour to God. Correctly speaking, the term "observance" is applicable only to the injunctions of a religious law. They are "observed" out of consideration to the Omnipresent God in order to give Him tokens of our attention, our reverence or our dependence. In that way everything, even the silence, becomes, in the words of the Dominican Constitution, a beautiful liturgical ceremony.

The Dominican Tertiary shares "in the religious and apostolic life of the Order of Friars Preachers." That is the consequence of the profession he has made "in honour of Almighty God, Father, Son and Holy Spirit." If this profession does not entail vows, it does, nevertheless, place the one who has made it in "a sacred order." He becomes subject to superiors and must follow a rule. The rule contains a set of observances which have been

specially selected with a view to permeating the secular life with the spirit of the religious state.

“ I wish the Rule of the Order, which is signed by my superiors and will be found in my travelling bag, to be placed beside me so that I may carry it to the grave.” These words were written in the will of the Duchess of Alençon, who was burnt alive at the Charity Bazaar and whose exemplary life is still remembered by the Tertiaries of St. Dominic. She never departed from the Rule of the Third Order, even when travelling. This Rule, along with the instructions of her Superiors, had served during her novitiate to prepare her for her Profession, and she had clung to it ever afterwards, that she might shape her life religiously according to its precepts.

The Tertiary, like the Religious of the First Order, recites the divine office “ seven times a day,” and perhaps “ rises in the middle of the night ” for that purpose. He even receives and is bound always to wear “ the most important part of the Dominican habit.” “ By creating the Third Order,” says Père Lacordaire, “ Dominic brought the religious life into the midst of the domestic hearth and to the nuptial bedside.”

St. James tells us that “ to keep oneself unspotted from the world ” is a part of true religion. It is, of course, in the first instance the work of temperance or of similar virtues. But the virtue of religion uplifts this operation to the level of its own dignity.¹ It impels us to exclude from our life all that is ugly, all that is frivolous, all that is vain,² and to fill it instead with that honourable integrity which God, in Whose presence we stand, wishes to find there that He may glory in it.

There is a variety of moral virtues which help to moderate the inordinate impulses of our passions, to give us courage in the face of our fears and to regulate our relations with our neighbours. Above the virtues of temperance, fortitude and justice reigns prudence,

¹ *Summa*, IIa IIae, q. 81, a. 1, ad 1.

² Comp. Ch. IX of the *Rule of the Third Order*.

which decides and enjoins the acts that ought to be performed in every Order. But the great virtue of religion rises even higher than this governing virtue, which it impregnates and through which it diffuses itself into all our other moral actions.

The honour of God, which religion has always in view, inspiring in the soul an unremitting concern for it, is a powerful incentive to the formation of reasoned decisions and to perseverance in keeping resolutions. Respect for the divine presence—what a curb upon the passions! How much the thought that God could be proud of us should encourage us to strive after a high ideal and pursue it disinterestedly! Under the animating influence of charity the virtue of religion repeats constantly, in the ears of the soul, St. Paul's cry: "All for the glory of God." And it is ever urging us on to heights to which we should never otherwise aspire.¹ In a life so ordered all works of renunciation or devotion, such as those mentioned by St. James—the bridling of the tongue and the care of orphans—become indeed "a religion clean and undefiled before God and the Father."²

Compliance with the commandments of God is not sufficient. We must follow eagerly in the path of the evangelical counsels. The Tertiary, though he does not pronounce the three vows, so far imbibes their spirit as to be able to make sacrifices of a similar nature. God is so infinitely preferable to riches, pleasures or independence! For His sake, to do Him honour, we detach ourselves from earthly goods.

No longer that excessive anxiety about the future, doubly excessive because it means that we rely too little upon God and too much upon money. Less and less shall we be eager for gain, and yet no time will be lost in useless occupations. We shall be the better able to spend for the benefit of all when we realize that property has been given us by God for it to be turned to good

¹ IIa IIae, q. 81, a. 8, c. and ad 1.

² James I, 26, 27.

account and not to be kept selfishly for ourselves. We must be prepared to give away what is superfluous. And if we should come to run short of the necessities of life, we shall accept with good grace the real poverty which comes to us providentially.

Furthermore, we shall accustom ourselves to an austere life, in which joy is kept under restraint, not passionately sought or gloated over, but merely tasted when God gives it, not asked for, scarcely even desired.

Finally, we shall so thoroughly understand that God is our Master, we shall so completely keep ourselves in subjection to His suzerainty that we shall always obey His authority underlying that of our visible superiors. And if it falls to our lot to give orders to others, we shall do it in a spirit of obedience to His commands.

St. Thomas tells us that religion thus understood is identical with sanctity, because it not only provides for the due performance of the functions strictly related to worship, but it also embraces the whole life and organizes it to perfection, being the fittest instrument the virtue of charity can use for that purpose.¹

¹ IIa IIae, q. 81, a. 8, corp et ad 1.

CHAPTER II

A RELIGIOUS FAMILY

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