

of Christian experience have recently been made by M. Jean Mouroux in a great book.¹¹ It is apparent there that Christian experience, and even any spiritual experience which is so, cannot be reduced to the verification of what one experiences—to the *empirical*—or to what one obtains voluntarily—to the *experimental*. It is 'the experience of the person in his contact with the God who is Person.'¹² It allows then in two ways of a passing beyond itself. M. Mouroux is thus led to coin a new word for a case equally confusing in the facts of experience, the word *experiential*. This term is applied to experience 'taken in its personal totality, with all its structural elements and all its principles of movement, an experience founded and laid hold of in the clarity of a consciousness which possesses itself and in the generosity of a love which gives itself.'¹³ It is essential to Christian experience that it go beyond the experimental.

There is therefore something of an injustice in the pretence of so many spiritually minded people, who complain of the insufficiency of techniques of liberation in our western world, equipped as it is with so many material techniques. We are going on to say what foundation there is in this regret, in this complaint. But at bottom it is unjust, because the desire frustrated is itself radically illegitimate. The complaint is that religion no longer offers 'any method, any concrete discipline for attaining that state of plenitude of which the saints and mystics speak'.¹⁴ But the saints and mystics have never taken for an end this plenitude itself. They are unanimous in preferring the least act of love in darkness to all the illuminations and all the experiences, in preferring the communion itself to the fervour which one can feel from it, unanimous in repeating that the 'happy encounters', as St John of the Cross called them, are unforeseeable graces of love, of God, never the success of our efforts.

II

THE NECESSITY OF A RENEWAL OF TECHNIQUES

Nevertheless we must pay attention to what there is, so to

¹¹ *L'Expérience chrétienne*, Aubier, 1952 (v. particularly ch. I, II, IX, X, XI).

¹² *Ibid.*, p. 21.

¹³ *Ibid.*, p. 14.

¹⁴ The words are Paul Sérant's, in Pauwels's *Monsieur Gurdjieff* (reviewed in *La Vie Spirituelle*, May, 1955), pp. 295-6. How significant is the title of Keyserling's book, *From Suffering to Plenitude*.

speak, legitimate in our contemporaries' pretence. Let us listen to their complaints.

Appeals like that of Katherine Mansfield to her husband awake in us an emotion which demands to be taken seriously. 'Do you like living the old mechanical life at the mercy of everything? Living only with a minute portion of yourself?'¹⁵ There is incompleteness, as if non-existence in the personal sense, division.¹⁶ If the modern world encourages 'personages' and excites 'push', if it gives too much weight to too much of the ego—one set of selves coming into conflict with another set, and all obscuring the self deep within us—if the abundance of shoots, going off anarchically in all directions, is exhausting the sap of the tree of life in us, we are not wrong to hope from religious practice some remedy for this evil, nor to be astonished and disturbed if, on the contrary, the evil overtakes religious practice itself.

Religious codes of behaviour have been too much regimented by the modern world. To the spiritual man religion manifests itself as a system composed of dogmatic formulas and abstract notions to be given intellectual assent, of orders to be obeyed, of feelings which cannot always be experienced sincerely, and of excessively external practices.¹⁷ Some put the emphasis on some of these elements, others on others, and inside each of these four components, 'tendencies' are at war. And there is a great deal of concern to find the best 'adaptations'. Now it may be supposed that the integration and theoretical equilibrium of all these given elements, even when it would be deficient, in the more customary religious codes, is what matters most to a normal flowering of the spirit. But are we so sure of this? What is the spiritual nostalgia which increases in many of the best people in proportion to their living in a Christian *milieu*? It is a nostalgia of the 'heart', and the psyche. Usually religious codes of behaviour, statements of ideas, expressions of feelings encourage neither the awakening of the psyche nor the opening of the 'heart' in Pascal's sense of the word (which is that of the whole human tradition, even before Christianity and parallel with it), that is, in the sense of the most secret

¹⁵ Quoted by Louis Pauwels, p. 250.

¹⁶ A striking expression of this misery and of aspiration towards self-fulfilment, *ibid.*, pp. 10, 14-16, 22, 69-73, 78-9, 231-3.

¹⁷ I have developed this point a little in *L'Art Sacré* of September, 1953: 'Of what spirit will you be?' There, certain pictures make it obvious. It is the real reason for the decadence of religious art. Affectations of being 'modern' will not change it. Quite the contrary.

recesses of the soul.¹⁸ Let us take this word to mean the spirit, an indissoluble gaze and love, deeper than ideas and feelings and the distinction between them. Faith, hope and charity are virtues of the 'heart'. But most often, alas, they manifest themselves only in the form of ideas and sentiments which deaden instead of awakening the mysterious faculties of the 'heart'.¹⁹ If many Christians are seduced by charlatans it is because these offer them methods or a tempting training in psychical realization, and promise to open 'the eye of the heart', while experience in the Church pays off its account, as far as this is concerned, by a miserable sham.

The spiritual man, to be sure, since he must *live by faith*, must be capable of surmounting such shams. The Church will always give the nourishment essential to his faith. His regrets are in the order of experience, and we have reiterated enough that faith is beyond that. But a life against the current is not a normal life, and in the normal life experience has its part to play.²⁰ The spiritual man is right to be sorry that the Church *as we have made it* does not easily appear as a *milieu* favourable to the life of the 'spiritual senses'. One of the most urgent tasks which must be taken in hand is the amelioration of this religious *climate*. The experience which the faithful have of the Church must become one of divine love translated into every human term. For myself it is specially the distortions of regular religious life, the blemish of art called sacred, and the general mediocrity of preaching which have made me aware of this defect of 'heart' and of the psyche; they are the symptoms of it, battering grossly upon the eyes of those who can *see what they see*.

In all this it is never a question of anything but the *conditions* in which freedom may be *exercised*, and we have stressed from the beginning of this article that it is only over them that means and techniques of spiritual life have power—not over freedom itself, no more, obviously, than over grace. But the part these conditions play is very important.

God's grace *makes us free* (Jn 7, 31-36 etc.). Now if it really

¹⁸ See the excellent volume of *Etudes carmélitaines* which is devoted to this subject.
¹⁹ I refer to the traditional doctrine (specially Greek) of 'spiritual senses', on which the essential things are said in the book by Mouroux quoted above.

²⁰ A part assigned considerable importance by Mouroux particularly in the chapter on 'spiritual perception'. It would have been interesting to exploit in this chapter the results of modern psychological studies, which have shown how the affective is necessary to the success of all the actions of life.

makes us free, it allows that this freedom should be really *ours*, in some sense other than the sense that it would be *obtained by us*, since it would come, on the contrary, from grace. It is not conceivable that grace enters in some way as a mere concomitant of freedom. *It gives us to our freedom*. Now this, our freedom, is governed by human conditions, which are not those of God—if one can talk about divine conditions!—nor those of angels. 'Freedom under conditions'—that is the formula for human freedom. These conditions are not only spiritual. They are also *psychological, corporal, social and cosmic*. Our task is to *dispose* all, in as much conformity as possible with the accordingly complex laws.

Now there are two qualities necessary to a spiritual technique: one is that of *openness*, through the presence of the free spiritual end, without measure, in the very act of having recourse to a means; the other is that of *rigour*, in the just choice of means and in their application.

On the one hand the means will not be spiritually effective unless they are animated by the sense of God, by the demands of the spirit, and unless charity makes of them much more than *means*—and I insist on the fact that there must, in this way, be charity *in the very acts* in which it makes use of the means. Let charity be there *in the act*, and the means are already becoming effectively *the realization of the Spirit, made concrete in, minted in, the conditions of our earthly life*. Yet on the other hand the means must correspond properly with what really are the conditions. Now in the four orders we have mentioned, those of our mind, of our bodily behaviour, of our participation in the life of society and of the world, we have learned much that the masters of the classical periods of spirituality did not know (there are also things which we have forgotten and must learn again). Moreover, the conditions themselves are considerably changed. Our modes of bodily and psychological behaviour, the assumptions which govern our dealings with the universe and with our fellowmen, many ways of thought, surely demand readjustment.

Let us consider, very briefly, the new factors which render obligatory this readjustment of means in the spiritual life.

First of all there is an immense increase in knowledge. Here especially, and rightly, there comes to mind all that we have learnt unassailably from depth psychology, but also the data of other human sciences, all the data which Alexis Carrel attempted

to synthesize just twenty years ago and in the extension and understanding of which a good deal of progress has since been made. To such data must be added what has come to us from spiritual environments other than that of our modern western world: from ancient forms of our own traditions, better understood; from antiquity, from the middle ages here in the west; from related traditions, especially that of the Christian east; from the chief human traditions as such—especially the traditions of ancient Egypt and of India, this last still a vital tradition today;²¹ from the 'primitives'. . . . We have no longer the right to live as if we knew nothing of all that has come to us from so many horizons and depths.

But it is a question of much more than knowledge; the conditions which govern our lives have changed and with them conceptions and mentalities. The upheaval which has been going on for a century in what the geographers (following Vidal de la Blache) and the sociologists call 'ways of life' is quite certainly more extensive and more radical than all the changes which have taken place in them from the stone age to the nineteenth century. The conditions in which the spirit has to live in the modern world are of essential importance to how our spirit should live. The era of the masses carries for us a double risk from which we cannot escape: the risk of becoming alienated from ourselves in the social hubbub, and the risk of a flight from it into interiority—in general the risk on the one hand of dissolution, on the other, of a hardening of ourselves in reaction against the world. . . .

And still we have not mentioned the most important thing. What, in the most immediate way, controls our conduct is the change which has taken place in the structure of human personality. Let us note only a few aspects of this change which are specially decisive.

The conscious mind has become more reflective. This is a great step forward, but it gives rise to very serious problems. All that a primitive man, a man of antiquity or of the middle ages, and the simple in recent times did naively, has to be *thought*. The twentieth century man must *give himself a reason for it*.²² Left to

²¹ My next article will pose the *question* of a 'Christian yoga'.

²² In all spheres fidelity to the traditional spirit obliges us to make such distinctions. So, on the subject of mortifications, D. Dubarle, in *L'Ascèse chrétienne*, Cahier de la Vie Spirituelle, pp. 244-259. And on the subject of worship, my article, 'The Unanimous Prayer' in *L'Art Sacré*, November, 1953. If one cries out at 'subjectivism', at 'psycho-

their own simple functioning, traditional practices, now that is it necessary to renew the *consciousness* of them, have no longer their former spontaneous effect.

Unfortunately reason sets itself up in a terribly indiscreet fashion. Modern man, as Péguy said, 'plays the know-all'. He wants everything to be explained, and he wants to explain everything, and he rejects what he does not 'understand', which is usually the most precious. He needs to rediscover, according to his own mode, a certain *art of informed attention*, which is *much more than rational* and which we shall try to introduce. It will be applied to *recognizing* the operation of the techniques most favourable to spiritual freedom. We shall need to take a *real cognizance* of them, and by 'real' I mean that we shall test out in ourselves as we now are, as individuals and as communities, the most normal codes of behaviour. In the Church all conduct must become a full and sincere 'experience of truth'. There is not a practice which does not need to be rediscovered, lived, in a new fashion, in terms of what we have now become—in terms of our actual disgrace (in order to emerge from it) the disgrace of being overmastered by the vastness of the new world, of being torn apart by it—and in terms of the wonderful possibilities for which, in regaining stability, we must prepare the way.

The *overvitalized* man of former ages has been replaced by human beings who are often *devitalized*, often too sensitive, nervously unstable, overworked. Their discipline will be very different, notably in regard to penance and in the attempt to regain their equilibrium. In all respects the most serious thing is surely the blunting of *attention*. The effective exercise of freedom is worth what *attention* is worth.²³ How can spiritual life stop being reduced among the majority of us to emotions and excessively abstract ideas, both of an astonishing variableness, to fanciful intentions and a great deal of external agitation? How shall we become capable of that ordered *élan*, that coherent

logism', if one imagines that the vocation of religious of the old Orders and of those of the faithful who attach themselves spiritually to them carries essentially the spontaneity of ancient times, if one rejects (that is self-evident) the reflective consciousness as a contamination of 'modern spirituality', this is quite the contrary of the simplicity preached.

²³ One is stupefied when one considers the contrast between the incalculable practical value of this principle and the feeble (or non-existent) part it plays in spiritual doctrines and spiritual formation. The learned keep it for themselves in a state of thesis. It has been set forth magisterially by Jean Laporte, 'Free will and attention according to St Thomas Aquinas', *Revue de Métaph. et de Morale*, 1931-1934 (an article each year).

and constant movement onwards and upwards which great lives make?

In the play of so many disturbing factors 'spiritualities' are suffering a crisis. The most affected are the 'modern' ones, that is to say those which have been elaborated since the end of the middle ages. They are suffering irremediably from the false intellectualist and volitionalist presuppositions which dictated them. They were beneficial only lately, corresponding to a mentality which was that of their times but which sustains them no longer. As for the traditional means which remain officially in use in the old orders, they scarcely operate any better. They correspond well to the reality of this 'human compound' which is man. But, generally speaking, they cannot be practised as at the time of their institution, in antiquity and in the middle ages: conditions of life, mentalities, physical constitutions and especially psychological constitutions are too much changed. One *adapts* these means as well as one can and that is useless. It is their total *transposition* which is needed, according to the new structures of life and personality. This is perfectly possible but the spirit is not there; for one sees everywhere religious doing as they please about the most essential of means, a means which is of all times and all circumstances, more necessary today than it ever was, silence. These religious seem extraordinarily unconscious of what is at stake, little disposed to understand how urgent it is to restore these means, *renewed*, revitalized. The majority dissipate themselves in disordered and useless activity, in a tumult of 'ideas', without any *real* knowledge of things, unconscious of *inner dimensions*, with little sensibility to *quality* of life. . . .

It is apparent then how deeply and widely it matters that the techniques of the spiritual life should be restored among Christians.

Some coherent picture of the directions in which codes of conduct must be orientated seems then desirable and even necessary. It will, inevitably, be provisional in character since the chief factors of change are still at work. But an *initiation* into what is surest and most nearly indispensable in any spiritual technique which attempts today to be normal and beneficial has a chance of retaining value for long enough.

This task is evidently one of those to which the modern reaction is immediate: 'It needs a team of specialists'. This is the academic

reaction—the university reaction if you like. Certainly for an academic work, calling for academic panegyric and revision, we need ‘a team of specialists’. And we know only too well the kind of report which this sort of team draws up. It elaborates those truths of which Nietzsche said that they ‘come to nothing’. The question is whether there are some among us who try to *live* taking into account the chief and (I insist on it) elementary data we have. If so, why should not one of us try to grapple with and synthesize his perception of what *living the life itself* suggests to him is essential and valuable for us all? Teams of specialists? It is for each one of us to see to it that the specialists from whom we get our instruction form a real *team*, a team which operates at last, while up to now it has been an academy. One of us may manage to change what he has learnt from them into what Gandhi called ‘experiences of truth’.

(To be concluded)

Catholic Evidence Questions and Answers

BY CECILY HASTINGS

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Anyone who expounds the faith on the street corner faces two tests. He must have a living, accurate grasp of the Church's teaching, or hecklers will soon have him in a tangle; he must be intelligible, or he will find himself without an audience. Cecily Hastings brought to the handling of the *Catholic Herald* questions column a thorough training in that exacting school; put it together with a collection of really searching questions—the kind which, if evaded, make a man's faith taut and touchy, but, when faced, turn from stumbling-block into stepping-stone—and you have a book which really demonstrates how theology is everyone's business, as the Church insists—everyone's richly interesting and vital business. The book is in two parts. As the author points out, no question about any part of Catholicism can, ultimately, be adequately answered without bringing in the whole; and it is with a brilliant thumbnail sketch of that whole—what is the Church and what her significance for man?—that the book opens. Against this first affirmation of mystery follows the second part—the answering of questions—set out in the pattern of the first: God, creation, man, Christ, the Church.

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