

TO THE HEIGHTS OF FREEDOM

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Three books have emerged from France—one already courageously translated into English, the second in process of translation, and the third inviting such a process—which between them mark the path of man from the depths of automatism to the heights of freedom.¹ The flash title of the *Etudes Carmélitaines*—‘*du Robot au Martyr*’—gives a fair indication of the theme treated in diverse ways by all the many contributors to the three volumes.

We live in a Robot age in so many directions that the modern moralist is confronted with a vast set of problems of conditioned, mechanical human actions with which he has hardly begun to grapple. How is he to judge of the culpability or the praiseworthiness of actions that are largely conditioned by interior, psychological or external, social compulsion? The widespread, unnatural and solitary vice among the young may be judged objectively as a serious sin. But is it really heading the unfortunate youth for eternal perdition? The effect of the scientifically organised methods of propaganda or of the merely degenerate forms of public mechanised entertainment and work limits the freedom of choice of the ordinary citizen to such a degree that it appears to be entirely whittled away in vast areas of society. The widespread view of sex and marriage seems to indicate that a great number of authorised unions no longer bear the character of a free choice of the state of holy matrimony. The eternal principles of the natural law remain unalterable but the judgment as to their subjective fulfilment or infringement makes the work of the modern moralist a task of the greatest intricacy and delicacy. Dr Suzy Rousset writes in this volume of *Etudes Carmélitaines* of the young delinquent and the confirmed criminal and of present investigations undertaken in France in relation to objective and subjective justice; and the question of the young delinquent only puts in the limelight a problem that runs through the whole spiritual life of the modern Christian.² Modern technique, this volume points out, has developed to the extent of inventing a mechanical brain; society on the whole

¹ *Limites de l'Humaine*. Being the papers read at the 8th International Congress of Religious Psychology. (*Etudes Carmélitaines*, published by Desclée de Brouwer; n.p.)

La Chasteté. Problèmes de la Religieuse d'Aujourd'hui (Editions du Cerf). Now being translated in the Religious Life Series (Blackfriars Publications).

New Problems in Medical Ethics, edited by Dom Peter Flood, translated from *Cahiers Laënnec* by Malachy G. Carroll (Mercier; 21s.)

² The problem has arisen again recently in the discussion as to when a murderer is mad.

is dominated by admiration for such techniques so that these man-made robots do in fact tend to dominate their creators and to subject mankind to this technique.

Dr Henri Samson, S.J. (*Etudes Carmélitaines*), shows how the whole biological as well as psychological system of the human frame is conditioned by the habits of growing men and women. The muscles, instead of being the vehicles for the expression of the emotions under the control of the will, can be dominated by nervous troubles, making up by violent movement for a hesitant action, registering quick anger owing to frustration in youth. . . . Mucus and serum which protect the organism from external agents or remove undesirable substances in the blood, express desires and conflicts. . . . It is all very well, says Dr Samson, for an habitual sinner to say after a sincere confession that he will not do it again; but he has to remember that his whole physique is saturated with what the Fathers called 'humours'. How far is he responsible in his subsequent actions; in other words, how far does his will control his physical make-up? Fr Snoek of Louvain, in *New Problems*, discusses this from the point of view of boys and girls and the phenomenon of solitary vice which can be so common. Is it a grave sin? he asks; and he answers that in principle of course it is grave; but it is sometimes brought on by 'inveterate anguish of the Psyche', is feared as a fatality, and the psychological situation requires very sympathetic and delicate handling. He gives some excellent advice on the ways of dealing with different types of those who fall into this sin. But the main point at issue is this: that if interior, psychological disequilibrium can lead to a minimal act of the will and compulsory acts of the Psyche or the physical organism, it is possible to trace some of these phenomena at least to external social situations. The modern world often sets up conditions in which such compulsory action can be easily bred. Abbé Oraison, in *Chasteté*, provides subject for thought in this matter in relation to hormones, Dr Le Moal and Père Larère, in *New Problems*, with reference to homosexuality. It should, perhaps, be added that the problems are, of course, not new; but the scale of environmental influence is far greater than heretofore; and also the science of the psychological and physiological states of men under such influences has been enormously widened if not deepened in the last half-century.

Yet the modern man remains free in essence and there lie before him the heights of human freedom which are described in these volumes and may be summarised under the three heads of Art, Virginity and Martyrdom. M. Stanislas Fumet introduces the volumes of *Etudes Carmélitaines* with a characteristic essay on *L'Acte d'Art*: 'Even if the artists on the whole are not chaste, it still remains true that their art is a manifestation of the spirit's conquest over the senses. . . .' The artist participates in some way in the free act of the Creator. But to turn to the supernatural freedom

of virginity and martyrdom, we can detect degrees of freedom emerging from the lower regions of compulsion. There is a purely negative freedom, a refusal or even a psychological incapacity to act, and this can scarcely be called freedom at all. A virginity that is established through fear of marital relations has no crown of glory attached to it. Indeed Dr Suzy Rousset, in *Chasteté*, points out the risk of accepting girls who might be called 'natural celibates', and even those who enter religion with the primary aim of preserving their virginity, with the love of God only as a secondary consideration. A Mother General, in the same volume, says that the sisters must realise that God has made man 'sexué', and that everything to do with sex is deeply rooted in their whole organism; and reaching above this they must see that God does not want desiccated, 'dehydrated' hearts. In the Old Testament sterility was a curse, though the author of the first volume shows how this prepared the ground for the Christian ideal of positive virginity.

Positive, dynamic virginity is the fullness of the free act of charity. 'Virginity has its origin in charity and is ordained to it', writes Père Le Guillou in *La Chasteté*, 'in its very finality which turns it into a virtue, towards the "decentration" from self and the union with God, which is charity; one is only chaste through love; virginity is only acceptable and expansive in the service of love. Virginity involves the consecration of the whole being to God: it only expresses in a particularly vigorous and sensible manner what charity is in its essence, the presentation of the whole man before the whole of God.' As an act, then, it is the free and total choice of God alone. In view of the captivity of man in the robot age it can become the great sign and manifestation of man's freedom in the life of charity. In the early Church the virgin was first recognised in her final act of free choice in martyrdom. Brought before the Roman magistrates to confess their allegiance to Christ, the Christian virgins were often subject to licentious attack and would protest that they were already espoused. Tertullian refers to them as being 'betrothed to Christ'. (cf. *La Chasteté*, pp. 53 et sqq.) So that very early in the history of the Church the freedom of virginity was closely associated with this other act of supreme liberty, that of martyrdom.

The last section, then, of the volume of *Etudes Carmélitaines* is concerned with the martyr as showing the final act of man's free will uplifted and strengthened by grace. But again it is the act of love that makes it so: 'The acceptance of death, St Thomas teaches, is not of itself virtuous, but a man can accept death out of the love of charity—he is a martyr. It is thus the sign of a sovereign charity'. (p. 222.) True martyrs are not those who take their own life; and while considering possible exceptions under the direct inspiration of the Holy Ghost, St Augustine and St Thomas after him refused to allow that a virgin could take her own life to preserve her

integrity (pp. 287 et sqq); that might well be an example of those who seem to place their 'virtue' above God himself. Moreover, one of the contributors goes to some length to warn us against the 'martyr of love' who derives a certain satisfaction from suffering, which can even develop into a kind of hankering for death (pp. 330 et sqq). Such people who seem to seek pain and suffering for its own sake do not manifest the perfect sign of true human freedom, but rather a return to some sort of compulsion arising from a psychological maladjustment. The great act of martyrdom by which all mankind was offered freedom was not the act of one who preached suffering and death for its own sake, but rather life, and that more abundantly.

One might ask in this context whether certain martyrs for the faith were not inspired by some type of 'enthusiasm' which had the nature of a compulsion, taken out of themselves by the exultation of the moment. It is possible in certain cases, and the authors of this volume are careful to show where this great act of Christian love and faith is fully and freely engaged. Another question in relation to modern martyrdom might also have been discussed in view of the diabolic methods of breaking down the personality and attacking the very will itself in current methods of torture. This question seems to have been passed by; yet it might have helped considerably in elucidating what is surely a very real problem to Christians when they read the 'confessions' of many men who have undergone the third-degree methods of the Russians.

Nevertheless the general trend of these three volumes seems to point to the fact that though the Christian subjected to all the modern attacks upon his freedom will continue to offer problems to those trying to enlighten and strengthen his conscience, the signs of the virgin and the martyr will serve to raise our eyes above the over-anxious scrutiny of men's hearts and show that the Christian's free act of love does in fact exist in every walk of life.

REVIEWS

THE LETTERS OF SAINT BERNARD OF CLAIRVAUX. Newly translated by Bruno Scott James. (Burns Oates; 42s.)

The English reader will find here some principal sources of his knowledge, whether he be interested in St Bernard's healing of universal and local schisms, his invitation to the Crusade, his war against the heresies of Abelard, his discussion of monastic observance with Peter of Cluny, his urging St Ailred of Rievaulx to write the *Speculum Charitatis*, or a discourse of the love of God like that addressed to Prior Guy and his Carthusian brethren. In a work of over five hundred pages some faults and inaccuracies are to be forgiven. It is easy for the casual reviewer to spend