

HOPE—THE ADVENT VIRTUE

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OCCASIONALLY in books of art reproductions you will come across a large picture of a nose, or waving hand, or something similar; and perhaps you will be taken aback by the peculiar choice of subject until you glance at the caption: 'Detail from somebody or other's *Adoration of the Magi*'. And then if you turn back a few pages you will find the full picture of the *Adoration of the Magi* and be able to spend several exciting minutes identifying which particular nose has been magnified on the later page. For the first time you will understand why the nose is pointed in the direction it is, why it is painted such a peculiar colour: for you will see it in its context.

A theological article on hope is like that nose. Since it is to be theological it cannot be about hope, it must be about God. And hope is only one detail in the full picture of God's relation with men. The trouble is to provide a previous page upon which the detail of the article can be studied in context, to provide something short of a *Summa* which will show the place of hope in the full picture of God and man. Perhaps an image will do, the vision that opened the ministry of the Prophet Isaias:

In the year of king Ozias's death, I had a vision. I saw the Lord sitting on a throne that towered high above me, the skirts of his robe filling the temple. Above it rose the figures of the seraphim, each of them six-winged; with two wings they veiled God's face, with two his feet, and the other two kept them poised in flight. And ever the same cry passed between them, Holy, holy, holy, is the Lord God of hosts; all the earth is full of his glory. The lintels over the doors rang with the sound of that cry, and smoke went up, filling the temple courts (Isaias vi, 1-4). This vision is not just a vision of the temple in which Isaias was standing, but a vision of the whole heaven and earth of which the temple was a symbol. The throne above the ark in the holy of holies has become the heavenly throne above the firmament of which we read in Ezechiel (i, 22-28); the glory in the temple is but the skirts of God's glory in the whole world. For the true

temple is the heaven and earth that God created in six days, in preparation for the first sabbath. He threw up the firmament like the tent of meeting in the desert (Isaias xl, 22); he set the earth on foundations and pillars like the temple in Jerusalem (Ps. lxxiv, 4); he divided the heavens, the dwelling place of God, from the earth, the dwelling place of man, as the holy of holies is divided from the rest of the temple by a veil (Ps. cxiii, 16). And finally he made man to use this world as a temple of worship: for without man worshipping in it this world is as nonsensical as an unused church. Indeed, it is the response of man to God in the form of worship that perfects God's creation and inspires it with that essentially religious character that it was designed to have. It is in man's heart and life that the heavens and earth had to become a temple; just as it is in his heart that the veil between earth and heaven really hangs.

In the time before Christ this veil was impenetrable: man was forbidden to set foot in the holy of holies, and all that he could see was the carrying-poles of the ark emerging from behind the veil. Notice that no man who dies in the old testament is ever thought to go to heaven; the dead man goes to Sheol, the world under the earth. Angels dwell in God's heaven but of all men only Elias ascended into the air, and he did not die. All that man could do was to attempt to bring heaven down to earth in his temple. Only when Christ, the true temple of God on earth, descended from heaven, do we get the gate of heaven opened for the first time. He is the first dead man ever to rise again and ascend into the dwelling-place of God, rending the veil of the holy of holies, rending the heavens.

In Christ, the vision of Isaias gains new dimensions, dimensions which St John makes clear to us. Isaias, he says, saw Christ's glory: 'it was of him that he spoke' (John xii, 41); and in the Apocalypse the vision of Isaias is renewed with Christ on the throne. St Thomas says that the vision of Isaias is in fact not only the image of the revelation vouchsafed in the first few verses of Genesis, but of the entire gospel revelation, too. The figure on the throne is the Word that was in the beginning with God, and was God; the glory filling the earth is the light and life that were created in the world through the Word; the presence in the temple is the Word made flesh of whose fulness we receive (*In. Joann. prologus*). For us who live in time the origin and end of things is

hidden as God's face and feet are hidden: we see only the movement out from heaven and back that lies between (*IV Sent.*, 50 exp. textus). But that movement is the centre now of our worship, the movement of Christ from the Father through the veil into this world, and the movement back to the Father through the veil out of this world. And that movement not only breaks the veil of heaven and earth, but the veil in our own hearts: we also in baptism are to be 'born from above', and, by thus being united with him who descends, share the right to return with him and be lifted up to eternal life (cf. John iii, 3, 13-15). The veil is rent in our own hearts, and the sanctuary of God, the presence of the Trinity, has revealed itself within us; Christ it is who rent the veil and laid down the way to the sanctuary, the way of faith, hope and charity.

Since then we have a great high priest who has passed through the heavens, Jesus, the Son of God . . . let us with confidence draw near to the throne of grace . . . (Heb. iv, 14-16).

Therefore, brethren, since we have confidence to enter the sanctuary by the blood of Jesus, by the new and living way which he opened for us through the veil, that is through his flesh, and since we have a great high priest over the house of God, let us draw near with a true heart in full assurance of *faith* . . . let us hold fast the confession of our *hope* without wavering, for he who promised is faithful, and let us consider how to stir one another up to *love* of good works (*ib.* x, 19-24).

It is in the epistle to the Hebrews, from which these quotations come, that the vision of Isaias is especially exploited with the emphasis on hope. God sent out his Son from heaven to teach and make purgation of sins, and then to return to sit at God's right hand (i, 1-4). He is the high priest who enters for us into the sanctuary, and after whom we must follow with confidence. 'We have this as a sure and steadfast anchor of the soul, a hope that enters into the inner shrine behind the veil, where Jesus has gone as forerunner on our behalf' (vi, 19-20). This theme the epistle repeats and repeats, and ends with the recommendations of faith (xi), hope (xii) and charity (xiii) that will take us to where Jesus now is.

With such an image of the whole of revelation to help us, such an image of the relations of God and the Christian man, we can safely turn to details of the picture: to theological discussion of

the nature of faith, hope and charity. These are the three virtues, the three 'strengths' of soul, that bind us to Christ. Through them we are born with him from above, sharing his nature; through them we bind ourselves to his life in this world, sharing his life of apostolate and sacrifice; through them we shall eventually pass through the veil to his and our heavenly Father and come home to heaven. Above all, we will understand the fundamental character of hope: for of all the three virtues hope is specially the impress in our souls of that movement of Christ out from his Father, through the vale of this world, and back again to the holy of holies. Christ has brought faith to our hearts by being the Word made flesh, the Truth; he has brought love to our hearts by being the beloved Son of his Father, the Life; but by being the Way, by his coming out and his journey to death and his resurrection and ascension, he has brought to our hearts hope.

For hope is not merely faith, not merely belief. Even in the ordinary use of the word we see that. I may hope it won't rain tomorrow, and yet believe that it will. Faith does not tell me that I will go to heaven, but I nevertheless hope to do so, and with a hope that is sure because it relies on the strength and virtue of Christ. Some belief is demanded, but only the belief that I *can* get to heaven, the way having now been opened; not the belief that I necessarily *will*. This is not hard to understand, for it seems that even in the things of this world I can have strong hope without infallibly knowing the outcome. It is possible to say: 'I have hopes of passing the exam though I do not believe I will', even if it is impossible to say: 'I have hopes of passing the exam though I do not believe I can'.

Again, hope is not merely love. Sometimes admittedly 'I hope it is not going to rain' seems equivalent to 'I want it not to rain'; but even here we can discover a *nuance* of difference. I seem to be not only wishing for fine weather, but to some extent to be relying on it coming about. 'I want you to be good, Tommy' is simply the expression of every mother's heartfelt desire; 'I do hope you are going to be good, Tommy' suggests that non-compliance is going to ruin the afternoon, that the happiness of the afternoon depends, relies, upon Tommy's unpredictable behaviour. Indeed, we are at times so anxious to distinguish the meanings of 'hope' and 'desire' that we coin a new phrase: we say not merely that we hope it will not rain, but that we have

hopes that it will not. Again however hope *supposes* desire. I cannot say that I have hopes of rain, but I would rather it were fine.

Hope then is not just belief, for it sometimes bears on things that I have not the power of believing; and it is not just love, for even if it does not add certain knowledge of the outcome it suggests some sort of reliance upon it. In the case of our hope to come to the Father through Christ it suggests in fact an unshakable reliance, and so takes us beyond all human hope. Just indeed as human belief is usually fallible (I *believe* so), but supernatural faith removes all doubt, so human hope is generally unfirm (I *hope* so), whilst supernatural hope removes all hesitation and anxiety. For this reason precisely supernatural faith and hope are virtues, are 'strengths' of soul.

What then is hope if it is not belief and not love? What is the new thing that emerges over and above love and desire of heaven and the belief that I *can* get there? Let us ask ourselves what is added to the desire of a mink coat when the husband says that, because of a windfall in the pools, he *can* afford it: there is added the decision of the will to move toward the shop. The will ceases to be merely enamoured of the mink coat from a distance, it begins to move the lady's legs and feet toward the attainment of the coat. So it is in the supernatural life. Heaven has always been desirable from a distance, but Christ, our husband, has shown us now that it *can* be reached—he has broken through the veil. 'Let us then with confidence, with reliance, with hope, draw near to the throne of grace. . . .' We begin to move.

Hope is the virtue that inspires you 'to lift your drooping hands and strengthen your weak knees, and make straight paths for your feet' (Heb. xii, 12-13), for it *can* be done. Jesus, who has already done it in himself, can also do it in you. Hope is the virtue which routs despair: since faith tells me I can, hope decides I will. I begin to move.

But hope also routs presumption. For we must remember that we *can* get to heaven, not because we have been shown a new ability in man's nature, but because we have been given a share in the ability of Christ. Aristotle has said that what we can do with the help of friends, we count ourselves able to do. For we can rely on the promise of friends. And so if our friend tells us that he can and will get us a ticket for the cup-final, we feel ourselves as good as there. Christ is our friend, and a friend who does not relent.

We 'hold fast the confession of our hope without wavering, for he who promised is faithful'; but we know that without our friend it is not possible. Fundamentally presumption is a trying to find our own way to heaven, neglecting the way that our friend has opened, the way of the cross, the way of sacrifice and love.

Hope is the virtue of reliance that strengthens us to move toward the sanctuary: it is the virtue of approach, of advent. It puts dynamism into our faith and our love. It routs despair and presumption. For it binds us to Christ himself as he rends the heavens and comes down, as he journeys along the road to Calvary, as he ascends once more to his heavenly Father. For as Christ is the wisdom of God that inspires our faith, so he is the power of God inspiring our hope. And only by our continual closeness to him can we *hope* to enter into the kingdom prepared for us, to the 'riches and glory of this mystery which is Christ in you, the hope of glory' (Coloss. i, 27).



ROSA MYSTICA

PHILIP HOLDSWORTH, O.S.B.

'Behold all generations shall call me blessed.'

WE hear the words of the Mother of God and we think how much the generations have fulfilled them. Over the centuries, increasingly, men have recalled the wonder that is Mary and have held her blessed. What is that glory in her soul that causes us to halt and gaze in awe and love? *Rosa mystica*, the mystic rose, is before us and therein is a whole world of mystery, a life, a deep-set complex of relations. Look into the heart of a rose, of a rosebud, you will see an interweaving, interscrolled patterning of petals and from it you will breathe a scent as of all heaven. So, in the Spirit, is Mary, containing the divine mysteries and breathing the very 'odour of Christ Jesus'. 'The Holy Ghost shall come upon thee.'

Mary is the spouse of the Holy Spirit. When she heard this