

short cuts to Utopia is part of the desire to retrieve our primal innocence, a desire that can never be fulfilled. We may not disregard the difficulties of our fallen state; we must approach them always with the patience of St Thomas in his opening formula: *Videtur quod non*.



PLAY

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THERE is an interesting little paragraph in St Thomas Aquinas' works¹ which refers to play. He has been describing how every action is performed towards some end, with some *aim* in view. Then he breaks off, and says that there are some actions which do not seem to be for any end, such as contemplating, playing—stroking one's beard! Leaving aside the beard-stroking (which St Thomas accounts for as would a modern analyst), he sees close similarities between contemplation and play. That is to say, contemplation does not have any end outside itself, because it is its own end; likewise with play, for although we sometimes play so as to study better afterwards, we also play for the sheer delight which is in the game itself. Therefore there is obviously a close similarity between the playful and the contemplative attitudes: they have no end outside themselves.

St Thomas begins an exposition of Boethius² by quoting from the book of Ecclesiasticus (XXXII, 15) where man is told on rising to run first to his home, and there recollect himself and play. St Thomas uses the quotation to explain that he is undertaking this exposition because to contemplate wisdom (the recollection) is itself a delightful game which requires no exterior aim for its justification. Furthermore, he points out, the Scriptures themselves compare the divine wisdom to the delight of play, for in Proverbs VIII, 30, we hear how 'I was with him forming all things; and was delighted every day, playing before him at all times'. In view of which one is not surprised to discover St Thomas saying that a man may commit sin by not playing sufficiently.³

1. *Summa Contra Gentiles*, Book III, Chapter 2.

2. *Expositio super Boetium de hebdomadibus*.

3. *S. Th.* II-II, CLXVIII, Art. 4.

But, delightful as a thomist theology of play might prove, it must give place here to a very simple 'phenomenology of play' based upon the ordinary observations of our everyday life.

If we take as an example of play the games of cricket which many families play on the beaches during summer time, what features of the game are particularly striking? Adopting a hint from St Thomas we notice that such play involves a suspension of time, so that each second of the game is treasured for its own delight, and not as a means towards the next second. In this respect the game on the beach is like contemplation, for in contemplating there is also a suspension of time—time is left out of consideration and the mind relaxes from the anxiety of time into the peace of eternity. Is it not possible, then, that in a game where the players are enjoying every second for its own sake, they are, in fact, having some slight foretaste of the joys of eternity? By accepting each second in itself, and not in its relation to other seconds of time, the players may well be seeing it in the light of eternity. Play, perhaps, is the working man's mode of contemplation.

A related feature of this game of cricket on the beach is the relaxation which it brings. Instead of suffering from the tension of time, the anxiety of waiting for what will happen next, the players have thrown off care. In this mood of relaxation they are able to see everything as a whole, taking in the sights and sounds of the beach without straining to plan what use these sights and sounds may serve. In their workaday lives their minds are continually tensed to discover *what use* things may serve; all the time, whether consciously or unconsciously, they are asking *what use* is this, or that, or the other? But now, in their play, they are simply *enjoying* things, enjoying them for their own sakes; and in this they are not, perhaps, unlike the blessed in Heaven, who never ask themselves what use anything is but simply enjoy it.

The third feature of our game on the beach is that the result does not matter. Whereas in most of our working lives it is the result which decides whether our activities have been successful or not, it is not the result of a game which determines its success or failure. The result is irrelevant to the essence of the game. Even those who lose the game are the richer for it, since the loss cannot remove the enjoyment which they have had. 'Who loses, wins'—truly this can be said of those who know how to play; and he would be a blind man who could not see in this 'Who loses, wins'

of the players some reflection of the Christian notion that 'everything worketh for good to them that love God'. For the Christian, also, believes that we have to lose our life in order to gain it, and the Christian who watches his life in this world brought to nought can cry, 'Who loses, wins'.

These features of cricket on the beach are more sharply realised if we contrast them with the features of cricket when it ceases to be play, becomes a professional occupation, and is treated as work. When cricket becomes an occupation there is not the suspension of time which characterises play. With one eye on the clock and another on the state of the game the professional cricketer cannot afford to enjoy each second for its own sake; each second is seen in its relationship to other seconds. It is all brought beneath the tyranny of time; and, indeed, the tyrant time may even be used in order to sway the result of the game by a timely declaration or the use of the new ball. Here it is eternity, and not time, which is shut out.

Again, there is no relaxation for the professional cricketer, who must be oblivious to the sights and sounds of the spectators around him, or the whistle of the passing train. Or, at worst, he may even try to *use* these sights and sounds in order to disturb his opponent's concentration and secure an advantage over him. What *use* is it? must be his constant question, preventing his spontaneous, fresh enjoyment of the play.

Finally, in professional sport, 'Who loses, loses'. The result determines success or failure. And this baleful concentration on the end (a contradiction of play) becomes increasingly harmful to play in proportion to the importance attached to the end. If, for instance, a spectator gambles a penny or two on the result of a game the interference with his enjoyment of it may be slight, but if he gambles £2 on the result he will become so concerned and tense about the result as to lose all enjoyment. His concentration upon the result will have destroyed the elements of play in the game. To set an end to play is to destroy its essence.

In case these reflections on the beach seem out of place in a serious discussion ('Play and seriousness are sisters' says Plato), may we point out that many modern thinkers have been led astray through asking always what the *use* of anything is, and losing their capacity for *enjoyment*, for *fruition*, which is incidentally developed by play. It has been noticed how Freud, for instance,

could see roots (which have some *use*) but could not even *see* the blossom, the fruits, which are to be enjoyed. Similarly, the biologists who cannot enter into the 'play' of nature actually lose their ability to see nature as it is, because play is a real aspect of the world and they are ignoring it. A list of the harmful effects upon learning produced by destroying play would prove most enlightening; here it is sufficient to call attention to Bally's stimulating book on the subject.⁴ Bally points out (p. 132) that Archimedes set about working on the problem of how to weigh the King of Syracuse's gold, but was unable to solve it during all the time that his mind was concentrated and tense, narrowed to that immediate problem. The solution came to him when he was relaxed, in his bath, in a 'playing' disposition. Perhaps if Archimedes' successors amongst modern scientists would learn to relax, as he did, they would acquire deeper insights than they at present enjoy.

Furthermore, the game on the beach could prove a very enlightening introduction to a neglected aspect of Christian theology.⁵ For Christian revelation teaches us an astounding truth about God's creation of the world: God created the world *out of nothing*. Our astonishment at this truth is nowadays not so fresh in our minds as it should be, because we have been brought up within a tradition which accepts it. But God's creation of the world from nothing is a truth which should never be just calmly accepted; it should surprise us into daily renewed reflection upon its mystery. God is his own happiness; he does not *need* anything outside himself, and yet he creates the world. His Creation of the world, therefore, was not necessary to him, but supremely free. Obviously, then, this free act of God's had no end outside itself. In having no end outside itself the act of Creation has its analogy in contemplation and play, neither of which, according to St Thomas, has an end outside itself. The activity of play is the best analogy by which most of us can reach towards some conception of God's creative act. By thinking of God as the sovereignly free player who creates the world in his bounteous, gracious playfulness, we dimly perceive the eternal play of God's will at each moment of time. Each moment of time has its eternal treasure, which God eternally sees, and sees that it is good.

4. Gustav Bally: *Vom Ursprung und von den Grenzen der Freiheit*.

5. For what follows cf. Hugo Rahner's *Der spielende Mensch*. Eranos Jahrbuch. XVI.

In order to illustrate this element of play within the Christian tradition we have gathered below a few texts, which we present without comment in the hope that the preceding paragraphs have made a commentary unnecessary:

'When he compassed the sea with its bounds, and set a law to the waters that they should not pass their limits: when he balanced the foundations of the earth: I was with him forming all things: and was delighted every day, playing before him at all times, playing in the world: and my delights were to be with the children of men.' (Prov. VIII, 28-31.)

'But David and all Israel played before the Lord on all manner of instruments made of wood, on harps and lutes and timbrels and cornets and cymbals.' (2 Kings VI, 5.)

'And David said to Michal: Before the Lord, who chose me rather than thy father, and than all his house, and commanded me to be ruler over the people of the Lord in Israel, I will both play and make myself meaner than I have done: and I will be little in my own eyes: and with the handmaids of whom thou spoked, I shall appear more glorious.' (2 Kings VI, 21-22.)

'Thus saith the Lord of hosts: There shall yet old men and old women dwell in the streets of Jerusalem, and every man with his staff in his hand through multitude of days. And the streets of the city shall be full of boys and girls, playing in the streets thereof.' (Zacharias VIII, 4-5.)

'And we came near to a place, of which place the walls were such, they seemed built of light; and before the door of that place stood four angels who clothed us when we went in with white raiment. And we went in, and we heard as it were one voice crying *Sanctus, Sanctus, Sanctus* without any end. And we saw sitting in that same place as it were a man, white-headed, having hair like snow, youthful of countenance; whose face we saw not. And on his right hand and on his left, four elders; and behind them stood many other elders. And we went in with wonder and stood before the throne; and the four angels raised us up; and we kissed him, and with his hand he passed over our faces. And the other elders said to us: *Go ye and play*. And I said to Perpetua: Thou hast that which thou desirest. And she said to me: Yea, God be thanked; so that I that was glad in the flesh am now more glad.' (*Passion of SS. Perpetua and Felicity*, 12.)

'... in this work [the work of sanctification] ... strain not thy

heart in thy breast over-rudely nor out of measure; but work more with a list than with any idle strength. For the more listily thou workest, the more meek and ghostly is thy work. . . . This is childishly and playfully spoken, thou thinkest peradventure. But I trow that whoso had grace to do and feel as I say, he should feel good gamesome play with him, as the father doth with the child, kissing and clasping, that well were him so!' (*Cloud of Unknowing*. C. 46.)

'For some time past I had offered myself to the Child Jesus, to be his little plaything; I told him not to treat me like one of those precious toys which children only look at and dare not touch, but rather as a little ball of no value that could be thrown on the ground, tossed about, *pierced*, left in a corner, or pressed to his heart, just as it might please him. In a word, all I desired was to amuse the Holy Child, to let him play with me just as he felt inclined.' And more in the same vein. (*Autobiography of St Thérèse of Lisieux*, Taylor, p. 115.)

Finally an Orthodox monk, describing the ascetic life, says: 'You deny yourself sleep by night and sacrifice the hours of day, never sparing yourself, and when you realise that this is all play—then you are in earnest.' (Quoted by Rahner. *Eranos Jahrbuch XVI*.)

These witnesses to the play of God in man throughout many centuries seem to strike an alien note in our own society. We of the twentieth century have abandoned the creaturely receptive attitude of contemplation or play and replaced it by the ideal of the captain of commerce who wrests time and nature to his purpose. When he says that 'time is money' the modern businessman is quoting a formula for the destruction of himself and our culture. Under cover of this formula he destroys the growth of trees and of crops by forcing them to grow at his rate, forgetting that growing things require their own time and, if forced, are forced to destruction. In the name of the same formula he insists that he and his workmen should each produce a certain amount of work in a certain time—for 'time is money'—forgetting that each one of us has his own time and rhythm, and that our nature gives us a nervous breakdown when that rhythm and time is not respected. 'Time is money', he says, and thus throws everyone into nervous anxiety, because they fear lest they should lose some time. With his ally, the tyrant Time, he destroys his own nature, the nature of his workmen, and of all growing things.

Having for centuries asked what *use* everything is, he has eventually turned his eyes towards our play. When we tell him that we do not need to state a *use* for our play, because it is delightful in itself, he is incapable of understanding us. He has so thoroughly perverted his own nature that he is incapable of *enjoying* anything, including our delightful play. And so, in his jaundiced perversity, he has even turned what was our play into an article of commerce, by inventing professional sport, and making it an occasion for gambling. Having lost the capacity for play he has poisoned the play of others.

But this captain of commerce will not have the last word. For if you wander into cities which his bombs and shells have reduced to rubble, you will still find 'the city full of boys and girls, playing in the streets thereof'. They laugh as they play over the businessman's destruction; these children prove themselves true men—in St Thomas's definition of man—'a rational animal capable of laughter'. And in the last day they shall laugh, these children in the rubble, when they walk the streets of the New Jerusalem, playing before the face of God.



TYPOLOGY IN THE SCRIPTURES

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IN the great pastoral effort of contemporary Catholicism, a return to sources seems to provide one of its most powerful inspirations and also to give some of the finest results. Catholics are re-discovering an interest in the Bible, the Fathers, the Liturgy, an interest which completes and perfects what the return to the texts and teaching of St Thomas has contributed to Christian thought during the last fifty years. But since in this case a purely scientific perspective is not sufficient, what is required being not only to admire but to assimilate, the problem of the approach to, and interpretation of, these sources cannot fail to arise. And, primarily, the problem of how to read the Bible, how to discover anew a constant source of spirituality and of triumphant Christian energy in the Old Testament which modern exegesis seems at first sight to have drained of its spiritual value. A more extensive