

Helps to self-knowledge

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HELPS

TO

SELF-KNOWLEDGE

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by

William I. Lonergan, S.J.

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Archbishop of New York

Diagnosis of Character

F. B. VALUY, S.J.

The following article is taken from a masterly little work entitled "Directorium Sacerdotale: A Guide for Priests," which passed through many editions. Though the analysis was originally intended chiefly for priests, it is so thorough, so searching and evidences such an unusual knowledge of human nature, that it has been judged worthy of reprinting in these pages.

I. General Rules

1. What impression have I created about myself at home? What is the opinion formed of my disposition by parents, brothers and sisters? What is the fault for which I was most frequently corrected during my childhood?

2. During my school career, what did my companions think of me? What nickname did they give me, or how did they caricature me? What was the origin of all my difficulties with my teachers?

3. What do friends tell me about myself, either when they admonish me amicably but seriously of some glaring fault; or when they jokingly and familiarly take for granted that my chief defect is such and such?

4. What is said of me in society? It is impossible that some busybodies and gossips should not have occupied themselves with me as well as with everybody else; and equally impossible that some others should not have occasionally informed me of what has been said. Their remarks will often have had some truth at bottom.

5. What has been thrown in my teeth by enemies or by any other person in moments of excitement and irritation?

6. What have people said to me when I have reason to think they were flattering? Were they not playing upon me, having seen through me, and knowing my foibles?

7. What involuntary thoughts constantly present themselves to my mind, especially when I have least power over it? For example, on first waking in the morning; when composing myself to sleep at night; at certain moments of unoccupied time; even in dreams? To say nothing of thoughts that become voluntary and sinful.

8. What secret do I know about myself—a secret well known, as the jealousy with which I guard it abundantly proves? What is that fault in my character which I strive to conceal, and which it pains me to hear spoken of? I should not feel pain if the finger were not touching me on a sore place.

9. What is the object at which I am aiming, and towards what center do all my actions seem to converge? What is the spring which sets all my life in motion? Of what do I speak? What do I read about with most pleasure and delight? What passages in books fascinate me, so that I return to them and read them twice?

10. What are my favorite aphorisms and proverbs? "Make haste slowly," perhaps if inclined to sloth. Or, "The animal that is not well fed cannot work well," if prone to greediness. Or, "The laborer is worthy of his hire," if avaricious, etc.

11. What does my physical constitution tell me of myself? Am I delicate and nervous, naturally desirous of excitement? Am I of a robust constitution, and possessed of a keen relish of enjoyment? Am I of a melancholy and dreamy disposition? Sanguine and changeable? Phlegmatic and loving ease and quiet, etc., etc.?

12. What qualities am I likely to have inherited from my parents? They had difficulties with their character; have these difficulties come down as an heirloom to myself?

13. What irritates me in others? If I am self-willed myself, I shall dislike very much headstrong determination in others.

II. Particular Rules

Having discovered our type of character, we must proceed to find out what are its ordinary and external manifestations. We cannot hope to conquer it by rooting it out altogether; and considering that, in the majority of instances our chief defect is nothing but the merely natural and unmortified development of some good quality, we should not try to destroy it. But we can, and should, correct the disordered sallies of this characteristic fault, until by degrees it has ceased to injure us, and on the contrary has been made to help us.

The following list of faults may be of use. It is not meant of course to exhaust the subject, but only to suggest thought, and put the reader on the track of his own defects. It should be observed that some persons seem to think that they have several predominant faults, which manifest themselves not only successively but simultaneously. This is an error—one passion alone is the “Master-Passion” of our life, and rules not only ourselves, but all our other passions. We commit sins, for example, of anger, mainly because we are proud.

THE PROUD PERSON

Is independent and self-confident. Does not ask advice of anyone. Attempts things above his ability to perform. Is ambitious and aims at dignity and rule. Cannot work in harmony with anyone of great talent. Treats others with contempt and haughtiness. Is indifferent generally to praise or blame of others, thinking himself above both; but is filled with jealousy and envy when persons are praised in his presence. Takes no interest in what is done by his companions, imagining that any plan not originated by himself cannot be worth carrying out. Is stubborn, obstinate, unchangeable in his opinions. Talks wildly about learned subjects. Thinks it unnecessary for him to study much. Pretends to have read what he has not read. Will lie rather than acknowledge himself to be in the wrong. Spends his time in criticizing everybody and everything. Cannot endure to be found fault with, however justly, etc., etc.

THE VAIN PERSON

Is often foppish and ultra-fashionable in his dress. Pays great attention to his hair and looks; is ever seeking occasions of seeing himself in the glass. Affects elegance of language in speech and writing. Is eager to know what is thought of him. Has perpetual self-consciousness, and is always studying effect. Talks of self, and, whether he praises or blames himself, courts esteem. Strives to shine in conversation, prepares subjects unknown to others, and leads the conversation up to them. Studies enough to be able to talk without knowledge sufficient to make him master of his subject. Boasts, exaggerates, and is guilty of continual vio-

lation of truth when speaking of himself. Gives way to thoughts of self-complacency about real or imagined good qualities and gifts, natural and supernatural. Studies to conceal his defects rather than to correct them. Spares himself in the confession of small sins for fear of losing the good opinion of his Confessor. Engrosses conversation in society and gives decisions unasked. Has an affected pronunciation, manner of walking, etc. If he has good hands, will seek to show them; or good teeth will smile merely that they may be seen; if he has travelled, will bring all conversation to the subject of his travels, etc.

THE UNMORTIFIED PERSON

Indulges his palate at table. Thinks of his food out of mealtime, and for the pleasure of thinking of it. Talks of eating, is hard to please, frequently complains of food. Wastes time in drinking, smoking, dining out when he can get the chance, etc. Talks and jokes too freely. Reads things in books and newspapers which should be passed over. Is almost entirely neglectful of custody of the senses. Lolls and sprawls in public and in private. Dreads practices of mortification, and has little esteem of penance. Uses no bodily austerity, though strong enough to do so. Has numberless dangerous thoughts and fancies, and dallies with them. Is partial to the good-looking, and takes a great interest in them.

THE EXCITABLE PERSON

Is touchy, sensitive, suspicious. Is fond of disputing and is intolerant of other men's opinions. Gives way to explosions of temper, angry gestures, hot words. Shows general brusqueness in his way of speaking to others. Indulges in bitter feelings against those who avoid him. Is commonly much deluded about his own state. When angry, uses oaths or expressions very like them, etc., etc.

THE AVARICIOUS PERSON

Harshness to the poor, seldom giving alms, and only when constrained, as it were, and in insufficient measure. Driving hard bargains with tradesmen and others. Constantly trying to obtain and save up money for the pleasure of having it.

Hoarding things that are useless. Harsh judgments of those who spend freely. Thinking or speaking, in season and out of season, of money. Allowing things of which he has charge to get out of repair, etc. Under plea of economy, buying articles of bad material and make, etc., etc.

THE PERSON WHO HAS TOO MUCH HEART

Is soft generally in character. Wastes time in the company of some favorite. Writes affectionate and gushing letters, and uses strong expressions in the assurance which he gives of his attachment. Makes handsome presents. Lets his thoughts wander constantly upon some beloved object. Shows inordinate love of parents and relatives. Gives way to sentimentality in public and private. Is full of feeling and sympathy which often go no further than mere feeling. Allows himself to be taken in by stories of distress told by impostors. Has a morbid craving for spiritual consolations. Reads books, profane and sacred, that excite emotion; dislikes solid piety, etc., etc.

THE PERSON WHO IS ALL HEAD

Is fond of ventilating strange theories. Is always at his books, and neglects the practical duties of the hour. Cannot lower himself to the level of his hearers—does not understand them, and is not understood by them. Turns every conversation into an intellectual tournament, and seeks to unhorse his adversary. Spends his money in purchasing rare editions of books and curiosities. In matters of doctrine has speculative opinions, ruthless logic, unpractical views. General coldness of character; seems to like no one, and to be liked by no one. Prays coldly and without devotion, which he despises. Sometimes learns all kinds of languages and sciences, without caring whether they will be of use, etc., etc.

THE PHLEGMATIC PERSON

Uninterested in his state of life. Routine and mechanical performance of duties. Absence of yearnings for better things; no ideal standard or type of perfection; no aspirations for excellence. Attempting and expecting little. Letting things take their course. Dislike of exertion. Fear of

unpopularity because it entails trouble. Toleration of evil, little feeling about sin. No definite ideas of self, persons and things. Talents undeveloped. Irreverence in church. Having no fixed object in work done. Indulging lazy habits. Unintentional and unconscious reserve with those with whom he should be open. In short is a "drifter."

PERSON OF A MELANCHOLY DISPOSITION

Takes the black side of everything. . . . Makes religion gloomy, and brings it into odium. Adopts every exaggerated view. Not infrequently is scrupulous, fears, and given to vain fears. Is dreamy, and forms Utopian ideas and schemes. Is absent in mind and forgets the presence of others. Is reserved, concentrated; does not contribute his share of amusement when in society. Neglects cleanliness of person. Is slovenly and slatternly in dress. Cherishes bitter and revengeful thoughts. Uses undue self-introspection and analysis; too much self-incrimination. On occasions believes that he has, or is going to have, some chronic malady. Has his prophetic moments in which he predicts universal calamities. Suffers more from evils which do not befall him than from those which actually come, etc., etc.

THE SANGUINE PERSON

Rushing into all kinds of work. Too hasty acceptance of various undertakings, good in themselves. Want of finish and perfection in what is done. Fickleness and inconstancy in working. Discouragement under difficulty and failure. Sudden elation, and dejection no less rapid. Extremes of high and low spirits. Allowing duties to run away with the spiritual life. Love of show, brilliancy, dash, romance. Want of purity of intention. Working from natural activity. Devouring books; learning everything at once, and reaping no benefit from study. Trusting everyone, lending money without security. General want of ballast, etc., etc.

THE VULGAR PERSON

Has a heavy and swaggering walk, and sways his arms about roughly. Laughs with a horse-laugh, and is noisy in all his actions. Will slap his friends on the back when meet-

ing them, and chuck persons in the ribs to make them appreciate the point of his jokes. Calls everyone by his Christian name, at times even by a nickname. Roars out comic stories. Delights in playing practical jokes, and is not ashamed to boast of what he has done in that way. Insists upon it that everyone is "hipped" who complains of weak health. Speaks grossly of certain sins, which it is wise not to mention, even to condemn them. Affects to dislike the aristocracy, and says harsh things in general of the higher classes. Singles out some weak and amiable person to serve as the butt of his sarcasms. Has for one of his favorite aphorisms that he likes "to call a spade a spade," etc., etc.

THE TOUCHY PERSON

Goes out of his way to pick a quarrel. Is nearly always in hot water with some one or other; not on speaking terms. Insists upon it that people dislike him, laugh at him, oppose him. Is always wanting to change his place of residence in order that he may be put with persons who will appreciate him. If asked to do much, thinks that he is cruelly overworked; if placed in an office where there is little to do, believes himself to be thought incapable. Cannot succeed in public without a large audience, or if some of them seem uninterested. Requires to be complimented, and is hurt at not receiving praise. Easily persuades himself that coming from a certain class of society, or country, or college, goes against him. Imagines that a dead cut is intended if anyone passes him unawares without saluting. Lives in habitual bitterness of mind which leads him to be much tempted to sins against charity, etc., etc.

THE NERVOUS AND DELICATE PERSON

Is overwrought and seeks excitement and emotions. Has recourse to stimulating liquors to brace up his system. Gives way to trifling fears, e.g., horror of certain insects and animals. Is too careful of health, and quacks himself. Wants calmness of judgment. Is changeable in his temper. Has unceasing ups and downs of joy and sorrow. Wastes time and money by unnecessary travelling in search of a climate which suits him, etc. Dreads infection needlessly. Has a morbid desire to meet with sympathy and kindness. Mistakes temptations for consent to them, etc., etc.

Putting Order Into Our Lives

TIMOTHY BROSNAHAN, S.J.

This paper is taken from the unpublished retreat notes which were found after Father Brosnahan's death. It seems peculiarly appropriate for the beginning of a new year.

IN the preamble following the title of the Exercises, St. Ignatius tells us that they are "Spiritual Exercises for overcoming one's self and for putting order into one's life without being swayed by any inordinate attachment." What is the meaning of the phrase to "put order into our lives"?

WHAT IS ORDER?

Order is the unity that is found in multiplicity. To reduce a number of varied things to one plan is to put them in order; to leave them without such unity of plan is to leave them in disorder. True order, therefore, implies that each of the many becomes a part of the whole, and occupies that relation to others which its nature or character demands. True order implies a multiplicity reduced to unity and the adjusting of each individual part in keeping with its character and its proper relation to others. Disorder on the other hand is had when many things though coexisting in the same place or time are not arranged in accordance with a plan, or at least the plan is such that many things do not get that place which their peculiar properties and their bearings on other things call for; or when many things acting simultaneously do not act together for a common purpose, or if the purpose is common, it is not such as to fit the natural inclination of some of the things that are made to seek it.

Disorder, therefore, in our lives is compatible with a thorough exterior performance of our individual duties. A man may study, or teach, or work industriously; he may observe the exterior requirements of his state of life faithfully; he may perform the specific duties of his position in life exactly; he may challenge anyone to say that he doesn't do his duty, understanding that word, as Balaam did, in the

rigorous and literal exterior aspect of it. Yet it is possible that there is no unity of purpose in his life; no subordination of all his actions to a common interior spirit; no co-ordination of one duty with another or of one class of occupations with occupations of a different tenor; no interlinking of duties and occupations in order to make, not a series, or succession, but one common and unified duty or occupation having varied and diverse phases.

A disorder may arise either from the fact that individual duties are not all performed with that devotion and exactness demanded by their individual character, as if one should be very exact in his work but slovenly in his prayers, or vice versa, very devout in performing his religious duties, but uninterested in the work assigned to him to do. Or the disorder may arise from the fact that duties are not performed with due coordination to other duties, or, again, the disorder may exist from the fact that though all duties are performed with due coordination as to time, place and mutual relation, they are not all subordinated to a common purpose, inspired by a common spirit, directed to a common end.

MANY ELEMENTS IN OUR LIVES

Now, our lives are full of many elements among which order may reign, or disorder exist. We have various occupations, religious, intellectual, social, domestic; various interests, personal, official, civic; many and diverse bonds of affection or relationship; we are in quest of many objects: temporal, intellectual and religious success for ourselves and others; health for body and soul; our own individual improvement spiritually and mentally; labor and recreation. In the most uninteresting and dullest life there is in truth multiplicity enough. Is there any unity beyond unity of time and place? Is there any thread of a common purpose running through all these? Am I seeking recreation and labor for the same ultimate end? Am I in my quest of success, or influence, or friends motivated ultimately by the purpose I have in hearing Mass or going to confession? Is there any dominant note in my life giving a meaning to the various and at times mutually discordant notes that make my life? Do all my actions converge to one purpose? Are my interests and hopes and ambitions, are all my affections, however

different their objects, motivated by one overmastering affection? If so, the manifold details and incidents of my life have unity, and there is order in my life. The supremacy of one purpose, of one absorbing interest is the most notable mark in the life of a saint. St. Ignatius was what the world would call a fanatic about the greater glory of God. The most charming characteristics of the spiritual diary of Bl. Peter Faber is the simplicity with which he manifests, apparently unaware of the manifestation, the fact that he was possessed by one thought, that everything was looked at through the medium of one idea.

If, on the other hand, our lives are merely a succession of events having no intrinsic connection; if we rise daily, pray briefly, with or without the cooperation of the sleep-devil; if we take food and drink, work and converse, recreate and sleep; and if these actions succeed one another without blending into unity, our lives are in disorder. If routine, whim or necessity determine the succession of our employments; if they are merely a succession of occupations, some of which are engaged in to kill time, others to conform to the assignments of those in authority, others because of some intellectual interest, others for the sake of our souls, while nothing gives them the unity of a coherent whole, then our lives are in disorder. If I change my mental attitude at each change of occupation, if the motive that impels me to kill time, to gossip with my neighbor, to read the daily newspaper or the latest novel, to keep acquainted with the latest athletic statistics, to go to the theater or to a dance, has not the remotest connection with the motive that inspires me to examine my conscience, or to hear Mass, then evidently there is not order in my life. I am consequently leading not one life, but a number of lives running parallel or superimposed. I am at times a worldling with all my thoughts and energies centered on time and its values; at times I am seeking the kingdom of God. But my life is disjointed, confused, disorderly. I am neither hot nor cold. I cannot be classified as one who has given unity to his life by measuring everything from the viewpoint of pleasure or of learning, or of life eternal. I try to serve God a little, to serve the world a little, to serve self a little; or rather, I drift from one occupation of life to another changing the color of my soul with each change of occupation.

Among the "additions" which St. Ignatius gives for the first part of a retreat is one which instructs us to stand a few feet distant from the place of our meditation and "for a moment or so" *per tantillum tempus* to ask ourselves—"What am I about to do," *quid acturus sum*. Rhetoricians tell us that one of the minor requirements in constructing a speech or essay in such a way as to preserve its unity is the skilful use of particles of transition. Now, if in our daily life we were to habituate ourselves to the use of this device of transition suggested by St. Ignatius for meditation, that is to say, if in passing from one occupation to another, from rising for instance to prayer, from prayer to breakfast, from work to leisure-time occupations, we were seriously to ask ourselves, "What am I about to do," we should be constantly recalling to ourselves a principle of order and of unity.

The truth of the matter is that the first thing to do in order to make life effective is to bind all my life, its interests, aims and activities into the unity of one purpose. The history of those who have succeeded and of those who failed, teach that much at least. The man, for instance, who has made the acquisition of wealth the one purpose of his life, makes all things subservient to that. He recreates in order that he may apply himself with fresh energy and zest to business; he makes friends in order that he may advance his interests; he reads with the phantom of business before his mental vision. His domestic joys, his social calls, his political allegiance, all subserve one purpose, are all grist for the same mill. He is a member of a church even, a pewholder, a pillar of religion, because it pays; he is a philanthropist, because he believes a reputation of this kind is a good advertisement; he believes in raising the standard of living among the poor because it will increase business, and enlarge trade; for the same reason he wants to civilize the Filipinos or other similar people in order to induce them to wear shoes; and a few years ago he was shockingly indignant at the Boers because they did not use more soap. So, too, he believes in education, in frugality and other social virtues, understood mundanely or puritanically, because they will help to produce wealth or to protect vested interests. He will for the same reason sometimes, with cautious qualifications, indulge in laudation of the Catholic Church, because it is in his pregnant phraseology—What a divine institution?—no, a great

conservative power which helps to secure him in the possession of his accumulations. And he will finally become a millionaire, an honored and respected citizen—and in due course, like the rest of us he will die, and large white grave-worms will grow fat on his putrid flesh.

The same may be said of the politicians, of the scholar, of the soldier. Each has chosen some paramount object in life and subordinated to it all else; it rules the smaller details as well as the larger activities of life; and they have had success or attained only mediocrity in proportion to their devotion to the one ideal, the intensity with which the one purpose absorbed them, or their dissipation over many; their enthusiasm or half-heartedness. Now our lives are made up of many occupations which arouse interests of themselves disassociated and even diverging, and of these some are more attractive than others or appeal more strongly to our natural tastes, aptitudes, or temperaments. The danger, therefore, is that instead of pervading with a common spirit and of quickening into vitalized continuity by one supreme purpose the successive aims and actions of our life, we allow that occupation which is most congenial to the natural man to overshadow by its interest all else. To it we form an undue attachment, which takes earnestness and sometimes sincerity out of occupations that are of another kind.

PLEASURE IN WORK NATURAL

It is, of course, perfectly natural that we should find some occupations very agreeable, even when they are accompanied by labor or even annoyance. It is a law of our nature that we should find pleasure in doing that in which we succeed. The successful business man, teacher, clerk, housewife, mother, will find their respective occupations interesting and agreeable. The fact, therefore, that we find pleasure in any of our duties is normally a sign that we are doing them well, and is not to be regretted, nor to be considered an indication of any imperfection. It is a fact to be scrutinized though. If the pleasure or satisfaction I experience in performing any duty becomes the ultimate motive of performing it, or the norm by which I measure the value and importance of one duty over the other, and determine the place one will hold in my rational esteem in preference to another,

and the amount of concern, application and labor that one shall receive over the other, then that pleasure has, instead of being the natural consequence of healthy activity, become the inordinate antecedent and spring of action, has engendered an undue attachment and has become a principle of unity for my life. As a consequence whatever I find disagreeable I shall leave undone or do in a listless and routine way as something that is unconnected with my real life.

TRUE UNITY

Unity, therefore, may be of many kinds in fact; but true unity can be only of one kind. It must be based on a principle applicable to our whole life and exhibiting the supreme purpose of our lives. True unity cannot give play to certain tendencies of our nature and paralyze and atrophy others, or ignore, suppress or subordinate the higher to the lower. If a man, for instance, looks on himself as a dollar-hunting animal, he gives a unity to his life that makes it sordid and mean, even though he is surrounded by material refinement. If he sets his heart on the acquirement of fame, honor or office, he gains unity by sacrificing many of his nobler aspirations. If his idol is learning, scholarship, science, he loses spirituality. Neither devotion to personal comfort and well-being nor to science, philosophy and literature, nor to the acquisition of fame, friends or office can ever adequately interpret the meaning of man's present existence, though these severally have given a certain continuity and unity to individual lives, and though they may subordinately and in due proportion give to parts of our life a specific coloring and characteristic more or less noble in proportion to their dignity and dominating influence. But they have never given fullness, proportion and depth. The man who makes love of learning of whatever kind, desire of power, whether in business, in positions of superiority, or in social intercourse, the supreme and exclusive ideal of his thoughts and endeavors may become as veritably odious and contemptible as the creature who finds the satisfaction of his being in looking for his personal ease, comfort and happiness.

If we are to put order into our lives we must keep in mind the real purpose of life, the bond that can give unity

without destroying unity and fulness. We must view life from its true center, and not fancy ourselves to be, as the Greeks said, *omphalos tes ges*, "the hub of the universe," because the sky from the horizon to the zenith seems to be at an equal distance from us in every direction. That our life has such a center is evident from our nature and Revelation; it is evident from the history of the saints who with a supernatural intuition saw life in all its essential relations, saw it whole and saw it from the center. What is that essential purpose which will give order to our lives, that bond through which it shall have unity?

TRUE CENTRAL PURPOSE

In general, we may say that it is the purpose of our creation. The purpose of our creation must be the purpose of our life, and the bond that will bind in unity all our actions of whatever kind is the bond that binds us to God. But of the three elements which express the adequate end of our creation, namely, knowledge, love and service of God, knowledge is an antecedent and preparation, service is a result and consequence of the central element which is love. We know God that we may love Him and serve Him because we love Him. The love of God, therefore, "in whom we live and move and have our being" and the personal love of the Man-God, the eternal Son whom the Father hath sent to us, is the motive that gives color to all our actions, the purpose that inspires our every effort, and the bond that binds our days and hours and moments each to each in the Holy Spirit, who proceeds from the Father and the Son.

CHRIST THE CENTER OF OUR LIVES

St. Paul, after enumerating the vices which the Colossians should avoid, concludes by putting down one principle of radical and universal value (iii, 14-17): "Above all things, have charity which is the bond of perfection. And let the peace of Christ rejoice in your hearts, wherein also you are called in one body . . . All whatsoever you do in word and in work, do all in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ, giving thanks to God and the Father by him." The Lord, Jesus Christ, therefore, His person, His life, His teaching, His

mission is the center of our lives, from which all things radiate and to which all things converge. Through Him we know, love and serve God, for Him we rise in the morning and sleep at night, and eat and work and take our pleasures; for Him we love all men in whom the image of God is found and for whose salvation He died—our friends and our enemies, the good and the sinner—all men independently of race, of personal merits, of attractive qualities, from the very fact that they are all dear to Him, who is to us at once the object of our adoration and our dearest friend. We must therefore put order in our soul by adopting the love of Christ as a universal principle of thought, of speech and of action, and motive of conduct that will coordinate all our various modes of conduct giving to each its proper place and due relation, and will subordinate all to the end of our creation.

How Humble Am I?

The following articles are also taken from Father Brosnahan's notes and help to complete the picture of self which is afforded by the other articles.

HUMILITY is a disposition of will, founded on knowledge of our littleness and of the unimportance of our place in the world, to submit ourselves to the will and counsels of God. It disposes us to obey God, to respond to His intentions in our regard in a spirit of self-distrust, and of absolute confidence in the power of God to help us and in His bounty and mercy to do. The humble man, therefore can do all things.

Humility, we are told, is a virtue connected with temperance, a kind of temperance of the will of which self is the object. It essentially consists in a contempt of self, following from a right intellectual estimation of my nature as a creature, of my weakness and frailty, my unimportance and insignificance, as a person (*Summa Theologica*, 2. 2. q. 161, art. 1. ad 2). It therefore restrains the tendency to undue exaltation or esteem of self (art. 1, ad 3; art. 2), first from a knowledge of natural limitations and personal deficiencies which renders self-abasement a reasonable act

(art. 1, ad 1); and secondly from a knowledge of the infinite majesty of God, the supreme importance of His will and boundlessness of His knowledge and power. The humble man will therefore habitually sacrifice his will to the will of God, his interests to the interests of God, his glory to the glory of God.

Humility therefore inferentially will consist in subjection to God immediately or mediately through His representative.

Recalling, therefore, that we have had revealed to us the plan of redemption, the idea of Christian perfection and the principles of the Kingdom of Christ, we may examine the habitual dispositions of our soul toward the will of God, regarding our willingness, our generosity or our joyous enthusiasm in the service of the Kingdom. Hence we have three grades of subjection to God, three grades of submission of our own will in the presence of God, with three grades of self-abasement before the majesty of the Creator. We examine ourselves, therefore, regarding our instinctive and habitual attitude towards God, when the principles of poverty and humiliations come in conflict with comforts of body. St. Ignatius, in his well-known subject of mediation, presents three grades and a test for each, though the test is sometimes confounded with grade in the presentation of this consideration.

FIRST GRADE

1. *Definition.* Habitually to be so disposed towards God that I obey in all things what is manifestly His law, habitually and without reflex act to reject what is manifestly and without doubt deliberate and grave sin, so that I do not even deliberate thereupon. Habitually, if the alternatives are God or creatures, I prefer the Creator. In cases, therefore, in which the choice of action entails what is objectively a mortal sin I cannot be deceived by the devil. This is a grade of humility necessary for salvation, but, as we know, not attained by all men, either on its intellectual side—for many are deceived even when there is question of sin—or on its voluntary side—for many prefer creatures to God. Those who have this grade have supernatural wisdom enough to detect the malice of sin.

2. The *motives* for striving after this degree are: (1) the indignity to God; (2) the disproportion between our pleasures and God's interests; (3) the necessity for salvation.

3. The *test*. Death rather than mortal sin—theoretically easy, not necessarily so practically, unless we have acquired the essential wisdom and humility of this grade. Those who faltered at the stake, had some interior excuse, a deceit of the devil.

SECOND GRADE

1. *Definition*. Habitually to be so disposed as to be unconcerned about personal goods, independently of their relation to God. Habitually to have such little esteem of ourselves, of our temporal interests, our bodily comfort, health or life, our fame, or honor as to measure their value solely by their aptitude to promote God's glory and help me to serve Him and save my soul. This second degree of humility is an habitual indifference of the will to creatures, considered precisely as creatures. When we accept as a matter of course the discomforts of body that come to us through God's providence, when in the use of things of the avoidance of suffering arising from their absence we are determined by reason, not by desire of liking, then we have this second degree.

2. The *motives* for striving after this degree are: (1) the possession of this degree gives largeness and breadth to character, gives calm and peace, and consequently patience and gentleness; (2) its absence fosters egotism and naturally leads to mental obscurity regarding the objective character of venial sin, finally to callousness regarding venial sin.

3. The *test*. Our readiness to accept death, rather than entertain the thought of committing deliberate venial sin.

THIRD DEGREE

1. *Definition*. To habitually choose what Christ would have chosen; habitually to esteem ourselves so little that likeness to Christ is preferred to any possible worldly good of fortune or of honor, to any personal comfort or pleasure or esteem. Therefore, where the glory of God can be equally

obtained by one of two courses of life or conduct I habitually choose that which makes my life more like Christ's life. "He must increase, I must decrease." I become merely a mirror to reflect Him, so that men looking at me see not me but an image of Christ, do not notice what I am beyond being another Christ. "With Christ I am nailed to the cross."

2. The *motives* for striving after this degree are: (1) Imitation of Christ, spread of His Kingdom, the *noblesse oblige* of His followers and Apostles; (2) the nobility of identifying ourselves with Christ and rising superior to the world and to self; (3) the joy of union that will result when we have but one interest, one ideal, one love with Christ; (4) this disposition must be found somewhere in the Church. It is an element in the sanctity of the Church. Where is it to be found if not in those who strive after perfection?

3. The *test*. To prefer actual poverty with Christ poor rather than worldly comforts; to desire opprobrium with Christ in opprobrium, rather than the esteem of men; to want to be esteemed a fool for Christ who was esteemed a fool rather than be reputed wise with the wisdom of the world.

SUMMARY

There are, therefore, three habitual attitudes or dispositions of the soul, any one of which implies an abasement of self in the presence of God.

1. To feel the unimportance of self, to have such an intellectual estimate of my nature as a creature, that I shall never exalt myself against my Creator by committing mortal sin.

2. To feel a deeper sense of my unimportance, to have a clearer intellectual estimate of my nature as a creature so that I shall never exalt myself against my Creator by committing venial sin.

3. To feel so deep a sense of my insignificance and to have such a clear intellectual estimate of my nature as a creature that self is absolutely subordinate to Christ. The question of sin whether mortal or venial is never considered. The only question is does this action make me more or less like Christ.

A Lesson from a River

TIMOTHY BROSNAHAN, S.J.

YOU know from your geography that the river Rhone begins at its source a beautiful stream with clear and sparkling water, a mountain brook so bright and clean that every pebble can be seen through its transparent water; but after passing by many cities and the dwellings of men and after it has come in contact with many muddy drains it becomes turbid, foul, filled with impurities. Thus it continues until it flows into the broad bosom of Lake Geneva; there it empties its muddy water into the beautiful sky-blue water of the lake and for a short distance from its entrance it colors and soils the waters of the lake. Finally, however, it drops all its impurities, becomes as limpid as Lake Geneva itself and flows out at the other side as clear and beautiful as it was when it came from its mountain home, and then flows on until finally it rests from wandering in the great Mediterranean Sea.

LIFE LIKE RIVER

My dear children, your life is like a river. From the waters of Baptism you came with the purity and poetry of Heaven clinging to you, making something loved by all. Perhaps many, God grant that all of you have yet preserved to an extent at least the white robe of innocence and humility and charity that was put on your souls at Baptism and you yet remain the most beautiful thing that God has created—a child with the reflection of Heaven shining in your eyes. If you only knew how beautiful is the face of one whose soul is pure—a beauty that cannot be defined, but can be recognized, a beauty that is missed no matter how much of mere vulgar human beauty remains, a beauty that makes you dear to men, and Angels and Christ.

You remember how Christ Our Lord called the little children of Jerusalem to Him and said that no one should enter the Kingdom of Heaven unless he was as those little children. If He were here today and could gather you

around Him and look into your eyes with His look of infinite wisdom, do you think He would love you as He loved those children of Jerusalem? And if those eyes that see and know all things should see in your soul something that put an enmity between you and Him, some sin or shadow of sin and should look pained when you came forward to receive His blessing! Let us hope that such would not be the case or if it be, that after the self-examination and confession of this retreat, after your union with Him in the Holy Eucharist you may again be able—if need be—to look your Saviour in the face with all the conscious pride of sinlessness.

CORRUPTING STREAMS

But my dear children, like the river's course through the earth until it reaches and rests forever in the ocean is our course through time until we meet the ocean of eternal delight in Heaven. So we are apt to meet other streams of life which are corrupting, other companions whose very presence will surely cause a stain on the purity of our souls. The pity of it!—that you cannot hold forever the gifts of Baptism, that the beautiful work of God should be stained by sin, by anger and pride and deceit and ungentleness. Like the river, I find much pleasure in thinking of your life which you are going to rest on the bosom of a lake for a few days before again starting on our course towards Heaven. You are going into a retreat to purify your souls of the stains and to become more pure and strong to resist the bad example of others, to resist your own bad inclinations. You are going to turn aside from the busy things of life to think of this soul God gave you; to examine it and to see if you have kept it pure as He gave it; to give Him an account of all failing, to get His forgiveness and to be united again to Him and become His children whom He delighted when on earth to gather around Him.

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