

to pass quickly beyond them and find his own way, several indications can be given, a few signposts can be set up. Means that have succeeded in other cases, especially when they have been proposed by the great masters, merit consideration.

1. LOVING ASPIRATION

John of Saint Samson, that saintly blind man who was a bright light of the Carmelite Reform of Touraine in the seventeenth century, recommends the exercise of "aspiration" to lead the soul into these peaceful regions of the spirit. He writes:

Aspiration is a loving enflamed launching of the heart and spirit by which the soul, passing beyond itself and all created things, unites itself in close union with God in this ardent expression of its love. Those who are disposed to aspirations must put forth effort until their aspiration, having become more intense, is sweet to them and delightful.⁴

One will succeed in this by degrees. As the beginning, aspiration draws its support from visible things; little by little, it becomes more concise, more brief, it encompasses and contains in itself "truths stripped of the non-essential." Thus one arrives at "love itself." He continues:

The love produced by aspiration is so strong in certain souls that the will enters all alone into the loving bosom of God whom it tastes beyond all understanding and expression, while the understanding remains at the door astonished as it were and suspended in its action. There ensues an outflow of love, inundating, ravishing, delighting the soul and covering it with its floods, in the midst of which the soul is God Himself, His spirit, His divinity, as much as a creature can be in this life.

This exercise of loving aspiration which carries the soul back to God on a reflux tide of loving acts, less and less impeded by formulas is, as John of Saint Samson assures us, sovereignly efficacious. It makes use of the act of love, which is the anagog-

⁴ Cf. *Vie de Jean de Saint-Samson* by P. Sernin, pp. 141-43. Also by the same author, *Maximes spirituelles*, pp. 155-58. Cf. *Vie Spirituelle*, 1925, which gives a very instructive summary of the doctrine of Jean de Saint-Samson. See especially Chapter vi, p. 134 ff., on aspiration.

ical act par excellence, and thus fixes the soul through love in its divine object which is God-Love.

John of Saint Samson notes that the soul must not too soon attempt the exercise of aspiration, for love in beginners is not strong enough efficaciously to elevate them to such lofty acts.

The great blind mystic remarks also that this exercise is not suited to all souls, even contemplative.

It is suited

. . . to those who draw notable profit from the mystical ways, especially if they are of an affective nature. Some souls are never suited for it, occupying themselves as they do in God and with God by that holy and loving speculation which, it too, is an excellent mystical way.⁵

2. ANAGOGICAL ACT OF FAITH

We find again under the pen of John of Saint Samson the distinction between affective temperaments, for whom contemplation is especially loving and who can rise to the divine source through love whose sweetness they experience, and intellectual temperaments, in whom contemplation is especially knowledge and consequently dryness. In these latter, to whom we have constantly to return, we find that the sentiment of love is less easily aroused and perhaps less frequently exercised. There contemplation is more arid than loving, more static than dynamic. The peace which forms its base may be accompanied by all kinds of impressions: immobility and absolute silence, a perception of God through an opaque cloud, the impression of a wall that impedes any progress, or even an impression of being repulsed. One can give only general characteristics of these states which are almost as numerous and as varied as souls themselves and the moments of contemplation experienced by each.

It is the exercise of the virtue of faith that best suits them. But how are they to make these acts in practice? Generally it will not be by using set formulas but rather by keeping the

⁵ *Vie de Jean de Saint-Samson.*

gaze of the soul fixed on God, by maintaining an interior attitude which consists in an orientation of the soul toward Him, a peaceful and actual attention, and an opening up of itself to His action.

It is very true that it is by faith that contact with God is established and maintained. And ordinarily the gifts of the Holy Ghost perfect faith when it is acting. But we have no right to count on this divine intervention through the gifts being sufficiently marked as to suspend our faculties and act without our concurrence.

This dryness and helplessness oblige us to exercise our faith actively in a peaceful and subtle manner. We should keep it awake by a penetrating gaze on the divine Reality of which now we have only fleeting or dim glimpses, or again by some short, tense ejaculatory prayer continually repeated because each time it makes God present to us in a vivid way. Or perhaps it may be best to maintain a simple attitude of peace under God's action, or a patient waiting on God who has hidden Himself and reduced us to this powerlessness, in order that we may find Him at a deeper level.

By turns Saint Therese of the Child Jesus remains content in the dark underground where no light shines except "from the lowered eyes of the face of Jesus," or keeps her gaze fixed on the cloud that hides the divine Sun, willing to wait for its luminous rays until "that unending day when faith shall be no more." Saint Jane de Chantal counsels the soul in this state to remain motionless in the presence of the Master, like a canvas before the artist who is to animate it with a living design.

But beyond these particular modes, here is the teaching of Saint John of the Cross on the exercise of faith in these regions:

At this time the soul must be led in a way entirely contrary to the way wherein it was led at first. If formerly it was given material for meditation, and practised meditation, this material must now be taken from it and it must not meditate; for, as I say, it will be unable to do so even though it would, and, instead of becoming recollected, it will become distracted. . . . For it turns from the quiet and peaceful

blessings which were secretly given to its spirit, to the work that it desires to do with sense. . . . Wherefore in this state the soul must never have meditation imposed upon it, nor must it make any acts, nor strive after sweetness or fervour; for this would be to set an obstacle in the way of the principal agent, who, as I say, is God. For God secretly and quietly infuses into the soul loving knowledge and wisdom without any intervention of specific acts, although sometimes He specifically produces them in the soul for some length of time. And the soul has then to walk with loving advertence to God, without making specific acts, but conducting itself, as we have said, passively, and making no efforts of its own, but preserving this simple, pure and loving advertence and determination, like one that opens his eyes with the advertence of love.

Since God, then, as giver, is communing with the soul by means of loving and simple knowledge, the soul must likewise commune with Him by receiving with a loving and simple knowledge and advertence, so that knowledge may be united with knowledge and love with love.⁶

If, as I say, and as in truth is the case, the soul receives this loving knowledge passively and after the supernatural manner of God, . . . this soul must be quite annihilated in its natural operations, disencumbered, at ease, quiet, peaceful, serene and adapted to the manner of God; exactly like the air, which receives the greater clarification and heat from the sun when it is pure and cleansed from vapours and at rest. Therefore the soul must be attached to nothing—to no exercise of meditation or reasoning; to no kind of sweetness, whether it be of sense or of spirit; and to no other kind of apprehension.⁷

It must stand in complete detachment above all this and its spirit must be completely freed from it, as Habacuc⁸ said that he must needs do in order to hear what the Lord should say to him. "I will stand upon my watch," he says, "and I will fix my step upon my munition, and I will watch to see that which will be said to me." This is as though he had said: I will raise up my mind above all the operations and all the knowledge that can be comprehended by my senses, and above that which they can keep and retain within themselves: all this I will leave below. And I will fix the step of the munition of my faculties, not allowing them to advance a step as to their own operation, so that through contemplation I may receive that

⁶ *Living Flame*, st. iii; Peers, III, 160-1.

⁷ *Ibid.*; 161.

⁸ Hab. 2:1.

which is communicated to me from God. For we have already said that pure contemplation consists in receiving.⁹

This text describes particularly well the peaceful isolation of the soul in the region of spirit.

The Saint does not tire of insisting on the detachment and peace necessary for faith to be pure. In this dryness, which at times resembles death, the soul must be strengthened against any intellectual activism that seeks its nourishment in distinct thought, as well as against discouragement that would sink into complete passivity. Faith must be kept alive, sound, free, like an antenna erected above all the noises of the world to receive the waves from the Infinite.

When in this way the soul voids itself of all things and achieves emptiness and surrender of them (which, as we have said, is the part that the soul can play), it is impossible, if the soul does as much as in it lies, that God should fail to perform His own part by communicating Himself to the soul, at least secretly and in silence. It is more impossible than that the sun should fail to shine in a serene and unclouded sky; for as the sun, when it rises in the morning, will enter your house if you open the shutter, even so will God, Who sleeps not in keeping Israel, still less slumbers,¹⁰ enter the soul that is empty and fill it with Divine blessings.¹¹

On the other hand, with what sadness the holy doctor speaks of the harm caused the soul by agitation voluntarily stirred up during contemplation:

These anointings, then, and these touches, are the delicate and sublime acts of the Holy Spirit. . . . These blessings, with the greatest facility, by no more than the slightest act which the soul may desire to make on its own account, with its memory, understanding or will, or by the application of its sense or desire or knowledge or sweetness or pleasure, are disturbed or hindered in the soul, which is a grave evil and a great shame and pity.

Oh, how grave a matter is this, and what cause it gives for wonder, that, while the harm done is inconspicuous, and the interference with those holy anointings almost negligible, the harm should be more serious, and a matter for deeper sorrow and regret, than the disquiet-

⁹ *Living Flame*, st. iii; Peers, III, 162.

¹⁰ Cf. Ps. 120:4.

¹¹ *Living Flame*, st. iii; 167.

ing and ruining of many souls of a more ordinary nature which have not attained to a state of such supreme fineness and delicacy! It is as though a portrait of supreme and delicate beauty were touched by a clumsy hand, and were daubed with coarse, crude colours. This would be a greater and more crying and pitiful shame than if many more ordinary portraits were besmeared in this way. For when the work of so delicate a hand as this of the Holy Spirit has been thus roughly treated, who will be able to repair its beauty.¹²

These quotations are taken from the *Living Flame of Love*. Consequently they might seem applicable only to the perfect contemplation of a soul that has arrived at the summit. Actually, just as there is but one supernatural contemplation, there is but one contemplative attitude. The one and the other are progressively perfected. Their development is in constant, very close mutual interdependence and is regulated from the beginning by the same laws.

Since the aridity of which we are treating is clearly contemplative, the soul must already know the perfect response to be given to God's action within it, and should try to realize the contemplative attitude to the full measure insofar as the intermittent character of the contemplation and its own as yet unadapted faculties permit.

It is the senses, clamorous and dull in their operation, which impede the perfect receiving of the breathings of the Holy Ghost. Is it possible to render them less noxious, to free oneself from their troublesome agitations? The second directive will answer this question.

B. How to ignore the noise of sense and bring it calm

The exercise of faith or even loving aspiration, although always opening up the soul to God's light, does not always succeed in establishing peace in the lower faculties. These latter are restless and demanding, thus thwarting the soul's escape

¹² *Ibid.*; 164-5.