

whole Carmelite family is now theirs and if either of the Saints Theresa were 'odd' then oddness is to be commended! What is more, the vast store-house of prayer and penance which the First and Second Orders of Carmel have built up, and to which the Third Orders Regular and Secular have added their contributions, is there for them to plunder at their hearts' content for the good of souls.

Within this framework it is possible for the lay contemplative to go forward with a greater sense of purpose, of security and peace. No longer do they need to fear that they are free lancing in their spare time, or that they are becoming spiritual dilettantes, play-acting at being hermits. They have a vocation, a dedication, and a rule; they need waste no more time puzzling over their way of life but can go forward to their great vocation as one of God's Commandos.

THE CONTEMPLATIVE LIFE & FRIENDSHIP¹

BY

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WHILE the active life is the life of the soul acting as the form of the body (that is, the life of the individual as a member of the human race), the contemplative life is the life of the soul in its purely spiritual reality, the life of the person, the complete being, the 'whole'. For by definition the 'whole' suffices to itself. It has all.

It lacks nothing.² The contemplative life is the perfect life: in itself it has need of no assistance. It can be entirely solitary.

But, it being granted that the human person is a person created, a part of the divine 'whole'; it being granted also that it has been multiplied by the Creator, are we not going to discover that the nature of the person implies an 'order' or organisation, a 'spiritual society'?

It is certainly true that there exists an 'order' of persons, and even an order of creatures purely spiritual—the angelic hierarchies. But it is only a question there of a 'communicatio in forma', an analogical similitude, in the fact that all these creatures possess an intelligence which has for its final perfection the contemplation of God. There exists then, by that very fact, among men and among angels, a 'communion' in the object, a 'communion' in the final end. But that in itself only means that all contemplate the same

¹ Being section 1 of Chapter 4 of *Le Rôle de l'Amitié dans la Vie Chrétienne selon Saint Thomas d'Aquin*. (Angelicum). Translated by R. M. Wildy.

² 'Totum et perfectum sunt penitus idem'. III *Physic.* xi.

object, though they may live each one in solitude, and be mutually unknown to each other. Also this union of 'solitary' contemplation in the object can only be the cause of a love of 'general benevolence' towards those who have communion or who can have communion in the same object.

Nevertheless the friendships which exist already continue to exist in this solitary life. In fact since the soul as the form of the human being (which is a composite being) is not limited by [the material elements in] it, but transcends the life of the body in order to attain its perfection as a spiritual creature, so friendship which is the uniting principle of souls in their perfection, transcends the social life of the individuals and causes people to have communion affectively in the contemplative life. Contemplatives can thus love their friends in their solitude as well as in society—even better indeed—for their friendships are of a more pure dilection without any alloy of use or pleasure: and the friendships themselves have as their good and their end that very thing which is desired and loved in the contemplative life.

And yet as regards the inward part of contemplative life, these friends cannot communicate anything, one to another: this order of persons therefore cannot become a society. In fact, the contemplative life of man (and of angels) consists essentially speaking³ in an intellectual possession of the whole of Being, 'anima est quoddammodo omnia'; and since these creatures are not 'the whole', they only find their perfection and their own wholeness in their intellectual unity or identification with that which alone is 'all being, with God, the divine and independent Whole. But this act of understanding is a wholly immanent communion of the intelligence with its object, a veritable 'intentional unity' between the creature and God. By consequence, neither men nor angels can communicate to one another the act of intellection (that would be to communicate the self and the self is incommunicable) or even the object of their blessedness (that would be to communicate God, and God alone can do that)⁴; they cannot then help each other mutually in the actual exercise of their contemplative life (that would be to interpose themselves between God and the subject in the actual immanent act which ought to unite them, and would hinder the union).

It is undoubtedly true that men can aid each other in the preparation of the act of understanding, in so far as the sensible faculties are necessary to its inception; and angels themselves can by 'illu-

³ Supernaturally speaking, the problem remains the same. There will be an 'affective unity' joining itself to the 'intentional unity'.

⁴ 'Nulla natura beata potest communicare suam beatitudinem alteri'. I-II, 5, 6 ad 1.

minations' and 'locutions' enlighten each other and tell each other the meanings of the mysteries of God, and help each other to love him more;⁵ but these acts, human or angelic are not strictly speaking, acts of the contemplative life,⁶ for they are directed towards other objects than God: this 'communicatio', human or angelic, thus constitutes a society, but—so far as the contemplative life, properly speaking, is concerned, the life of union with God, it is no part of that life. It is 'extra verbum'. As regards human beings we know clearly what is meant by social life: communication by means of the senses at the direction of the soul, which is the form of the body, and of the inter-dependence of individuals one with another. As for angels, they show us that a society of created persons is not necessary to the perfection of each one of them. Created immediately by God, and united immediately to God⁷ their personal end coincides with their end as a spiritual creature: their proper good with the common good of the order which they form together. For to be created and dependent on God does not make them the less 'persons', complete entities, independent one of another. Thus in order that there may be a society conforming to the character of the person (angel) or to the character of the individual (man) we see that this society can never be, in itself, a 'communicatio' in beatitude. The contemplative life, angelic or human, is then in itself a solitary life, 'apart' [separate from, independent of, others] because a thing divine.

Never, therefore, can a friendship be born in the depths of the contemplative life since communication is necessary for its beginning. But, if a friendship existed already before the solitary contemplative life [was entered into], it certainly would not disappear, but it could never communicate any good to the contemplative state, or have any beneficial effect on it.

One must always recognise too that the conclusions drawn here from the consideration of the contemplative life, from the strictly formal point of view, of the exercise of acts of contemplation should be very sensitive to fine shades of difference when they are applied in practice. The solitude necessary to the exercise of the contem-

5 'Illuminare nihil aliud est quam manifestationem agnitae veritatis alii tradere'. I, 106, 1. Cf. ad 2, and article 2.

6 'Vita contemplativa praecipue consistit in contemplatione Dei; et quantum ad hoc unus angelus alium non docet. Sed de his quae pertinet ad dispensationem mysteriorum Dei, unus angelus docet alium purgando, illuminando et perficiendo; et secundum hoc habent aliquid de *vita activa* quamdiu mundus durat. . . . Et in eis non distinguitur *vita activa* a contemplativa sicut in nobis qui per opera vitae activae impedimur a contemplatione'. II-II, 181, 4 ad 2.

7 'Sola natura rationalis creata habet immediatum ordinem ad Deum quia . . . natura rationalis, in quantum cognoscit universalem boni et entis rationem, habet immediatum ordinem ad universale essendi principium'. II-II, 2, 3.

plative life is not, speaking formally, the material solitude of the desert, but a spiritual independence of all that is created and human. Doubtless material solitude, the eremitical life, is the most suitable instrument for the spiritual solitude of the contemplative life. But absolute solitude, quite apart from the material conditions of life which make it almost impracticable, when it reaches to the exclusion of all contact with the civilised world, pre-supposes at the same time (if it is not to be almost unendurable), a habit of contemplation so intense and continuous as God alone can infuse, as well as a moral life strong enough to face all temptations of the devil and the vengeful attacks that will be made by a body wounded by mortal sin. This life is then extremely perilous⁸, and if one does not enter on it in order to become 'deified' by charity and contemplation one falls to the level of the beasts, 'aut bestia aut deus'⁹. Absolute solitude is suited to none but those who are very perfect, that is, those who participate almost (but not entirely for that is impossible here below)¹⁰ in uninterrupted contemplation, and in that unceasing and undeviating charity which belongs to the state of eternal beatitude. And as we have always here below more or less need of being taught and encouraged in the contemplative life, and even of being perfected in the moral life, we are justified in holding, by referring to the experience of the founders of the contemplative orders (who certainly should have been able to solve the problem practically)¹¹ that the life best proportioned to the perfection which we ought to attain here below is a contemplative life, led in a solitude more or less great, but led within a social framework sufficiently wide and sufficiently regulated to assure only that minimum of communal life which is indispensable to the life of

⁸ 'Solitudo non est ipsa essentia perfectionis sed perfectionis instrumentum. Id quod est solitarium debet esse sibi per se sufficiens. Hoc autem est cui nihil deest, quod pertinet ad rationem perfecti. . . . Et ideo vita socialis necessaria est ad exercitium perfectionis. Solitudo autem competit iam perfectis. Sicut ergo id quod iam perfectum est praceminet ei quod ad perfectionem exercetur, ita vita solitariorum si debite assumatur praeceminet vita sociali. Si autem absque praecedenti exercitio talis vita assumatur, est periculosissima, nisi per divinam gratiam suppleatur quod in aliis per exercitium acquiritur, sicut patet de beatis Antonio et Benedicto'. II-II, 188, 8.

⁹ 'Homo potest solitarius vivere dupliciter, uno modo, quasi societatem humanam non ferens, propter animi saevitiam et hoc est bestiale, alio modo per hoc quod totaliter divinis rebus inhaeret et hoc est supra hominem. Et ideo Philosophus dicit I Politicorum (cf. S. Th. Lec. 1) quod ille qui aliis non communicat est bestia aut deus, id est divinus vir'. Id. ad 5.

¹⁰ 'Rationem esse semper in actu rectae contemplationis in statu viae ita quod omnium operum ratio sit Deus est impossibile'. *De Verit.* q. 24 a 9. cf. II-II, 24, 8; 184, 2 on the impossibility of a charity always in act here below.

¹¹ The Salmanticenses note (*Curs. Theo. De Statu religiosi*, disp. ii dub. iii n. 36) that there has never been officially in the church a 'religion' (vowed order) of hermits who made profession to live in solitude.

uninterrupted interior tranquillity¹².

We see then that if the essence of the contemplative life, the full exercise of the theological virtues and gifts, has no need of social life nor of the aid of friendship which cannot in any way do it good; if on the contrary it demands absolute interior solitude and the most fierce independence as regards all that is human, nevertheless it can live and survive in a material solitude which is only relative, and does indeed normally live (we must not forget that it is the final end of all men) within the framework of social life, or the ordinary human way of life here on earth. It is evident that the more men approach perfection in the exercise of their contemplation, and the more they participate in the state of continual beatitude, the less need have they of any element of social life¹³, but also the more perfect men are, the less is sensible intercourse necessary for the birth and continuance of their friendships: one single meeting often suffices great men and saints to understand each other and to join them in friendship: as the radii of a circle approach each other as they approach the centre of the circle, so do friends understand and love each other more in proportion to their greater communion in the object, almost without their having any need to communicate with each other, so much does their union in the object cause them to understand their mutual good. It is only sometimes long after we have seen our friends that we understand, when we ourselves live through what they had lived through those earlier days, how much closer was the union in the object, and how much more intense their love for us than we realised at the time.

We can conclude then that, far from its being necessary to sacrifice human friendships, the contemplative life renders them more pure and more profound; but also we must recognise that the wholly interior, inward-turning life requires friendships to remain outside in the region of human contacts and emotions. In the interior of the contemplative life there cannot be, speaking formally, any effective communication, any reciprocal usefulness or benefit.

We know also quite definitely that this contemplative life consists in the exercise of the theological virtues and the gifts of the Holy Spirit, and that it is principally in the exercise of charity that the perfection of man consists.

¹² It is in this sense that Pope Pius XI in his Letter to the Carthusians of the 8th July, 1924, affirms the superiority of the Carthusian life to every other form of religious life (cf. *Acta Apost. Sedis*, 1924. p. 385 sq.; cited by J. Maritain, *Primauté du Spirituel*. Paris, 1927. pp. 312-313).

¹³ 'In contemplatione sapientiae, tanto aliquis efficacius operatur, quanto magis solitarius secum commoratur'. In *Boeth. de Hebdom. Prolog.*