

which embraced the total spiritual experience of mankind' (p. 288). At the same time the final chapter on Necessity and Human Destiny shows the new context and completion of the old standards much more clearly than it demonstrates any ultimate contradiction. That man is a being capable of knowing and loving the truth and goodness of being is the truth at the basis of the classical view of life and of any genuinely Christian philosophy too. And since truth is one, the coming of the First Truth on earth necessarily brought progress but no reversal.

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CONTEMPLATION AND CULTURE

IN these last months England, individualistic, active, bustling England, has been called upon to defend for Europe, and for the world, the precious treasure of Christian Culture. That culture has, however, been handed down to us, not by an active, utilitarian philanthropy characteristic of all that is not mere self-seeking in England to-day, but by the tradition of Christian contemplation incarnate in the contemplative orders of the Church, and in particular in the Order of St. Benedict. England has become permeated with that American pragmatism which discountenances contemplation as useless, and at best she retains a certain attachment to 'useless' knowledge and to art only as the remnant of the pagan classical period of enlightenment that forsook Christianity and the supernatural order and adopted a purely natural type of contemplation and culture. If the British victory for which we hope and pray is, therefore, to prove itself worthy of its noble cause it would be necessary for the British citizen to return to a more integral Christian life which should

include a contemplative culture that is basically supernatural.

It is, therefore, not out of place to consider what part culture can play in the supernatural contemplative life at which we would have our civilization aim, and to decide whether the two can travel hand in hand in the peace which is a necessary condition for both. By culture we mean the possession by mind and will of all that is true, good and beautiful in this world, the knowledge and experience of the beauty that derives primarily from human society and which man has imposed on the whole universe. It is the cult or worship of science and art, which are acquired for their own sake and are not used for any ulterior purpose; they are good and desirable in themselves. By culture, therefore, the human mind increases and expands in its own experience and wisdom, everything is ordained to the expansion of man as a social and rational animal, giving him a breadth of mind that can appreciate and enjoy all the best things of creation both human and divine.

Having described culture in these terms one could justifiably maintain that the remnants of classical and Grecian culture still remaining in British civilization represent the only true culture because it is essentially natural and pagan, so that it would be worth fighting for in itself without the complications introduced with Christian contemplation. For every experience, every activity, in the contemplative life must of its nature be directed to a further and ultimate goal, that of the supernatural vision of God, so that if culture is an end in itself and a natural end not directed to any ulterior goal, then it must surely distract from the vision of the supernatural goodness of God. If cultural knowledge and experience were directed to a further end they would seem to lose their very nature as culture, just as the study of medieval art or modern poetry for the express purpose of making money as a guide or 'author' or librarian, has little or no value as culture.

Perhaps it is the same with those who would read their history or listen to their Bach concerts for the sole purpose of seeing and loving God more distinctly and more intimately. Can a true contemplative ever indulge in secular reading and in the enjoyment of secular arts? As such the man devoted to culture has solely human aims and ambitions; the contemplative only derives benefit from sacred art, from poetry with a divine theme, from hymns that are written and sung for God. Would a whole-hearted contemplative ever spare a couple of hours to listen to a concert or visit an art collection, would he spend still longer on a classical novel or even classical history? Perhaps England in fighting for her little remaining culture is defending the only possible culture after all? Perhaps the Christian contemplative thrives more fruitfully without any culture?

This interpretation of the relation between culture and contemplation errs not only in being too exclusive an interpretation of contemplative life, but also in overlooking the spiritual value of cultural experience. It certainly runs counter to the tradition of the Church and the example of all the greatest contemplatives inspired by her teaching. Thus St. Jerome maintains that all that is best in human wisdom and experience should be sanctified by grace, and at the same time purified of all that is mundane in them. He writes graphically to a monk, Pammachius: 'If thou shouldst love the captive woman, namely secular knowledge, and shouldst be captured by her beauty . . . cut off the allurements of her hair, the verbal embellishments, and cleanse her with the ointment of the Prophets; then lying with her one can say: His left hand is under my head and his right hand shall embrace me, and the captive woman shall give thee many offspring, and from a Moabitess she shall become a daughter of Israel.' There is no need to quote from St. Augustine, since every theological word he wrote, every vision he contemplated, was permeated with all the best that the world could give him

in letters, art and science. The heathen poets and philosophers were canonized by his supernatural vision of them, and he did more than any other single man to preserve culture for Western civilization. St. Thomas, too, fought hard to preserve it against the vandalism of those who would condemn all that was not penned by a saint and doctor of the Church, and he refers to those words of St. Jerome to show that even monks should be permitted to read secular literature. In England, if further example be needed, we have our own St. Thomas More, the most able classical scholar of his day and yet one of the few who enjoyed sufficient wisdom from the Holy Spirit to be able to recognize the truth in the religious dispute about authority.

Reason, too, comes to the support of these great authorities, for, because man is essentially an intellectual being, the more that essential faculty of intellect is expanded, is realized, or, as the scholastics say, reduced from potency to act, the more the man himself is expanded, realized or actuated, the more human, whole and perfect is his nature. It is like developing a film with a great clarity and perfection so that all details, the smallest twigs on the bushes, the lines and dimples on the face, are distinct—i.e., realized—on the film and photograph. Hence man is perfected and actuated by the experience, the love and the knowledge of all that is best in the human sphere; so that he who acquires a broad and profound intellectual development, he whose intellectual faculties are actuated by the true, good and beautiful in the world about him, is more actualized and has a greater soul, qualitatively greater, than another who knows how to add and multiply figures in order to increase his income but has no taste for Dante, Shakespeare or Bach. Perhaps such a comparison seems false and unfair since we are talking about Christian contemplatives who have their soul filled, actuated, qualitatively enlarged, in the entirely new and higher sphere of grace. We must therefore add at once that when

we compare the cultured with the uncultured contemplative everything else is taken as being equal. The greater charity one has, the greater wisdom one also enjoys, so that the saintly old charlady has a far more 'realized' soul than the tepid cultured professor. But supposing the professor and the charlady to be of equal spiritual tempera- ture, having the same degree of charity and the gifts, then the professor is more perfect, his essential nature is more actuated and broader. It should, of course, be added that this increase in the soul belongs to the natural order, for it is a question of natural human perfection. Yet this does not diminish the 'magnanimity' of our saintly profes- sor, since the whole man with all his natural perfections is elevated by grace. One part of him is not sanctified at the expense of the rest; he is wholly sanctified, his culture included; his soul is filled by grace which transforms every positive good in his human make-up.

Should someone demur at this brief statement on the grounds that it treats of spiritual things according to a quantitative measure, which is wholly unsuited to testing the hidden diversities in nature and quality between such things as culture and grace, we may turn for support to St. Thomas. No one could accuse him of trying to establish the worth of the Bach Concerto for two violins with a five- hundred-ton hydraulic press, yet he does speak of the soul being 'dilated' and 'magnified.' The soul in its faculty of perception, that is especially in the mind, is 'dilated' or expanded by pleasures such as are acquired in true cul- ture. Expansion denotes, he says, 'a kind of movement towards breadth, and it belongs to pleasure . . . in one respect on the part of the apprehensive power, which is cognizant of the conjunction with some suitable good. As a result of this apprehension, man perceives that he has attained a certain perfection, which is a magnitude of the spiritual order: and in this respect man's mind is said to be magnified or expanded by pleasure' (*Summa*, I-II, 33, i). The principle is general, but must surely be most

perfectly realized in the spiritual delights of the grace of God, and in the sphere of nature in the human delights unsullied by lower passions that derive from a true and noble culture. The delights of a Beethoven symphony, a Dickens novel, a Shakespearean sonnet, or a Van Gogh landscape, must on these principles enlarge the soul to dimensions that will not be destroyed by grace but perfected, and supplemented in all its deficiencies, by that supernatural gift. The same great doctor admits that such things may distract and turn the attention away from God, in whom all true greatness and perfection is to be sought; and it is an obvious danger in an activity that 'cultivates,' that is, in some way, worships, and forms a religion round, the natural human perfections. But culture is a religious word, and it is possible to direct the 'cult' that it implies to the final end towards which the eyes of the contemplative are always turned. 'Knowledge and anything else conducive to greatness (*magnitudo*) is to man an occasion of self-confidence, so that he does not wholly surrender himself to God. Consequently such things sometimes occasion a hindrance to devotion, while in simple souls and women devotion abounds by repressing pride. If, however, a man perfectly submits to God his knowledge and any other perfection by this very fact his devotion increases' (*Ibid.*, II-II, 83, iii *ad* 3). If the natural increase in the soul springing from culture be wholly subordinated to the supernatural goal of life, the vision of God, the soul will realize more of its potentialities and so become more actual than the simple woman whose approach to the goal was less complicated, but lacked a good deal of natural perfection.

It might also be objected, however, that in the light of ultimate realities any advantages gained in the natural order fade into insignificance, and that after death such actuation of the soul is altogether lost. All that is good, true and beautiful in the classical heritage of mankind is to be found in God, the author of it all, so that in heaven

the washerwoman and the professor take their places side by side with no distinction in glory. If culture were for the perfection of this life alone, then the contemplative who, more than any other Christian, regards life on earth as passing along a vale of tears, the temporary preparation for final vision, would be merely wasting his time by indulging in it.

It would seem, however, that the soul does take this type of natural perfection and development with it from this life into the next. Since it is not a question of merely physical or corporeal development, whatever degree of actuality the soul attains by means of these good things of the human spirit, continues in some way even in glory. Every intellectual and spiritual act the soul has performed in this life becomes, at least to some extent, an eternal heritage. As he stands before his Judge at the moment after death the recent wayfarer on earth is seen in a fixed state which depends on his past actions; he carries his past with him as something actually remaining in his soul. Moreover, it is the teaching of St. Thomas that the habit and act of acquired human knowledge remain with a man after death (I, 89, v, vi). The merely physical side of this human perfection certainly passes away with the body, the soothing rhythm of music, the scent of old manuscripts, the vivid picture of the Grecian Urn. These phantasms or images are the material element of our understanding, and they perish with the body. Gone are the marshalled scenes of history that used to march in grand procession through the mind. But at the same time the formal part of knowledge remains; the penetrating insight into human nature in all its phases derived from those passing scenes does not itself pass, but stays to maintain the broadness of the mind. This means to say that all that is formally and essentially intellectual in culture is preserved in the soul irrespective of its union with the body (I-II, 67, ii). The ultimate and essential perfection of human culture must certainly be intellectual in character, otherwise it

would not be a strictly human perfection, but one that could be shared by the animals. Beyond this, moreover, we may surely look forward to the complete and perfect integration of all man's powers and faculties in the glory of his risen body. Then the delicacy of his sensibility and the subtlety of his imagination will provide a material element in his human cultural perfections, far more closely conformed to the formal intellectual element.

We may thus admit in principle that the object of culture, that the cream of Christian civilization takes its place in Christian contemplation being in some way part of the unique object of contemplation, not to be excluded as merely natural, but at the same time not to be regarded as essential or as a necessary condition for looking at God in love during life on earth. A caveat must, therefore, be added lest the soul more actualized and enlarged by the the assimilation of culture should be regarded as more absolutely perfect than the narrower soul of the uneducated saint. As an argument against the survival of humanly acquired knowledge after death, St. Thomas puts in the mouth of his opponent this reason: 'In this world some who are less good enjoy knowledge denied to others who are better. If then the habit of knowledge remain in the soul after death, it would mean that some who were less good would even in the future life excel others who were better.' To this St. Thomas makes answer: 'As a less good man may exceed a better man in bodily stature, so the same kind of man may have a habit of knowledge in the future life which a better man may not have. This, however, is *as of no moment* in comparison with the other prerogatives enjoyed by the better man' (I, 89, *v ad 2*).

If, therefore, we consider absolute values and regard human perfections in terms of the after life, we must admit that the human perfection derived from culture is not essential to the devout soul of the contemplative. Nevertheless, its accidental part in ultimate perfections is not to be despised. We know that although the objective

perfection of man is God himself, the unique goal of all in whom nothing can be accidental or multiple, yet the subjective perfection of man consists not simply in one essential goodness in himself, but in many good things. For in tending to perfection we tend to a more complete likeness in ourselves to the divine goodness; but the unique and absolutely single perfection of the Godhead can only be represented in the lower world of creation in multiplicity, so that the creature may reflect as many as possible of the infinite perfections in the unique Godhead. Hence the more human perfection, natural and supernatural, man acquires the more he resembles the one, single and supreme Perfection that is God. Man's complete and integral perfection includes not only an essential goodness in his soul by sanctifying grace, but also a human, accidental goodness in his faculties from nature; and by thus perfecting the whole man in accidentals as well as in essentials he attains to the most accurate and most varied representation of the Godhead that creatures of this material world can attain. The perfection of some classical work like the *Pensées* of Pascal is enhanced by good paper, clear and attractive printing and a strong handsome binding; we regard a cheap and shoddy production of any such classic as a desecration, though the essential perfection of the work remains.¹ Contemplation must needs put first things first, but this does not mean that it should despise or spurn the secondary which takes its part in the perfection of the contemplative, enlarging his soul and granting him a wider if not deeper vision of the Word.

Culture, then, is safeguarded and stabilized by being caught up in the contemplative's vision and at the same time it adds in some way to his perfection. Besides this, however, it may be said that the natural tendency of all true culture should be towards the ultimate perfection of a supernatural contemplation; it should be a natural dis-

¹ Cf. St. Thomas, *Contra Gentiles*, lib. 3 Cap. 20, *circa finem*.

position of the soul for the 'graceful' vision of divine things. The essential act of contemplation itself is a unique act, the intuition of the Godhead; so that all other acts of the mind, including practical judgments and considerations, are accidental to the substance of contemplation, as we have said. But these other intellectual actions may be necessary prerequisites leading the mind on towards the final intuition. It should, therefore, be possible to maintain that all true culture as such prepares the mind for contemplation, just as the practice of the moral virtues in the active order should tend always towards the tranquillity in which contemplation is brought forth and nourished.

The final achievement of culture must be the permanent establishment in the soul of a new, concrete and tangible perception of divine truth, as participated in the world of creation. For example, it should bring a knowledge of sympathy, not the abstract definition of it as 'compassion' or 'suffering-with,' that anyone without the vestige of culture could acquire, but the concrete realization of sympathy for the towering figures of tragedy in history and letters, for Socrates, Heloise, and Mary Queen of Scots, for King Lear, Jude the Obscure or even Tiny Tim. The truth that such experience contains depends ultimately on the First Truth, just as the being of everything depends on the First Being; it is simply a tiny chip of mirror throwing out a glint of light derived from the one great sun. The more individual, created truths that are known, and known in the full realization of the concrete, the nearer the mind draws to the apprehension of the one truth that is the Word of God. 'The ultimate perfection of the human intellect,' says St. Thomas, 'is divine truth; but other truths perfect the intellect in directing it towards the divine truth' (II-II, 180, iv *ad* 4). And St. Ambrose shows that all truth proceeds from God and therefore leads us back to God when he says: '*Quid quid verum a quocumque dicitur, a Sancto dicitur Spiritu.*'

This does not mean of course that all truth may be sought indiscriminately as though it would lead us automatically to divine Truth; for it is easy to fall into the vice of curiosity, which seeks knowledge inordinately (*cf.* II-II, 167, i *ad* 2). But it does mean that anyone who is intent on the final goal and the vision of God and sets his mind in that direction will find every aspect of truth a voice crying in the wilderness preparing the way of the Word.

The same relation is also to be found between all the individual created 'goods' and 'beauties' and the First Good and First Beauty. For love plays an intimate part in contemplation as the vision of the First Truth is also the most desirable of all things, the highest Good obtainable. Hence every good thing on earth should be loved and desired only in so far as it leads to this the highest of all goods, which is essentially contemplative. Dante's love of Beatrice must lead him and us to the love of Eternal Truth. The Word is a Word that breaths forth love—*Verbum spirans amorem*—and we can only return to the Word in whom we were created by way of love, the good things of the earth speaking to us of the supreme Good. Beauty, too, is fundamentally contemplative; 'beauty,' says St. Thomas, 'is *per se* and essentially found in the contemplative life' (II-II, 180, ii *ad* 3). The shining clarity and the due proportions which constitute everything of beauty, flow from the Mind which orders things, from the Truth which shines into the world. It is 'a joy for ever' only because it participates in the eternal beauty of the divine Word. Thus the truth, goodness and beauty that a man experiences and makes his own in assimilating the true culture of Christian civilization possess in themselves a natural tendency to draw his soul towards contemplation of divine things. They dispose the soul for supernatural grace, the *semen gloriae*, the first glimpse of the vision of God in which the ultimate perfection of man consists. Without this human perfection not only is the Christian in himself poorer and narrower, but also he lacks one of

the greatest natural dispositions for the supernatural perfection in which contemplation consists.

On the other hand, a culture that is deliberately cut off from its supernatural culmination is a headless creature in which truth, goodness and beauty do not truly dwell, because the artery that brings these from their living source has been severed. A true culture will depend on the divine Word and lead back to the same Word, and any interference with its dependence or with its journey towards the goal will necessarily despoil it of its real worth and vitality. The intimate relation between contemplation and culture should lead us to understand the vital need of returning to the contemplative ideals of the Christian faith in order to possess the culture for which we claim to be fighting. At the moment that culture is well-nigh dead, crushed down by the false humanism that seeks both the source and the goal of human perfection in man himself. 'Science' has ousted knowledge, commercial goods have been piled up in front of the Good, Beauty has been murdered by the connoisseur and the art critic, and the whole glorious heritage of Christian contemplation has been wrecked by the unreflective and un-Christian educational systems of the present day. Therefore, while yet we fight for all that makes human life perfect, we must strive internally also for the contemplation to which human life must necessarily lead.

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