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# Spirituality of the Old Testament



Paul-Marie of the Cross, O.C.D.

Translated by ELIZABETH McCABE

VOLUME I

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To Mary, Queen and Beauty of Carmel.

May she make fruitful in our souls  
the words which she kept in her heart.

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## Introduction

The inestimable theological and spiritual treasures of the Old Testament have been neglected for too long a time, but our age is rediscovering them. No one denies that there are, and will continue to be, a multitude of historical, critical and exegetical problems; but these difficulties no longer, as formerly, cause people to forget the essential message of the Old Testament which is a “wellspring of spiritual life.”<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup> This is exactly the viewpoint recommended by Pius XII in the Encyclical *Divino Aflante Spiritu*: “The commentators of the Sacred Letters . . . should set forth in particular the theological doctrine in faith and morals of the individual books or texts. . . . By making such an exposition, which is above all theological, they will efficaciously reduce to silence those who affirm that they scarcely ever find anything in biblical commentaries to raise their hearts to God, to nourish their souls or promote their interior life. . . . The professors of Sacred Scripture in the seminaries . . . (in) their exegetical explanation should aim especially at the theological doctrine, avoiding useless disputations and omitting all that is calculated rather to gratify curiosity than to promote true learning and solid piety. The literal sense and especially the theological sense let them propose with such definiteness, explain with such skill and

It is this essential message which is the subject of our book.

The inspired books speak of God and, in a certain sense, speak only of Him. Or rather, in the inspired books God Himself expresses Himself. His voice should be heard in preference to all others, for "God rightly speaks of God."<sup>2</sup> The messages of the Old Testament and of the New Testament are inseparable and show continuity and harmony. The Old Testament announces the New Testament and prepares for it, but it does more than prepare the road; it manifests in advance Him to whom the road leads, upon whom all its perspectives converge. Christ reminded His apostles of this: "Search the Scriptures, for you think in them to have life everlasting; and the same are they that give testimony of Me."<sup>3</sup> Even the Samaritan woman was aware of this truth: "The woman saith to Him: I know that the Messias cometh (who is called Christ); therefore, when He is come, He will tell us all things."<sup>4</sup>

Tradition asserts that each Testament sheds light on the other and that their viewpoints complete each other. This is especially evident on the plane of essential values; these, therefore are brought into focus in Part I of our book.

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inculcate with such ardor that in their students may be in a sense verified what happened to the disciples on the way to Emmaus, when, having heard the words of the Master, they exclaimed: 'Was not our heart burning within us, whilst He opened to us the Scriptures?' Thus the Divine Letters will become . . . a pure and never-failing source of spiritual life." (*Rome and the Study of Scripture: A Collection of Papal Enactments on the Study of Holy Scripture together with the Decision of the Biblical Commission*, fourth edition, St. Meinrad, Indiana, 1946, pp. 92, 93, 104.)

<sup>2</sup> Blaise Pascal, *Pensées*.

<sup>3</sup> John 5:39.

<sup>4</sup> John 4:25.

When God spoke to the first patriarchs, what He told them about His nature gave an early glimpse of immutable and eternal truth. "For I am the Lord, and I change not."<sup>5</sup>

Some truths were revealed to man before the coming of Christ, right from the beginning of time. Later God strove to make these truths penetrate more deeply into the mind, the heart and the soul of humanity. Other truths, and by no means the least important, were revealed only by the Son of God. But even in this case the Old Testament provided the ground on which the edifice of faith would be erected, showing man a God who is one and transcendent, spiritual and living, omnipotent and infinitely holy. Thereby it laid the indestructible foundations of subsequent revelations and also of all spiritual life.

The Bible speaks to us first of God, then of man confronting God. Again the essential values are elucidated: the depth of man's nature, his inherent misery, his basic aspirations, his irrepressible impulses. Then the Old Testament tells us of the bonds between man and God, recalling that we were made by Him and for Him, that He is always with us and truly ours. We learn the nature of the bond which unites us to God—a bond of charity, having two requirements stated in the two great commandments: love of God ("the greatest and the first commandment")<sup>6</sup> and love of neighbor (the "royal law").<sup>7</sup>

Not only does the Old Testament present theological and moral doctrine, but it also teaches man how he is loved by God; and here we are undoubtedly at the very heart of

<sup>5</sup> Mal. 3:6.

<sup>6</sup> Matt. 22:38.

<sup>7</sup> Jas. 2:8.

its message. To convey this message to us, the Old Testament used not only words but also acts, gestures and the divine lessons of things whereby God revealed the features of His face. Gradually man discovered in Him the Creator, the Master, the Father, the Savior and (most wonderful of all!) the Lover. This is the theme of Part II in which union with God is shown as man's ultimate goal. Indeed a wonderfully rich spiritual and mystical theology can be derived from the inspired books of the Old Testament, especially the prophetic books. This theology, however, depends entirely upon the person of the one who is constantly predicted, the Messiah, the Savior. Only He will bring this mystical doctrine to the plane of actual experience. Thus the theology of the Old Testament postulates Christ. Man's union with God, the goal of the spiritual life, likewise depends entirely upon Christ. Without the Savior this union between God and His sinful creature would be impossible. But in Him and by Him the nuptials are prepared, for He redeems and espouses humanity. Henceforth this God, who is Father and Savior, may be seen also as the Lover for whom man is destined, the wooer of souls.

God's plan, however, is not confined to the dimensions of only one man, but of all humanity; or rather, it finds its full meaning and efficacy, its complete development, only in the perfect man, Christ, the epitome of all men. The divine plan will be fully accomplished at the end of time, but it is already revealed in the Old Testament, where we see all humanity called to form the Church, of which Jerusalem is the figure, called to be a bride united with her Lover.

After revealing God to man and probing the depths of

divine love, the Old Testament has the further mission of turning man to God and of teaching him to open himself to this love. In Part III we retrace Israel's long march toward the Promised Land and we view the sad picture of Jewish history. This gives us a glimpse of the nation's spiritual journeying and of its striving for union with God. God's love of man calls for a response. We find this expressed in the Old Testament under the form of a hesitating advance interrupted by many pauses. How could it be otherwise? We see that God always comes more than halfway to meet man and to support him in the slow climb toward the light.

Part III deals with the progressive manifestation of the paths along which God and man advance to meet each other and to unite their strivings. These paths are so perfectly suited to our nature, our aspirations and our divine vocation that if we want to reach God, we should always follow them, for that is how He comes to us. In the Old Testament we note that the souls who followed these paths experienced unity and transformation. They acquired peace, knew joy, praised God from an overflowing heart. The most favored among them advanced so far in this direction that they are admirable models for us. In the Old Testament the paths by which God came to men and by which men went to God were: the dark but luminous path of faith, followed by our fathers, the patriarchs; the humble, bold and loving search for wisdom undertaken by the inspired scribes; the painful trials and purifications generously accepted by God's great servants, especially the prophets. This third section, like the other two, reveals that God destines man for love. Thus the soul is led toward the goal of all the spiritual life, which is divine union.

Such a method of investigating the sacred text is faithful to the spirit of the Church and of the Fathers. It is the most fruitful approach, though it may have been neglected temporarily. All Christians encounter this viewpoint in prayer, particularly in the liturgy; its value is fully evident in the mystics and the saints. It presents the advantage of keeping our gaze fixed constantly upon the complete plan of revelation, so that we may plumb the depths of spiritual reality and perceive the role of Christ in the whole of the Bible. The literal sense of Scripture retains its privileged place, but an effort is made to examine the meaning of the words and the texture of events in order to glimpse the divine thought in process of activity. To quote again the words of Pius XII in the Encyclical *Divino Afflante Spiritu*, we seek to discover how “what was said and done in the Old Testament was ordained and disposed by God with such consummate wisdom that things past prefigured in a spiritual way those that were to come under the new dispensation of grace.”<sup>8</sup>

Relying constantly on the internal coherence of the inspired text and on the analogy of faith, we strive, above all, to explain the Bible by itself, and the one Testament by the other. In this way the whole Bible becomes spiritual food for the soul: words, gestures, events, the record of history, man’s impulse toward God as well as God’s tokens of love for man. From this point of view the Old Testament acquires incomparable value as a text book for teaching and for spiritual formation. As a manual of prayer, it offers inexhaustible material for contemplation. God Himself is present there, speaks to us and mysteriously reveals Himself. The Old Testament is Jacob’s well, to which sinful humanity

<sup>8</sup> *Op. cit.* p. 93.

comes for water. Christ is found there in anticipation, waiting to draw up the living water for which we thirst, which will become within us “a fountain of water springing up into life everlasting.”<sup>9</sup>

May this book smooth the road to that spring, allow souls to catch the echo of the divine voice and give them the desire to return constantly to the inspired text. We hope that these meditations will nourish the spiritual life authentically by guiding it back to its wellspring. The book has ripened slowly by contact with the word of God, read and pondered time and time again, until the plan gradually emerged, as it were, from the Bible itself. In writing it, we have placed ourselves under the guidance of the Blessed Virgin Mary, the spouse of the Canticle of Canticles, who was predicted at the very beginning of Genesis<sup>10</sup> and was glorified in the Apocalypse,<sup>11</sup> the Virgin who united the Old Testament to the New Testament.

May she herself be the reward of those whose help has been invaluable and without whom this work would doubtless never have been undertaken. May she make fruitful in our souls the words which she kept in her heart, the words which rose from the divine source that she imparts to us in her Son.

<sup>9</sup> John 4:14.

<sup>10</sup> Gen. 3:15.

<sup>11</sup> Apoc., chap. 12.



# CONTENTS

*Introduction* . . . . . vii

## Part I God and the Soul

1	<i>The Course of Revelation</i> . . . . .	3
	Revelation to Adam . . . . .	3
	Revelation to Fallen Humanity . . . . .	10
	Words and Wonders . . . . .	15
2	<i>Revelation of God</i> . . . . .	23
	The One True God . . . . .	23
	The Divine Name . . . . .	32
	Life in God . . . . .	36
	The Attributes of God . . . . .	54
3	<i>The Soul</i> . . . . .	108
	Yearning for God . . . . .	108
	Self-Abasement . . . . .	117
	Surrender and Trust . . . . .	122

4 *Charity* . . . . . 131  
    Union with God . . . . . 132  
    The First and Greatest Commandment . . . . . 136  
    The Royal Law . . . . . 180

5 *God Among Men* . . . . . 202  
    God's Favorites: the Poor, Humble and Just . . . . . 222  
    God Dwells among Men . . . . . 237

PART I

God and the Soul



## Chapter I

# THE COURSE OF REVELATION

For the earth shall be filled, that men may know the glory of the Lord, as waters covering the sea.<sup>1</sup>

Singing the canticle of Moses, the servant of God, and the canticle of the Lamb, saying: Great and wonderful are Thy works, O Lord God almighty, just and true are Thy ways, O King of ages. Who shall not fear Thee, O Lord, and magnify Thy name? For Thou only art holy.<sup>2</sup>

### REVELATION TO ADAM

[He] hath made of one, all mankind, to dwell upon the whole face of the earth, determining appointed times and the limits of their habitation, that they should seek God, if happily they may feel after Him or find Him, although He be not far from every one of us; for in Him we live, and move, and are. . . . For we are also His offspring.<sup>3</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Hab. 2:14.    <sup>2</sup> Apoc. 15:3, 4.    <sup>3</sup> Acts 17:26–28.

With Christ, revelation is fulfilled, but God did not speak by His Son until after He “at sundry times and in divers manners, spoke in times past to the fathers by the prophets.”<sup>4</sup> There is a progressive revelation of God throughout the whole of the Old Testament, but this arrangement is not what God, in His loving generosity and bounty, had originally intended for man, “created . . . to His own image,”<sup>5</sup> into whose face He had “breathed . . . the breath of life.”<sup>6</sup> There had been a previous plan.

The first man had received from God a knowledge superior to ours.<sup>7</sup> God was more intimately present to him before the fall than He is now to us.<sup>8</sup> Adam was moving toward a vision which was to be his ultimate beatitude, but in the meantime he enjoyed full physical and spiritual development, as well as a life of happiness.<sup>9</sup>

We must, then, turn our thoughts to the earthly paradise, that place of enjoyment where the first human couple lived. We must consider the man whom God “made right,”<sup>10</sup> established “in justice and holiness of truth,”<sup>11</sup> and to whom He communicated Himself. Thus we can glimpse how the Creator would have liked to give Himself to all humanity and we understand man’s original vocation. More important still is the way the light of this admirable plan enables us to contemplate God’s infinite perfections.

Adam sprang directly from the divine hands and remained in close and continuous contact with his Creator, as Michelangelo magnificently suggested in the Sistine fresco.

<sup>4</sup> Heb. 1:1.    <sup>5</sup> Gen. 1:27.    <sup>6</sup> Gen. 2:7.

<sup>7</sup> *Summa theol.* Ia, q. 94, a. 1.    <sup>8</sup> *Ibid.*, IIa IIae, q. 5, a. 1.

<sup>9</sup> “And above every soul Adam in the beginning” (Ecclus. 49:19).

<sup>10</sup> Eccles. 7:30.    <sup>11</sup> Eph. 4:24.

Man was truly bathed in light, nourished on divine knowledge and understanding. The first pages of Genesis, teeming with life, show us Adam kneaded from clay, formed by creative thought and suddenly living by the breath transmitted to him: “And the Lord God formed man of the slime of the earth, and breathed into his face the breath of life, and the man became a living soul.”<sup>12</sup>

In the fullness of his God-given perfections, Adam awakened to life, opened his eyes, and perceived Him whom Judith was to call “God of the heavens, Creator of the waters and Lord of the whole creation.”<sup>13</sup> In the midst of the superabundant forms brought forth from the same hands which fashioned him, the first man contemplated the prodigious horizons on which the Sacred Book opened, his gaze penetrating to their very depths. He saw the divine handiwork in all its magnificence and integrity. Like the Creator, Adam saw that all things made were very good.<sup>14</sup>

Adam, moreover, contemplated the unique cause, the ultimate source of this created order, where he himself occupied the peak. Though last to appear, he was nonetheless destined in the divine plan to dominate the earth. “Subdue it,” he was told.<sup>15</sup> But how could this authority over nature fail to remind Adam of his own dependence upon a superior authority? He knew the divine sovereignty and he knew that he was placed under its direct control. This enabled him to perceive all the better how totally and happily all

<sup>12</sup> Not only did Adam receive life, but he was touched by a ray of divine splendor and he bore a reflection of the Creator: “And God created man to His own image: to the image of God He created him” (Gen. 1:27).

<sup>13</sup> Jud. 9:17.    <sup>14</sup> Gen. 1:31.    <sup>15</sup> Gen. 1:28.

things were submitted to their first cause. Thus did God appear in those first days of the world: as the sovereign and first cause.

In the unique clarity of those first days of time, Adam became conscious of the fact that within himself the divine reality was reflected as in a perfect mirror or in clear water. Had not God said: "Let Us make man to Our image and likeness"?<sup>16</sup> Hence something of the inner splendor of the Blessed Trinity lived in the soul of the first man. God had made it a true mirror of the triune life, the scene of the relations binding the divine Persons to each other. Adam's strong and intact will as well as his undimmed intellect were directed toward God, his ultimate beatitude. His soul was perfectly attuned to the divine touch and it provided a place where the three Persons could "renew their mystery."<sup>17</sup> Why was this mirror to be broken so soon? Throughout the ages, would man seek to restore it. But at least the fragments, however dirty and tiny they might be, had received the original light and would continue to reflect at least a few of its rays.<sup>18</sup>

The same mystery which St. Paul shows us in Christ,

<sup>16</sup> Gen. 1:26.

<sup>17</sup> Cf. prayer of Sister Elizabeth of the Trinity, Philipon, O.P., *The Spiritual Doctrine of Sister Elizabeth of the Trinity*, translated by a Benedictine of Stanbrook Abbey (Cork: the Mercier Press, 1947) pp. 53-54.

<sup>18</sup> With regard to the continuance of the image of God in man, it is helpful to refer to *The Mirror of Eternal Salvation* by Ruysbroeck, who declared that the image of God is His Son, His own eternal wisdom, existing before all creation, and that man was created in relationship to this eternal image.

which he invites us to contemplate in its depth, length, width and height—in short, the divine immensity—Adam knew, by the resemblance etched on his own soul. He perceived also how gratuitous the gift was, this being all the more evident because there was no intermediary, no secondary cause. By His word God brought forth from nothing a new being which He filled with happiness by bestowing on it a share of His own abundance. "God saw all the things that He had made, and they were very good."<sup>19</sup> All that surrounded Adam was stamped with the sign of excellence and truly reflected the substantial goodness of the Creator. The first man beheld the great spectacle of creation and he was appointed its priest and ruler: "Rule over the fishes of the sea and the fowls of the air and all living creatures that move upon the earth."<sup>20</sup> "And the Lord God having formed out of the ground all the beasts of the earth and all the fowls of the air, brought them to Adam to see what he would call them; for whatsoever Adam called any living creature the same is its name."<sup>21</sup>

Adam, moreover, saw that everything had been ordained for his joy and satisfaction. "And the Lord God had planted a paradise of pleasure from the beginning wherein He placed man whom He had formed. And the Lord God brought forth of the ground all manner of trees, fair to behold and pleasant to eat of."<sup>22</sup>

Adam's soul and his human faculties were fully gratified. In a still more touching way he was to experience the totally gratuitous kindness and courtesy of divine goodness,

<sup>19</sup> Gen. 1:31.    <sup>20</sup> Gen. 1:28.    <sup>21</sup> Gen. 2:19.

<sup>22</sup> Gen. 2:8, 9.

when God, noting man's solitude, declared: "It is not good for man to be alone: let Us make him a help like unto himself."<sup>23</sup>

On receiving Eve, his companion, from the divine hands, Adam felt that he was deeply understood and that his strongest desire was satisfied. With a glad greeting he welcomed the one who was to help him fulfill himself: "This now is bone of my bones, and flesh of my flesh; she shall be called woman, because she was taken out of man."<sup>24</sup>

The human state appeared to be mere weakness and utter dependence upon God. In reality it was a wonderful invention of divine goodness eager to communicate itself. God provided for all the needs of His creature. Between Himself and man He established a personal relationship which was characterized by ineffable intimacy, rendered possible by the divine resemblance formed in the depths of the human soul. God revealed Himself not only as the first cause but also as man's last end and ultimate beatitude.<sup>25</sup> True child of God, king of the earth, spouse and companion of woman: in each of these titles the first man found reason to give thanks to the source of such benefits and to adore the in-

<sup>23</sup> Gen. 2:18.      <sup>24</sup> Gen. 2:23.

<sup>25</sup> Cf. the Sermon by St. Leo, Pope, read in the Divine Office on the fourth Sunday of Advent: "If with faith and intelligence we understand the beginnings of our creation, we shall find that man was made to the image of God, that he might imitate the Author of his being. In us, as in a mirror, the figure of the divine goodness shines resplendent. Herein lies the natural dignity of our race. To this end the grace of our Savior is renewed in us daily, that by its use, man, though he be fallen through the first Adam, may be raised up again through the second (*Roman Breviary in English*, New York: Benziger Brothers, 1950).

finite, immutable, eternal Good who so generously endowed him.

This being so, how could it be supposed that man, of his own accord, would deliberately cut off the transmission of such benefits, and with his own hands demolish the indescribable happiness of his state? But that is what happened and that is the result of sin. Adam and Eve disobeyed God and turned away from the one who had given them everything. As soon as "the eyes of them both were opened"<sup>26</sup> to evil, they fled from the face of Yahweh to hide, thus shutting out the divine gifts.

But the unstinting generosity shown toward man was an expression of a love which could not cease its activity. This is apparent in the account of the fall and the divine intervention. Man's will had broken the pact, but divine goodness persisted in showing itself. Of course Adam and Eve had to undergo a just punishment: they heard the words of the terrible curse and they were driven out of paradise. But this occurred only after God's promise had shed a ray of light on the hearts of the man and woman as they were about to wander out into the black shadows: "I will put enmities between thee and the woman, and thy seed and her seed: she shall crush thy head."<sup>27</sup>

This was love's answer to man's offenses. God spared man's life and also gave him a hope of victory over evil. Even when driven from paradise, man bore a sign upon him and remained the object of divine concern. Even though he had been wounded, racked by the conflict between his utter poverty and his glorious destiny, yet he still was made by

<sup>26</sup> Gen. 3:7.      <sup>27</sup> Gen. 3:15.

God and for God.<sup>28</sup> Man's fate was at stake, but the die was cast by the hand of infinite love, which was sure to win. God's plan encountered an obstacle in man's free will, but God used this obstacle to bring forth from it a greater good.<sup>29</sup> The divine plan was restored and love was victorious. At this point began the history of how the divine leaven raised fallen humanity—a history which can be explained only by love, an infinite force, a yearning flame. It is true that the fall made revelation more difficult and also more necessary, but what matter? Through the patriarchs and the prophets and, finally, by his own Son, God continued to proclaim and to offer to all men nothing less than Himself, and in Himself, eternal beatitude.

#### REVELATION TO FALLEN HUMANITY

God . . . at sundry times and in divers manners, spoke in times past to the fathers.<sup>30</sup>

To whom it was revealed, that not to themselves, but to you they ministered those things which are now declared to you by them that have preached the gospel to you, the Holy Ghost being sent down from heaven, on whom the angels desire to look.<sup>31</sup>

<sup>28</sup> St. Paul puts special emphasis on this vocation to the divine life for which we were intended from the beginning: "He chose us . . . before the foundation of the world, that we should be holy and unspotted in His sight in charity, who hath predestinated us unto the adoption of children through Jesus Christ unto Himself, according to the purpose of His will" (Eph. 1:4-5). Cf. Eph. 1:11-12; II Tim. 1:9; Rom. 6:22.

<sup>29</sup> "O God, who in creating man didst exalt his nature very wonderfully and yet more wonderfully didst establish it anew" (Ordinary of the Mass).

<sup>30</sup> Heb. 1:1.

<sup>31</sup> I Pet. 1:12.

Because Adam belonged to God and was His child, the divine gifts were lavished upon him to the fullest extent. Through the first man, the whole human race was called to a happiness like his. But by Adam's sin all humanity was likewise deprived of this privilege and all had to suffer the consequences of the original fault.

We learn in the Bible that fallen humanity became still worse by plunging into evil and by sinking, all too frequently, to appalling depths of degradation. "And the earth was corrupted before God, and was filled with iniquity. . . . All flesh had corrupted its way upon the earth."<sup>32</sup>

This sad spectacle pained man's Creator and aroused His just anger: "And God, seeing that the wickedness of men was great on the earth and that all the thought of their heart was bent upon evil at all times, it repented Him that He had made man on the earth."<sup>33</sup>

As men were utterly corrupt and totally untrue to their vocation, God decided to destroy them: "He said to Noe. The end of all flesh is come before Me, the earth is filled with iniquity through them, and I will destroy them with the earth."<sup>34</sup>

Since the world no longer had any hearts that heeded the divine voice, why should God allow the increase of a race which became more evil from day to day? And yet, if there were even one man, a single one, whose soul was true, considerate and faithful, would he not cause God to relent in His anger? At the time of the deluge the dove at first was unable to alight, as the earth was still covered with water. Only when Noe sent it to reconnoitre a second time did it return carrying an olive branch in its beak. Similarly it

<sup>32</sup> Gen. 6:11-12.

<sup>33</sup> Gen. 5:5-6.

<sup>34</sup> Gen. 6:13.

seemed that at first glance God saw humanity entirely submerged in sin. But He looked again, then perceived the one just man on earth. To alight and to bring back a symbol of hope and of peace, the dove needed but a single olive sapling. Likewise, to pardon humanity and to ratify His covenant with men, God was satisfied with one just man. That just man, who had remained pure in the midst of general corruption, was Noe, "a perfect man in his generation."<sup>35</sup> Moreover he was, doubtless, the only man who kept intact the worship of the true God: "And Noe built an altar unto the Lord; and taking of all cattle and fowl that were clean, offered holocausts upon the altar."<sup>36</sup>

He pleaded the case of sinful men, and while he could not avert their punishment, he at least obtained the promise that they would not be annihilated in the future: "I will no more curse the earth for the sake of man. . . . I will no more destroy every living soul as I have done . . . neither shall there be from henceforth a flood to waste the earth."<sup>37</sup>

Noe was granted even more. His prayer for humanity disposed God to be merciful and kind. The survivors of the deluge received God's promise of a permanent covenant: "Behold I will establish my covenant with you, and with your seed after you . . . for perpetual generations."<sup>38</sup> As testimony of the ratified covenant and of renewed peace, a sign appeared in heaven: "I will set My bow in the clouds and it shall be the sign of a covenant between Me, and between the earth. . . . And I shall see it and shall remember the everlasting covenant that was made between God and every living soul of all flesh which is upon the earth."<sup>39</sup>

<sup>35</sup> Gen. 6:9.    <sup>36</sup> Gen. 8:20.    <sup>37</sup> Gen. 8:21; 9:11.

<sup>38</sup> Gen. 9:9, 12.    <sup>39</sup> Gen. 9:13, 16.

One man of good life, a single true and faithful soul, sufficed to cause God to reverse His decision, to spare the earth which was already marked with the sign of destruction, to decide to communicate His light and love once again to the human race. But this dreadful corruption added to original sin made men's hearts rebellious and their spirits almost impervious to spiritual truth. To reach them, therefore, God had to use new methods. Thenceforth He revealed Himself progressively, often in a concealed way, ever taking into account what men could bear. Another result of man's vice was that, at least for a time, revelation ceased to be universal. For many centuries it reached only a handful of men; for many centuries, also, it was to be confined within narrow limits. But at least it was faithfully preserved and jealously defended, as a family possession, by the obscure nation to which it was entrusted. Thus the Creator of heaven and earth, the one, infinite, eternal Supreme Being became, for a long time, the God of merely one tribe, the God of Abraham, of Isaac and of Jacob.

Nevertheless, while God, in His love, consented to these delays and limitations, He could not cease to be the one true God. It was still true that "He hath called the earth."<sup>40</sup>

From the outset He could not fail to establish a final and universal covenant with all humanity. Though the biblical story abandons the cosmic horizons of the first days ("In the beginning God created heaven and earth") to record the history of a few members of a nomadic tribe, yet God's words ever retained their permanent and universal relevance. God promised Noe "the everlasting covenant . . . between

<sup>40</sup> Ps. 49:1.

God and every living soul of all flesh which is upon the earth.”<sup>41</sup>

It is true that with Abraham the covenant and subsequent revelation seemed to become restricted: “And I will make of thee a great nation,”<sup>42</sup> but God immediately added that this special choice and apparent limitation was a preparation for the final covenant and universal blessing: “In thee shall all the kindred of the earth be blessed.”<sup>43</sup>

Abraham was aware of the fact that God judged all the earth and extended salvation, not only to those who were His specially chosen people, but to all the righteous who walked in His paths. Abraham knew this, since he did not hesitate to plead their cause before God: “Wilt Thou not spare that place for the sake of fifty just . . . for thirty . . . for twenty . . . for ten?”<sup>44</sup> And what was the Lord’s answer? “I will spare the whole place for their sake.”<sup>45</sup>

The biblical account informs us that, unfortunately, Sodom did not contain that many just men, but we see that it enters into God’s plan to grant the prayer of the just man and by it to save all men. In this way something of the mystery of the covenant is revealed to us. The covenant was to become effective by faith in the one who was to come to save all humanity. Thenceforth Abraham bore within him, as it were, the one in whom the new, universal and eternal covenant would be fulfilled: the Lord Jesus, the one Mediator.

“And in thy seed shall all the nations of the earth be blessed, because thou hast obeyed My voice.”<sup>46</sup> *In semine tuo*, that is to say, “in Christ” (so all the Fathers of the

<sup>41</sup> Gen. 9:16.

<sup>42</sup> Gen. 12:2.

<sup>43</sup> Gen. 12:3.

<sup>44</sup> Gen., chap. 18.

<sup>45</sup> Gen. 18:26.

<sup>46</sup> Gen. 22:18.

Church maintain and the Church teaches) “all nations will be blessed.” Thus were the patriarchs permitted to see the universal scope of their particular vocation and of the promises reiterated to Isaac, Jacob and their descendants. Through them God’s glory would shine forth on all humanity and His name would be hallowed. Truly a flood of grace was to follow the other flood: “For the earth shall be filled, that men may know the glory of the Lord, as waters covering the sea.”<sup>47</sup> That is why “the God of gods, the Lord hath spoken; and He hath called the earth. From the rising of the sun, to the going down thereof, out of Sion the loveliness of His beauty, God shall come manifestly.”<sup>48</sup> Now we must examine lovingly and reverently that revelation, the divine words bequeathed to us in the sacred books.

### WORDS AND WONDERS

Now these things were done in a figure of us, that we should not covet evil things, as they also coveted. Neither become ye idolaters, as some of them.<sup>49</sup>

The Old Testament has transmitted to us the words by which God expressed Himself; these constitute the first element of revelation. The men entrusted with God’s message were irresistibly impelled by Him to become its heralds. “For the Lord God doth nothing without revealing His secret to His servants the prophets.”<sup>50</sup> Though its inner meaning often was hidden from them, yet they kept repeating it, as did the apostles later, “in season, out of season.”<sup>51</sup> Thus, not only do they provide all men with the content and object

<sup>47</sup> Hab. 2:14.

<sup>48</sup> Ps. 49:1-3.

<sup>49</sup> I Cor. 10:6-7.

<sup>50</sup> Amos 3:7.

<sup>51</sup> II Tim. 4:2.

of faith, but they also show that the motive of faith is divine authority itself.<sup>52</sup> The Psalmist recalled the same fact: "Attend, O my people, to my law, incline your ears to the words of my mouth. I will open my mouth in parables; I will utter propositions from the beginning. How great things have we heard and known, and our fathers have told us. They have not been hidden from their children, in another generation. Declaring the praises of the Lord and His powers and His wonders which He hath done. And He set up a testimony in Jacob, and made a law in Israel."<sup>53</sup>

From generation to generation the divine message was kept and transmitted faithfully; even the wording of it was inviolable:<sup>54</sup> "This is My covenant with them, saith the Lord: My spirit that is in thee and My words that I have put in thy mouth, shall not depart out of thy mouth nor out of the mouth of thy seed nor out of the mouth of thy seed's seed, saith the Lord, from henceforth and forever."<sup>55</sup>

The function of words is to translate thought and to express spiritual truths; that is why God used words to reveal Himself. Words constitute the link between God, who is a spirit, and the creatures made in His image. But in His nature God is invisible and His word reaches us only through agents. Unconditional acceptance of God's word (i.e., faith)<sup>56</sup> must be founded on the absolute certainty that the

<sup>52</sup> "No prophecy of Scripture is made by private interpretation. For prophecy came not by the will of man at any time, but the holy men of God spoke, inspired by the Holy Ghost" (II Pet. 1:21-22).

<sup>53</sup> Ps. 77:1-5.

<sup>54</sup> Christ Himself said: "The Scripture cannot be broken" (John 10:35).

<sup>55</sup> Isa. 59:21.

<sup>56</sup> "Faith then cometh by hearing; and hearing by the word of Christ" (Rom. 10:17).

message conveyed by men comes from God. Hence proof is required. Who but God could furnish this proof, either directly or by delegating power to men who acknowledged that they received it from on high? What else but signs and wonders could provide this proof? It is evident, then, that to ask God for signs may not indicate a lack of faith but a necessary way of ascertaining that a message truly proceeds from Him. Some men of the Old Testament, before enlisting in God's service, asked Him for signs. God did not refuse them. Indeed, many times He spontaneously gave proof that a message was authentically His. The more universal the message and the more exacting its demands, the more marvellous were the wonders that accompanied it. Thus majestic theophanies preceded the promulgation of the Decalogue, and the whole Law was inserted in the series of miracles and the wonders which was the Exodus. Not only Moses but all the people testified to this: "You are My witnesses, saith the Lord, and My servant whom I have chosen that you may know and believe Me and understand that I Myself am."<sup>57</sup>

Consequently, no one doubted that the message conveyed by Moses was a divine message. The signs of credibility were present and formed the foundation of faith for the people of Israel.<sup>58</sup> But wonders had another function too. The marvels and great events recorded in the Bible were signs only for the spectators. As the witnesses disappeared, the signs lost

<sup>57</sup> Isa. 43:10.

<sup>58</sup> The necessity of miracles was not abolished in the New Testament. Christ used them to prove that His testimony was authentic: "Believe you not that I am in the Father and the Father in Me? Otherwise believe for the very works' sake" (John 14:11-12). For the same reason the apostles received the power to perform miracles (cf. Matt. 10:8).



their worth as visible evidence and became an object of belief for those who had not seen them. Why then, does the Bible record them so minutely and complacently? It is, of course, largely because Israel was proud of these repeated marks of God's favor,<sup>59</sup> but it is also because God intended these signs to be always valid and to retain their power to enlighten and educate humanity.

Signs, symbols and images have, indeed, an undeniable power to express and to impress not only primitive minds but all men of all times. Our knowledge of God consists essentially in abstract ideas and concepts, but its means of expression are particularly dynamic and pregnant with meaning: images, signs and symbols. They make an impression on the sense faculties and reach into the regions where the fusion of body and soul takes place. Therefore they awake mellow overtones and lasting resonances, leaving a deep and indelible impression. It is easily understood that God wanted to reveal Himself through all the faculties of man and that is why He inspired the sacred authors, particularly the prophets, to use this method of education which is remarkably effective.<sup>60</sup> It is also noteworthy that the signs and symbols found in the Bible were chosen so judiciously that they are as appropriate as ever to reveal God deeply and truly.

In the pages which follow, reference will be made to the words of revelation in order to glimpse what God has permitted us to know about Himself, His nature, His attributes and His relations with humanity. Signs will be studied in

<sup>59</sup> Cf. Ps. 77:4-6.

<sup>60</sup> Regarding the value of the parables as signs, cf. Matt. 13:11-15, 34-35.

connection with the problem of faith. But so important is the relation between words and signs, so valuable is the help given to words by the signs which surround them with a favorable atmosphere, that at the very outset we must understand in a general way the import of signs.

The most typical example is the "glory" of Yahweh. In many religions signs are a stumbling block, so far as man runs the risk of stopping at them, taking them for the one whom they are intended to reveal or whose presence they should indicate. In this respect individual differences undoubtedly occurred in Israel, but always the divine teaching was absolutely clear and exacting. However dazzling and amazing Yahweh's glory may have been, it never was confused with God Himself. It merely indicated and manifested His presence.

And the glory of the Lord dwelt upon Sinai, covering it with a cloud six days; and the seventh day He called [Moses] out of the midst of the cloud. . . . And the sight of the glory of the Lord was like a burning fire upon the top of the Mount, in the eyes of the children of Israel. . . . The cloud covered the tabernacle of the testimony, and the glory of the Lord filled it.<sup>61</sup>

God showed His glory when He wished to utter words of primary importance, thus guaranteeing their authenticity, or the glory appeared in places where God wished to receive worship:

The Lord said to him: Lo, now will I come to thee, in the darkness of a cloud, that the people may hear Me speaking to thee and may believe thee forever.<sup>62</sup>

And it came to pass, when the priests were come out of the

<sup>61</sup> Exod. 24:16, 17; 40:32.      <sup>62</sup> Exod. 19:9.

sanctuary, that a cloud filled the house of the Lord. And the priests could not stand to minister because of the cloud; for the glory of the Lord had filled the house of the Lord.<sup>63</sup>

The general upheaval of surrounding nature provided a proper background for the presence of the Creator and, in a way, was only intended as a way of drawing attention to Him. This is emphasized in the seventeenth psalm, a magnificent account of the events on Mount Sinai:

The earth shook and trembled; the foundations of the mountains were troubled and were moved. . . . He bowed the heavens and came down; and darkness was under His feet. And He ascended upon the cherubim, and He flew; He flew upon the wings of the winds. And He made darkness His covert, His pavilion round about Him: dark waters in the clouds of the air. At the brightness that was before Him the clouds passed, hail and coals of fire. And the Lord thundered from heaven, and the Highest gave His voice.<sup>64</sup>

But a truly thrilling impression is made by the Book of Exodus; its tale is sublime, powerful, calm:

And now the third day was come, and the morning appeared; and behold thunders began to be heard, and lightning to flash, and a very thick cloud to cover the Mount, and the noise of the trumpet sounded exceeding loud, and the people that was in the camp, feared. And when Moses had brought them forth to meet God from the place of the camp, they stood at the bottom of the Mount. And all Mount Sinai was on a smoke, because the Lord was come down upon it in fire, and the smoke arose from it as out of a furnace; and all the Mount was terrible. And the sound of the trumpet grew by degrees louder and louder and was

<sup>63</sup> III Kings 8:10-11.    <sup>64</sup> Ps. 17:8, 10-14.

drawn out to a greater length; Moses spoke, and God answered him. And the Lord came down upon Mount Sinai, in the very top of the Mount, and He called Moses unto the top thereof.<sup>65</sup>

The elements familiar to man were transfigured and yet they were but pale and stuttering analogies of the ineffable, untranslatable transcendence. "And they saw the God of Israel; and under His feet as it were a work of sapphire stone, and as the heaven, when clear."<sup>66</sup> This transcendence is emphasized also in the prophet Ezechiel's awkward attempt to translate what he saw: "This was the vision of the likeness of the glory of the Lord."<sup>67</sup>

In other instances the forces of nature seemed animated by completely divine power and efficacy: "And the glory of the Lord appeared to all the multitude; and behold a fire, coming forth from the Lord, devoured the holocaust, and the fat that was upon the altar; which when the multitude saw, they praised the Lord, falling on their faces."<sup>68</sup> Psalm 49 affirmed the same occurrence: "A fire shall burn before Him; and a mighty tempest shall be round about Him."<sup>69</sup> God's glory is the divine reality which the elements are charged with reflecting. The ineffable manifestation is devoid of specific details and thereby compels adoration all the more.<sup>70</sup> Thus God deigned to reveal His divinity to the people and more especially to certain men better able to understand and convey His message. But at the same time, by the very signs which had attracted their attention, He withdrew them from sensual apprehensions and purely hu-

<sup>65</sup> Exod. 19:16-20.    <sup>66</sup> Exod. 24:10.    <sup>67</sup> Ezech. 2:1.

<sup>68</sup> Lev. 9:23-24.    <sup>69</sup> Ps. 49:3.

<sup>70</sup> Cf. the effect on the minds of the apostles of the bright cloud and the glorious transfiguration of Christ (Matt. 17:5; Mark 9:7).

man concepts. In this way He opened from them the gates of a supernatural kingdom, a realm of both light and darkness, namely, faith.<sup>71</sup>

The Church teaches us that by faith not only do we receive revealed truths as transmitted by her authority, but we also attain Truth itself, in a real though veiled way, the same Truth which one day we shall have the happiness of contemplating face to face. By faith we acquire, in the depths of our being, absolute certainty of the reality of God. The circumstances in which God revealed Himself, though extraordinarily in magnificence and glory, were yet by no means proportionate to the certainty inspired in the witnesses. The events were endowed by God with a power to express His meaning, and in themselves they reveal something of the divine transcendence. But by that very fact their dazzling brilliance blinded human understanding. Consequently the more they reveal, the more they conceal; the knowledge they transmit assumes an ineffable quality. The certainty produced is absolute but at the same time it surpasses the sphere of all particular and communicable modes of knowledge. The God who is revealed by these marvels is necessarily a hidden God. "Verily thou art a hidden God."<sup>72</sup> As Pascal said, this is not the God of philosophers and scholars, but the God of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob.

<sup>71</sup> "Now faith is the substance of things to be hoped for, the evidence of things that appear not. For by this the ancients obtained a testimony" (Heb. 11:1-2). "But without faith it is impossible to please God. For he that cometh to God, must believe that He is, and is a rewarder to them that seek Him" (Heb. 11:6).

<sup>72</sup> Isa. 45:15.

## Chapter 2

# REVELATION OF GOD

### THE ONE TRUE GOD

Being therefore the offspring of God, we must not suppose the divinity to be like unto gold, or silver, or stone, the graving of art, and device of man.<sup>1</sup>

See ye that I alone am, and there is no other God besides Me.<sup>2</sup>

When God asserted in the above text of Deuteronomy that He was the true God, He proclaimed Himself, consequently, to be the one God. The Bible states and reiterates and emphasizes the essential, fundamental truth that there is one true God. All idols had to be overthrown, all the Baals and Astartes which men kept shaping with their own hands and then adoring: "Now therefore, said He, put away strange gods from among you, and incline your hearts to the Lord the God of Israel."<sup>3</sup> It was necessary to exorcize

<sup>1</sup> Acts 17:29.

<sup>2</sup> Deut. 32:39.

<sup>3</sup> Jos. 24:23.

the passions and the myths which, from the first days of humanity, kept usurping in men's minds and hearts the place which belonged only to the true God. We must remember, too, that the seductive words murmured to Adam and Eve, "you shall be as Gods,"<sup>4</sup> were ever repeated to all men; and they, listening with complacent ears, deified pride, violence, ambition and power. It is, then, understandable that for man's own good and salvation, God should claim jealously and emphatically the title due to Him alone.

In the vast tapestry of events displayed in the Bible, the figures of four men stand out in brightest colors: Adam, Noe, Abraham and Moses. Why? Because with the passage of time, they alone bore witness to the true God in the midst of widespread desertion. The essential reality of the one true God was known to Adam, who walked and lived in the brightness of divine radiance. This primary truth was transmitted to humanity, but twice after Adam the whole world sank into forgetfulness and ignorance. Twice likewise does the Bible extol the mission of a single man who alone remained faithful to the one true God.

Noe kept God's word in the midst of universal corruption. While mankind was engulfed in the waters, Noe was saved from the deluge and offered worship to the true God. Something of the atmosphere of paradise still clings to this faithful man.

Then time flowed on. However brilliant may have been the civilizations that flourished in the course of the centuries, the Bible did not heed them, but presented one man alone: Abraham. This man renounced the ease and delights of a pagan world, left his country, his kindred and his father's

<sup>4</sup> Gen. 3:5.

house<sup>5</sup> to travel across the desert with a handful of companions, his only wealth his faith in Yahweh, the one true God who would be glorified in Abraham's posterity: "For I know that he will command his children, and his household after him to keep the way of the Lord, and do judgment and justice; that for Abraham's sake the Lord may bring to effect all the things He hath spoken unto him."<sup>6</sup> Abraham appears in Genesis as the herald of the one true God; that is why he became the father of the covenant and of our faith.

Then finally there is Moses. If he stands on the peak of the Old Testament panorama, is it not because he received God's word on Sinai, stamped it on men's hearts and made it the *Credo* of Israel forever? "Hear, O Israel, the Lord our God is one lord. . . . See ye that I alone am, and there is no other God besides Me."<sup>7</sup> These conclusive words forbade Israel to consider Yahweh as merely the God of one tribe among others. At the same time there is revealed part of the priceless treasure entrusted only to the race of Abraham. Later the prophet Amos reminded the people: "You only have I known of all the families of the earth."<sup>8</sup> Thenceforth Israel's duty was to preserve the divine inheritance: "The Lord is the portion of my inheritance."<sup>9</sup> It had to be defended against enemies from without and from within. But this privileged destiny was to win a unique place for Israel. The long history of the chosen people can be summarized as a constant struggle: an external struggle against pagan nations and an internal struggle against the invasion of alien cults.

The prophets' fiery words revived weakened faith and

<sup>5</sup> Gen. 12:1.      <sup>6</sup> Gen. 18:19.      <sup>7</sup> Deut. 6:4; 32:39.

<sup>8</sup> Amos 3:2.      <sup>9</sup> Ps. 15:5.

confirmed it where necessary by signs and striking wonders. Thus Elias assembled the disloyal nation and the prophets of falsehood on Mount Carmel, where he alone bore witness to the true God:

Call ye on the names of your gods and I will call on the name of my Lord; and the god that shall answer by fire, let him be God. And all the people answering said: A very good proposal. . . . And they called on the name of Baal from morning even till noon . . . but there was no voice, nor any that answered. . . . And when it was now time to offer the holocaust, Elias the prophet came near and said: O Lord God of Abraham, and Isaac, and Israel, shew this day that Thou art the God of Israel. . . . Then the fire of the Lord fell, and consumed the holocaust, and the wood, and the stones, and the dust, and licked up the water that was in the trench. And when all the people saw this, they fell on their faces, and they said: The Lord He is God, the Lord He is God.<sup>10</sup>

But the people were not long in relapsing into their infidelity. By the mouth of the prophet Isaias, God once more asked them this poignant question: "And to whom have ye likened Me, or made Me equal, saith the Holy One? . . . Before Me there was no God formed, and after Me there shall be none. I am, I am the Lord; and there is no savior besides Me. . . . I am the first, and I am the last, and besides Me there is no God."<sup>11</sup>

The sages too added their voices to the chorus of patriarchs and prophets. The author of the Book of Wisdom denounced the error of those who attributed to the elements what belonged to God alone, those who "have imagined

<sup>10</sup> III Kings 18:24-39.

<sup>11</sup> Isa. 40:25; 43:10-11; 44:6; cf. also Isa. 46:5.

either the fire, or the wind, or the swift air, or the circle of the stars, or the great water, or the sun and moon, to be the gods that rule the world, with whose beauty . . . they, being delighted, took them to be gods."<sup>12</sup> There is reference also to the yet greater folly of those who trusted in idols devoid of life, idols which are not only insulting to God but unworthy of man himself:

But unhappy are they . . . who have called gods the works of the hands of men, gold and silver, the inventions of art, and the resemblances of beasts, or an unprofitable stone the work of an ancient hand. . . . For no man can make a god like to himself. For being mortal himself he formed a dead thing with his wicked hands. For he is better than they whom he worshippeth, because he indeed hath lived, though he were mortal, but they never.<sup>13</sup>

Ezechiel, wishing to save Israel forever from the monstrous aberration perpetrated among the pagans, namely the deification of a man, emphasized the mad arrogance of the king of Tyre and warned him of the punishment that would strike him:

Thus saith the Lord God: . . . Thy heart was lifted up with thy beauty; thou hast lost thy wisdom in thy beauty. . . . Thou hast defiled thy sanctuaries by the multitude of thy iniquities and by the iniquity of thy traffic; therefore I will bring forth a fire from the midst of thee. . . . All that shall see thee among the nations shall be astonished at thee; thou art brought to nothing, and thou shalt never be any more.<sup>14</sup>

<sup>12</sup> Wisd. 13:2-3. St. Paul, in his Epistle to the Romans (1:18-32), traced a long and exact parallel of this text of the Book of Wisdom.

<sup>13</sup> Wisd. 13:10; 15:16-17. <sup>14</sup> Ezech. 28:17-18.

But it was all in vain. Jeremiah was to weep over the blindness of his people; countless warnings did not suffice to keep them faithful to the one true God. "I will be jealous for My holy name."<sup>15</sup> "I the Lord, this is My name: I will not give My glory to another, nor My praise to graven things."<sup>16</sup>

The whole vocation of Israel was to be the champion of belief in the one true God. Whenever the nation was unfaithful, it risked the effects of His vengeance and jealousy. "Thou shalt not have strange gods in My sight . . . For I am the Lord thy God, a jealous God."<sup>17</sup> "Adore not any strange god. The Lord His name is Jealous, He is a jealous God."<sup>18</sup>

By divine decree this exclusive adoration was a strict duty and inescapable obligation. It can even be said that the whole law is contained in that one commandment. Though it might seem excusable that faith should falter at a time when it was subjected to so many temptations and counterfeit enticements, yet considering that the fate of all humanity was involved in Israel's attitude toward this primary truth, it is easy to understand why God was so peremptory in His demands.<sup>19</sup>

The strongest possible condemnations of idolatry are found in the Book of Deuteronomy:

<sup>15</sup> Ezech. 39:25.    <sup>16</sup> Isa. 42:8.    <sup>17</sup> Deut. 5:7, 9.

<sup>18</sup> Exod. 34:14.

<sup>19</sup> Our Lord was to be just as inflexible regarding entrance into the kingdom of heaven: "And if thy hand scandalize thee, cut it off. . . . And if thy eye scandalize thee, pluck it out" (Mark 9:42, 46). St. Paul also reminds the primitive Church that men are still dealing with the same God who is revealed as so apparently ruthless in the Old Testament: "For our God is a consuming fire" (Heb. 12:29).

If there rise in the midst of thee a prophet or one that saith he hath dreamed a dream, and he foretell a sign and a wonder, and that come to pass which he spoke, and he say to thee: Let us go and follow strange gods, which thou knowest not, and let us serve them, thou shalt not hear the words of that prophet or dreamer; for the Lord your God trieth you, that it may appear whether you love Him with all your heart and with all your soul, or not. Follow the Lord your God, and fear Him, and keep His commandments, and hear His voice; Him you shall serve, and to Him you shall cleave. And that prophet or forger of dreams shall be slain; because he spoke to draw you away from the Lord your God . . . and thou shalt take away the evil out of the midst of thee. If thy brother, the son of thy mother, or thy son, or daughter, or thy wife that is in thy bosom, or thy friend whom thou lovest as thy own soul, would persuade thee secretly, saying: Let us go, and serve strange gods, which thou knowest not, nor thy fathers, . . . consent not to him, hear him not, neither let thy eyes spare him to pity and conceal him. But thou shalt presently put him to death. Let thy hand be first upon him, and afterwards the hands of all the people. With stones shall he be stoned to death: because he would have withdrawn thee from the Lord thy God . . . that all Israel hearing may fear, and may do no more any thing like this.<sup>20</sup>

Finally the ultimate severity is expressed in this command:

If in one of thy cities which the Lord thy God shall give thee to dwell in, thou hear some say: Children of Belial are gone out of the midst of thee and have withdrawn the inhabitants of their city and have said: Let us go, and serve strange gods which you know not, inquire carefully and diligently the truth of the thing by looking well into it, and if thou find that which is said to be

<sup>20</sup> Deut. 13:1-11.

certain, and that this abomination hath been really committed, thou shalt forthwith kill the inhabitants of that city with the edge of the sword, and shalt destroy it and all things that are in it.<sup>21</sup>

Josue, faithfully observing the law and moved by zeal for Yahweh, reduced the cities of Hai and Jericho to a mass of ruins where every last inhabitant perished. But the fact that at the same time not a scrap of booty was kept by these grim men proves their extraordinary moral courage and holy jealousy. Any leader or group of men who took possession of objects condemned to anathema were punished by immediate death:

And Achan answered Josue: . . . I saw among the spoils a scarlet garment exceeding good, and two hundred sicles of silver, and a golden rule of fifty sicles; and I coveted them, and I took them away, and hid them in the ground in the midst of my tent. . . . Josue said: Because thou hast troubled us, the Lord trouble thee this day. And all Israel stoned him.<sup>22</sup>

For the same reason it was forbidden to marry alien women who brought with them idolatrous worship. At the time of Esdras' reform each man sent away the wife he had chosen: "All these had taken strange wives, and there were among them women that had borne children."<sup>23</sup>

Only the sacred defense of the rights of the one true God could justify such implacably jealous measures. All compromise was necessarily forbidden because the treasure of revelation was worth the payment of this high price: "Thou shalt be perfect and without spot before the Lord thy God. These nations, whose land thou shalt possess, hearken to

<sup>21</sup> Deut. 13:12-15.    <sup>22</sup> Jos. 7:20, 21, 25.    <sup>23</sup> I Esd. 10:44.

soothsayers and diviners; but thou art otherwise instructed by the Lord thy God."<sup>24</sup>

Naturally God had no reason to fear any rival, as He alone was God. But He who is master of all things and all souls is also master of time and therefore the enforcement of belief in His omnipotence was to be spread among foreign nations only by a very slow process.<sup>25</sup> Little by little throughout the centuries the victories and defeats of Israel served the purpose of proving that Yahweh was the one true God, since the nation was invincible only so far as she was faithful to Him. "And there was no one that triumphed over this people, but when they departed from the worship of the Lord their God."<sup>26</sup>

But if the fortunes of this poor, apparently weak tribe bear eloquent witness to the fact that all its strength derived only from the one, true God, this testimony also had to be sealed and ratified in its blood. Only at this price would men be led to pay homage to Yahweh and confess Him as the only God. The Machabees sacrificed themselves to testify to His existence. "But I, like my brethren, offer up my life and my body for the laws of our fathers, calling upon God . . . that thou mayst confess that He alone is God."<sup>27</sup> Their martyrdom was fertile. Even evil-doers attained faith in the

<sup>24</sup> Deut. 18:13-14.

<sup>25</sup> St. Peter was to say, referring to this slowness in the accomplishment of divine decrees: "The Lord delayeth not His promise, as some imagine, but dealth patiently for your sake, not willing that any should perish, but that all should return to penance. . . . One day with the Lord is as a thousand years, and a thousand years as one day" (II Pet. 3:9 and 8).

<sup>26</sup> Jud. 5:17.    <sup>27</sup> II Mach. 7:37.

true God through the heroic fidelity of His servants. "Therefore I, Nabuchodonosor, do now praise and magnify and glorify the King of heaven, because all His works are true and His ways judgments, and them that walk in pride He is able to abase."<sup>28</sup> Thus God's persistent action, together with the generosity of a few elite souls, assured the triumph of the true God in Israel. It was prophesied that finally the whole world would be rescued from vain idols and from self-worship and would pay homage to the one true God. "Because then I will restore to the people a chosen lip, that all may call upon the name of the Lord, and may serve Him with one shoulder."<sup>29</sup>

### THE DIVINE NAME

Who art thou, Lord?<sup>30</sup>

Even the Lord the God of hosts, the Lord is his memorial.<sup>31</sup>

Nothing is more important in the Bible than the affirmation that there is one true God. This establishes forever the adoration due to Him and blocks the path to polytheism, overthrowing all idols both past and future. But this revelation does not of itself suffice to turn man's heart toward this God who shows Himself to human beings. God is an impenetrable mystery to men. To make men desire Him, He strives to make them become acquainted with Him. Therein lies the purpose of the whole of revelation. It is, then, wonderful that in the very act of informing us of His "name" God revealed Himself and began to draw us toward the absolute good which He graciously offered to our adoration. We might have been limited to knowing Him only by His

<sup>28</sup> Dan. 4:34.    <sup>29</sup> Soph. 3:9.    <sup>30</sup> Acts 22:8.

<sup>31</sup> Osee 12:5.

works, receiving nothing more than His image or vestige stamped on them. Of course the profusion, variety and value of these works fill our minds with admiration, but they alone cannot satisfy us. "The eye is not filled with seeing, neither is the ear filled with hearing."<sup>32</sup>

As souls rise above these things which speak of God but cannot satisfy them,<sup>33</sup> they surmise "how much the Lord of them is more beautiful than they; for the first author of beauty made all those things."<sup>34</sup> Job told how the sight of God's works gave a glimpse of His infinite strength and limitless power:

Who doth things great and incomprehensible, and wonderful, of which there is no number. If He come to me, I shall not see Him: if He depart I shall not understand. . . . If strength be demanded, He is most strong; if equity of judgment, no man dare bear witness for me.<sup>35</sup>

But the power and majesty of creation, which should inspire our total respect, by a surprising contrast lead us to a growing awareness of the nothingness of all things in the sight of God:

Behold the Gentiles are as a drop of a bucket, and are counted as the smallest grain of a balance; behold the islands are as a little dust. And Libanus shall not be enough to burn, nor the beasts thereof sufficient for a burnt offering. All nations are be-

<sup>32</sup> Eccles. 1:8.

<sup>33</sup> St. John of the Cross expressed it thus: "One single thought of a man is of greater worth than the whole world; wherefore God alone is worthy of him." (*Complete Works*, translated and edited by E. Allison Peers, London: Burns, Oates & Washbourne, 1947, III, p. 245.)

<sup>34</sup> Wisd. 13:3.    <sup>35</sup> Job 9:10, 11, 19.



fore Him as if they had no being at all, and are counted to Him as nothing, and vanity.<sup>36</sup>

While man perceives, of course, that all creation derives life from its Maker and continues to receive existence and all its benefits from Him, yet he also sees dimly that the reality of God far surpasses and transcends His creative works. The works live only by Him and for Him, but He must exist "in Himself," in an incomprehensible, immutable simplicity of nature, of substance and of action. To prove that our ancestors had a deep awareness of this infinite transcendence, we need only examine their attitude in God's presence. "I will speak to my Lord, whereas I am dust and ashes,"<sup>37</sup> said Abraham. David and his son Solomon expressed true humility:

And king David came and sat before the Lord, and said: Who am I, O Lord God, and what is my house, that Thou shouldst give such things to me?<sup>38</sup>

Is it credible then that God should dwell with men on the earth? If heaven and the heavens of heavens do not contain Thee, how much less this house, which I have built?<sup>39</sup>

The psalms, inspired by God, thrill with adoration before the mystery of His presence. The Israelites' excessive respect and fear of God reached such a point that eventually they no longer dared pronounce the "incommunicable name." Why? Because the name not only reflected the dazzling light of the mystery of God but also contained something of His very self, since the Hebrew "Yahweh" meant "He is."<sup>40</sup>

<sup>36</sup> Isa. 40:15-17.    <sup>37</sup> Gen. 18:27.    <sup>38</sup> I Par. 17:16.

<sup>39</sup> II Par. 6:18.

<sup>40</sup> "God" in Hebrew is "Elohim." It is the name usually given to the divinity. (The root "el" is also found in other ancient lan-

Just as the name "Jesus" proclaimed the salvation which Christ would bring to the world, so the name "Yahweh" induced a sense of the absolute which God wished to communicate to us and to provide us our inexhaustible source of life.

The power and glory of the one true God were frequently manifested to men's eyes in the course of Old Testament times, but His being was disclosed only to the view of faith. To faith He showed Himself as absolute reality and the fullness of being. Moses understood this during the magnificent scene recorded in the Book of Exodus and we too can understand it through him. "Now Moses fed the sheep of Jethro. . . . He drove the flock to the inner parts of the desert and came to the mountain of God, Horeb. And the Lord appeared to him in a flame of fire out of the midst of a bush; and he saw that the bush was on fire and was not burnt."<sup>41</sup>

Such a marvel was well calculated to attract Moses' attention and indeed the cardinal importance of the divine message which followed required this preparation.

And Moses said: I will go and see this great sight, why the bush is not burnt. And when the Lord saw that he went forward

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guages and religions.) This name is used in the Bible by a whole scriptural school, that of the "Elohists." The revelation of the divine name, "Yahweh" (of which the root "Yah" is also found in "Joshua" or "Jesus"), which constituted a truly distinctive revelation, inaugurated a new relationship between God and man, as God Himself affirmed: "And the Lord spoke to Moses, saying: I am the Lord, that appeared to Abraham, to Isaac and to Jacob, by the name of God almighty; and My name Adonai I did not show them" (Exod. 6:2, 3).

<sup>41</sup> Exod. 3:1-2.

to see, He called to him out of the midst of the bush, and said: Moses, Moses. And he answered: Here I am. And He said: Come not nigh hither, put off the shoes from thy feet; for the place whereon thou standest is holy ground. And He said: I am the God of thy father, the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob. Moses hid his face, for he durst not look at God.<sup>42</sup>

Moses was first startled and attentive, then filled with holy fear, soon to be sloughed off by the wings of adoration. But in bestowing this revelation on humanity, God willed not only to affirm His absolute transcendence but also to show it inseparably united to His wonderful mercy. Thus, before giving His name, He told Moses: "I have seen the affliction of My people in Egypt . . . and I will send thee . . . that thou mayst bring forth My people."<sup>43</sup> Then and only then, did the divine dialogue begin:

Moses said to God: Lo, I shall go to the children of Israel, and say to them: The God of your fathers hath sent me to you. If they should say to me: What is His name? what shall I say to them? God said to Moses: I AM WHO AM. Thus shalt thou say to the children of Israel: HE WHO IS, hath sent me to you. . . . This is My name forever, and this is My memorial unto all generations.<sup>44</sup>

### LIFE IN GOD

We also are mortals, men like unto you, preaching to you to be converted from these vain things, to the living God, who made the heaven, and the earth, and the sea, and all things that are in them.<sup>45</sup>

<sup>42</sup> Exod. 3:3-6.    <sup>43</sup> Exod. 3:7, 10.    <sup>44</sup> Exod. 3:13-15.

<sup>45</sup> Acts 14:14.

The name "Yahweh" which God revealed to Moses means "He is." In a sense this name contains all that the Old Testament revealed regarding the mystery of God's absolute and transcendent life. For a brighter and more welcome light men had to await the coming of the Incarnate Word whose words would illuminate the darkness. Yet even before that advent, God willed that men should learn about the mystery of divine life and, casting off their unworthy, inaccurate, anthropomorphic ideas of it, they should draw near to this life and live by it. To reveal Himself as life and to communicate that life: such was God's intention from the very beginning and for all eternity, an intention fraught with glory and loving mercy. "I am come that they may have life."<sup>46</sup>

"I am who am." As far as God is concerned, this says everything. But how were men to "grasp" this phrase? By starting with life around them and life within themselves, they would be led gradually to its meaning. Though life may be indefinable and mysterious, it is the first reality of which men acquire a secret but deep awareness. Around them innumerable beings move, grow and multiply. Everywhere in nature life is evident, asserts itself, springs up energetically, superabundantly, prodigally. Men know and feel that they themselves are living. They bear the power within them to transmit life. At the very beginning Adam proved that life appeared as the essential reality, for he called his companion "Eve," that is, "life," because he saw that no other characteristic in her was as important as that of imparting life. The first woman was, in his eyes "the mother of all the

<sup>46</sup> John 10:10.

living.”<sup>47</sup> Of course, man is not the author of life in an absolute sense, but he controls its sources and understands its irreplaceable worth. “All that a man hath he will give for his life.”<sup>48</sup> Man can transmit life, but unfortunately he can also destroy it, and he was not long in using this power: “Cain rose up against his brother Abel and slew him.”<sup>49</sup> He can also dissipate it, divert it from its proper course, abuse it in many ways. The Bible shows this clearly and repeatedly.

God knows all this. He knows what men will do with the life entrusted to them and yet He leaves it in their hands and indeed counts on life to lead men to the discovery of higher realities. Little by little, men would learn that life is intrinsically good, sacred and utterly dependent upon God. The man who seeks to possess life must turn ever more wholeheartedly toward the Creator. But then arises the problem of what life man should ask of God. If material life were exalted, men risked confining their desires and ambitions to things of earth, all the more so as Israel had not yet received the revelation of a future life.

How then could man become aware of an infinitely higher and wholly spiritual life? How could he advance from the one to the other? How could he enter the life of the spirit? What gradual stages and numerous purifications would be necessary? Indeed, Holy Writ bears witness to this long, slow process. But we can also observe that the river of life moves in two directions: downward and upward. A mighty stream descends from the overflowing springs of life in God to meet the upsurge of man’s yearning for a deeper and higher sharing of divine life, for a return to the source of his being. Thus there is a real circulation of life in the Bible:

<sup>47</sup> Gen. 3:20.    <sup>48</sup> Job 2:4.    <sup>49</sup> Gen. 4:8.

man receives it, then seeks it anew, advancing by progressive steps toward the discovery that its essence is spiritual and truly divine.

God’s creative power and His communication of natural life is evident, not only in Genesis, but throughout the whole Bible. The exuberance and profusion of life might even have exposed man to a risk, inclining him toward the temptation to “naturism,” had not the inspired authors taken great care to show at the same time that life is constantly dependent upon its Author and is directed toward Him as its last end. Life is never presented as a dark, blind force. The universe is well ordered; life appears and develops only at the divine command. “I beseech thee, my son, look upon heaven and earth, and all that is in them: and consider that God made them out of nothing, and mankind also.”<sup>50</sup> Life is shown in a multiplicity of forms and species, each having its own power of fecundity: “And He said: Let the earth bring forth the green herb, and such as may seed, and the fruit tree yielding fruit after its kind, which may have seed in itself upon the earth.”<sup>51</sup> But as life increases and multiplies and fills the earth,<sup>52</sup> it does not withdraw on that account from its creative cause. Quite the contrary, for God beholds all creation in a loving glance: “And God saw all the things that He had made, and they were very good.”<sup>53</sup> He supports and sustains life, He alone being the essential cause, over and above all secondary, intermediate and instrumental causes. The mother of the Machabees expressed this in saying: “I know not how you were formed in my womb; for I neither gave you breath, nor soul, nor life,

<sup>50</sup> II Mach. 7:28.    <sup>51</sup> Gen. 1:11.    <sup>52</sup> Gen. 1:28.

<sup>53</sup> Gen. 1:31.

neither did I frame the limbs of every one of you.”<sup>54</sup> God’s hand also bestows subsistence on all creatures and His providence maintains them in existence:

All expect of Thee that Thou give them food in season. What Thou givest to them they shall gather up; when Thou openest Thy hand, they shall all be filled with good. But if Thou turnest away Thy face, they shall be troubled; Thou shalt take away their breath, and they shall fail and shall return to their dust. Thou shalt send forth Thy spirit, and they shall be created.<sup>55</sup>

If he turn his heart to Him, he shall draw His spirit and breath unto himself. All flesh shall perish together, and man shall return into ashes.<sup>56</sup>

These passages refer to natural life, the authors wishing to prove that it too emanates directly from the living God, however much it may differ from divine life. Moreover, even if communication of this natural life does not include any participation in God’s inner life, yet at least it puts the living creature in direct dependence on the divine will.<sup>57</sup> A creature’s beauty derives less from the pale image of true life which its life reflects than from the fact that it is a gratuitous manifestation of the dynamic superabundance of divine life. Every creature, therefore, sings the praises of God by its very existence. This idea was so well understood in the Old Testament that it has been expressed in magnificent poems:

<sup>54</sup> II Mach. 7:22.    <sup>55</sup> Ps. 103:27–30.    <sup>56</sup> Job 34:14, 15.

<sup>57</sup> St. Paul was to use this truth as the basis of his sermon to the Athenians: “God, who made the world and all things therein, He being Lord of heaven and earth, dwelleth not in temples made with hands; neither is He served with men’s hands, as though He needed any thing; seeing it is He who giveth to all life, and breath, and all things . . . although He be not far from every one of us; for in Him we live, and move, and are” (Acts 17:24, 28).

All ye works of the Lord, bless the Lord. . . . O ye heavens . . . O ye sun and moon . . . O ye stars of heaven . . . fire and heat . . . frost and cold . . . nights and days . . . lightnings and clouds . . . mountains and hills . . . fountains . . . seas and rivers . . . fowls of the air . . . beasts and cattle . . . O ye sons of men, bless the Lord; praise and exalt Him above all forever.<sup>58</sup>

And Tobias said: Lord God of our fathers, may the heavens and the earth and the sea, and the fountain, and the rivers, and all Thy creatures that are in them, bless Thee.<sup>59</sup>

And the stars have given light in their watches, and rejoiced; they were called, and they said: Here we are: and with cheerfulness they have shined forth to Him that made them.<sup>60</sup>

All creatures testify that God brought them to actuality, that He and He alone is the source of their life. They rejoice in their dependence upon Him while their profusion and beauty give a hint of the full glory of their Creator’s life. Their existence is like a constant, blissful applause: “Where wast thou when I laid the foundations of the earth . . . when the morning stars praised Me together, and all the sons of God made a joyful melody?”<sup>61</sup>

As the mystery of life depends closely upon God, its sole source, even natural life is stamped with a sacred character. This is one of the most illuminating insights of the Bible, affirming most admirably both the intrinsic goodness of life and its complete dependence upon God. When creatures are considered in themselves, their worth becomes quite relative, verging on nothingness: “Behold, you are of nothing, and your work of that which hath no being.”<sup>62</sup>

<sup>58</sup> Dan. 3:57–82.    <sup>59</sup> Tob. 8:7.    <sup>60</sup> Bar. 3:34, 35.

<sup>61</sup> Job 38:4, 7.    <sup>62</sup> Isa. 41:24.

But they are sublime to those who decipher in them the seal of the divine vestige, trace the touch of wisdom, hear the canticle to God's glory as manifested in their existence. Because of this dependence on God, even physical life acquires an inestimable value. Those who humbly acknowledge this dependence and faithfully obey the divine laws are rewarded by fecundity: "But if she be not defiled, she shall not be hurt, and shall bear children."<sup>63</sup> God's servants considered it a glorious thing to live and to transmit life—a function which Israel regarded as the fulfillment of a sacred ministry, the delegation of truly divine power. Holy Writ often showed that the most fervent souls in Israel were characterized by a strong desire to transmit life. They begged to receive this power, even miraculously if necessary. Anna, who was sterile, received it by dint of tears and as soon as her prayer was granted, she blessed God and consecrated the child to the Temple. At the dawn of the New Testament Elizabeth and her husband, Zachary, were to act in like manner. This proves how beautiful and pure the mystery of life appeared to Old Testament men—and even more to the women, such as Sara and Rachel. And yet when the latter cried out: "Give me children, otherwise I shall die,"<sup>64</sup> her keen distress was caused by something more than the deprivation of God's blessing. The women of the Old Testament longed to transmit life because they could not forget that one of their sons would become the hope of Israel. The fulfillment of the covenant promises was linked to the life which they gave to the world. Vehement as their desire was, yet what would it have been had they known in what a sublime way physical fecundity and natural life

<sup>63</sup> Num. 5:28.<sup>64</sup> Gen. 30:1.

would one day, by the overshadowing of the Spirit, be united to divine life itself? The Child bestowed upon the world by one of their women would come for all men, his brothers, "that they may have life, and may have it more abundantly."<sup>65</sup>

Small wonder then how teeming with life is the Old Testament. Throughout the history of the Hebrew people life resembled a process of fermentation where seething activity and mysterious properties prepared a new wine which was to gush from the Gospel in unadulterated joy. Of course, for a long time Israel had a murky and confused idea of life. For example, the people lacked the clear notion that in God all is life. Yet many texts prove that they acknowledged that all life comes from God and that life itself is the best praise that can be offered to the Author of life. Therefore the feasts in honor of Yahweh glorify Him by varied expressions of lively activity. "David and all Israel played before the Lord on all manner of instruments."<sup>66</sup> When the priests invited the people to rejoice at a great feast, they said: "Go, eat fat meats and drink sweet wine . . . because it is the holy day of the Lord, and be not sad; for the joy of the Lord is our strength."<sup>67</sup> Superabundant, exuberant life is to be associated with the fulfillment of the messianic promises and the release which Israel awaits:

And the redeemed of the Lord shall return, and shall come into Sion with praise, and everlasting joy shall be upon their heads.

Fear not, O land, be glad and rejoice. . . . And the floors shall be filled with wheat, and the presses shall overflow with wine and oil.

<sup>65</sup> John 10:10.<sup>66</sup> II Kings 6:5.<sup>67</sup> Neh. 8:10.

Behold the days come, saith the Lord, when the ploughman shall overtake the reaper, and the treader of grapes him that soweth seed; and the mountains shall drop sweetness, and every hill shall be tilled.<sup>68</sup>

In these expressions, in which we detect predictions and symbols of a new and higher life, the Israelites showed how much they loved and desired a life of material prosperity and abundance. Since life is good and God is its source and has blessed it, was it not natural that Israel should turn to the Creator to ask for an increase of life and happiness? Had He not promised it? This craving for life recurs throughout the whole Bible. It is certainly a matter of prime importance that man should turn to God because he sees Him as the source of life. But there remains the problem of what life man should ask of God. May he not be satisfied to seek merely an increase of physical and material life from the one who said, "Increase and multiply," and grants blessings even in the natural order? This was a very real danger. Yet how else could the aspiration to an infinitely higher life be roused in men except by first planting deep within them the conviction of the goodness of life? This developed their thirst for life and then gradually this thirst was to be transferred from the material to the spiritual level.

We can surmise how difficult such a transference was, how long a time was required to accomplish it and how much God had to stoop to human weakness. It is certain that during most of Israel's history the thirst for life was confined to the temporal and terrestrial level, since the existence of a future life was not clearly revealed by God. But the desire for a life continuing beyond death did appear in the

<sup>68</sup> Isa. 35:10; Joel 2:21, 24; Amos 9:13.

sacred books, first beneath the surface of the text, then more and more clearly. It became increasingly repugnant for souls to accept death as a final end or even to be satisfied with the pale and diminished life of Sheol:

Because Thou wilt not leave my soul in hell; nor wilt Thou give Thy holy one to see corruption.

Thou hast brought me to life, and hast brought me back again from the depths of the earth.<sup>69</sup>

But it would avail little were God to give man the assurance of an after-life, if the human idea of life remained purely material and the earthly ideal was merely projected into another existence. The difficulty is unavoidable until everything is transposed to the spiritual level.<sup>70</sup> The solution of the problem would be a long and arduous task, far from completed at the time of Christ, even among His own apostles, as was proved by His answer to the Sadducees: "And Jesus answering, said to them: You err, not knowing the Scriptures nor the power of God. For in the resurrection they shall neither marry nor be married; but shall be as the angels of God in heaven."<sup>71</sup>

Even now does not our personal experience teach that each of us must continually strive to achieve this transit from the material to the spiritual realm? It is a difficult, but not an insoluble problem. Man was created by God in His

<sup>69</sup> Ps. 15:10; 70:20.

<sup>70</sup> This thirst for total life, even on the physical plane, was not entirely wrong, and it finds its satisfaction in the dogma of the resurrection of the body. St. Paul was to be judged and condemned by both Jews and pagans because of this same dogma. Cf. Acts 17:18, 32.

<sup>71</sup> Matt. 22:29, 30.

image and likeness, made for Him, and therefore has a capacity for God. The Bible tells us: "To be allied to wisdom is immortality."<sup>72</sup> Thus, even if man is unaware of it, he possesses a spiritual capacity, a power to receive divine life. The aptitude need not be created, but its free functioning must be assured. This requires two conditions. First, men must be led gradually to a notion and awareness of spiritual life by the contact of their souls with a more purified atmosphere. From this viewpoint we may consider the entire Old Testament as a divine pedagogy. Secondly, men must tread the path which leads to true life. The law given to Moses by God was the path leading to life and at the same time the means whereby this life could be communicated to the purified soul. This is clearly expressed in a passage of the Book of Deuteronomy:

Consider that I have set before thee this day life and good, and on the other hand death and evil; that thou mayst love the Lord thy God, and walk in His ways, and keep His commandments . . . and thou mayst live . . . But if thy heart be turned away, so that thou wilt not hear . . . thou shalt perish. . . . Choose therefore life, that both thou and thy seed may live, and that thou mayst love the Lord thy God, and obey His voice, and adhere to Him (for He is thy life).<sup>73</sup>

Thus, every faithful Jew, every Jew instructed in the law, could not help but know that the goal which it proposed and the whole purpose of the commandments was to give life. To the extent that he submitted to God's law, he was set free from all that bound him to the earth and he perceived ever more clearly that his soul was made for a higher life. By his very acceptance of this life he became capable of experi-

<sup>72</sup> Wisd. 8:17.    <sup>73</sup> Deut. 30:15-20.

encing it. His initiation into the life of the spirit then conferred an aptitude for divine life: "O taste and see that the Lord is sweet."<sup>74</sup> This tasting was such a delight that it enabled faithful souls to accept willingly the yoke of the law and the burden of the commandments, perceiving in them the power to give life.<sup>74a</sup> Such is the state of mind of the Psalmist: "Thy justifications I will never forget, for by them Thou hast given me life."<sup>75</sup> It is evident that the transit from material life to spiritual life had taken place in the soul of this servant of God. He craves the spiritual life which he has tasted and he knows that God is its source. Many other verses of the same psalm corroborate this.

As the scribes and the sages meditated on the sacred texts and especially on the account of the fall of man, they

<sup>74</sup> Ps. 33:9.

<sup>74a</sup> How then could St. Paul in his Epistles turn so violently against the law, saying: "Now the law entered in, that sin might abound" (Rom. 5:20)? It was because the Jews did not distinguish between salvation by means of the Redemption (an absolutely gratuitous, divine deed accomplished by virtue of the promise made to Abraham) and external purification obtained by legal prescriptions which were but the shadow of things to come. The law does not operate on the level of redemption and filial adoption but is based on the opposition between life and death. It was designed as a protection against death but could become the cause of death because of the fundamental weakness of sinful man. Thus, St. Paul says: "The commandment that was ordained to life, the same was found to be unto death to me" (Rom. 7:10). The law, like good works without which faith is dead (Jas. 2:17), could not restore to the soul eternal life which had been lost by sin, but it did prepare it for that life and maintain its faith. It increases divine life in the soul. Thus Christ said: "Do not think that I am come to destroy the law or the prophets. I am not come to destroy, but to fulfill" (Matt. 5:17).

<sup>75</sup> Ps. 118:93.

did not fail to understand that obedience to the law would restore to man the life which his disobedience had lost for him. So in the Old Testament the tree of death in paradise appeared in opposition to the law, which became pre-eminently the tree of life, bearing the fruit of wisdom.<sup>76</sup>

He that shall find Me, shall find life.

She is a tree of life to them that lay hold on her; and he that shall retain her is blessed.

Knowledge is a fountain of life to him that possesseth it.<sup>77</sup>

The law was a tree planted in man's damaged soil, a tree dear to the Psalmist and rooted deep in his heart: "I have purchased Thy testimonies for an inheritance forever because they are the joy of my heart. I have inclined my heart to do Thy justifications forever, for the reward."<sup>78</sup> This tree bears wonderful fruits of knowledge and understanding which the soul can harvest without danger and can taste with purely spiritual enjoyment.

Thus it is that to follow the law led to life, to a life of the spirit. But were the men of the Old Testament conscious of the fact that this life of the spirit was not only a life communicated by God but was God's own life? Though it was reserved to Christ to bring us the clear revelation of

<sup>76</sup> The law given by God to Israel by virtue of the covenant with Abraham (Deut. 7:6-13) seals the promise of redemption. Observance of the law, as proof of faith in the promise, insured "justification" for men of the Old Testament. After the time of the redemption, "the tree of life" would be the cross of Christ and the sharing of His cross by means of charity practiced to the point of the total gift of self.

<sup>77</sup> Prov. 8:35; 3:18; 16:32.      <sup>78</sup> Ps. 118:111-12.

this truth,<sup>79</sup> some of the inspired authors, particularly the prophets, had long ago caught a glimpse of the mysterious bond joining our living souls to the living God. The Psalmist clearly stated that only life emanating from God gave life to the soul: "For with Thee is the fountain of life."<sup>80</sup> That living water of divine life touched the lips of men like Moses and Elias. At times they retired into solitude to taste it better, as this text from the Book of Kings suggests: "Get thee hence, and go toward the east and hide thyself by the torrent of Carith, which is over against the Jordan, and there thou shalt drink of the torrent."

Did the Old Testament men who enjoyed God's intimate friendship receive more than this? Was there revealed to them some part of the inner mystery of that divine life so abundantly bestowed upon them? Had they some hint of the life of the Trinity? It seems not. God reserved for His Son the dazzling revelation of this mystery. "No man hath seen God at any time; the only-begotten Son who is in the bosom of the Father, He hath declared Him."<sup>81</sup> But does that mean that men of the Old Testament were deprived of all knowledge of the nature of God? Did not the world created by His hands help them to know Him? Some of the Fathers of the Church, especially St. Augustine, have tried to find the image of the three Persons in one God imprinted on the very structure of the human soul. However profound such considerations may be, they presuppose an attitude of mind quite foreign to Israel. The Old Testament shows no trace of such speculations, even in the Wisdom books. On the other hand, it is clear that from the very beginning God prepared the way for the revelation of the mystery of the

<sup>79</sup> Cf. John 14:6.      <sup>80</sup> Ps. 35:10.      <sup>81</sup> John 1:18.



Trinity, but this preparation must be sought within the limitations of Old Testament intellectual background.

It is apparent throughout the whole Bible that a favorite subject of meditation for wise men was the story of creation. This story first of all affirmed that God was the source of all life. Then it stated that for life to appear and to develop required the union of two living principles. "Male and female He created them."<sup>82</sup> Yet this physical union required for fecundity, "and they shall be two in one flesh,"<sup>83</sup> was by no means the highest manifestation of the mystery of life. Man participates in a dialogue on the supernatural level as well as on the natural level. In him both flesh and spirit crave life and cannot attain the fullness of life except with the help of a complement. On the natural level man's solitude cannot be relieved nor his desire satisfied except by the one who not only brings him physical completion but also becomes his helpmate, a companion like to himself, drawn from his own being, bone of his bone and flesh of his flesh.<sup>84</sup> With her he can achieve real communion of mind and mutual exchange of knowledge and love. This fulfillment was secretly desired and eagerly awaited. When Adam saw Eve he couldn't help but greet her with a cry of joy; at last he was sure of finding completion and of developing to the full his faculties and vital endowments.

On the supernatural level the value of the life promised to man seemed even more marvellous, for the only being that can complete him is God Himself. True, the soul was only a capacity and an appeal, but a capacity for God and an appeal to infinity. God alone is worthy of the soul.

<sup>82</sup> Gen. 1:27. <sup>83</sup> Gen. 2:24. <sup>84</sup> Cf. Gen. 2:23.

Divine life is the only source of the soul's life. "Thou hast made us for Thyself."

Everything in the story of Genesis, even man's expectation and his painful awareness of solitude, constituted a necessary preparation for the coming of a desired being, an agent of fulfillment and enrichment of life. On the level of divine life the Bible was to use a similar pedagogy: the coming of the Savior bringing life to the world would be preceded by painful waiting and long preparation. So it was that in both spheres life appeared to man as a dialogue with another being, a series of exchanges of knowledge and love. It mattered little that Old Testament men were unaware of it. They were immersed in the mystery and unconsciously they lived by it—all the more so as the law of mutual exchange controlled life by ruling not only the relationship of man to woman but also that of man among his fellow men. When God promulgated the two commandments: "Thou shalt love the Lord thy God. . . . Thou shalt love thy neighbor as thyself,"<sup>85</sup> and when He added "keep the commandments . . . and thou mayst live,"<sup>86</sup> He taught clearly that true life should be founded on a relationship of friendship between man and God as well as friendship among men.<sup>87</sup>

Again it matters little that the men of Old Testament times were not fully conscious of all this. It sufficed that

<sup>85</sup> Deut. 6:5; Lev. 19:18. <sup>86</sup> Deut. 30:16.

<sup>87</sup> Although this commandment and its consequences were stated on different occasions by God to Moses and by Moses to the people, yet the close connection of the passage was understood by all the Israelites. The notion and the formation of an "association" between Yahweh and Israel dominated the whole history of the nation.

they received the commandment and lived by it. But for the greatest among them flashes of light illuminated momentarily a bit of the unsoundable depths in the vast life of the living God. Although there is no explicit description, yet some superb insights have reached us in the amazing prophecy of Ezechiel, the highest revelation of the mystery of divine life. There God is hidden in an impenetrable cloud and yet He manifests the mysterious activity of His transcendent life. The passage thrills and lives in the overpowering wind of the spirit. God commands attention by a dazzling and blinding flash of lightning. The mystery remains intact; yet we see overwhelming evidence that God is "life."

On the fifth day of the month . . . the heavens were opened, and I saw the visions of God. . . . I saw, and behold a whirlwind came out of the north; and a great cloud, and a fire in-folding it, and brightness was about it; and out of the midst thereof, that is, out of the midst of the fire, as it were the resemblance of amber. And in the midst thereof the likeness of four living creatures; and this was their appearance: there was the likeness of a man in them. Every one had four faces, and every one four wings. Their feet were straight feet, and the sole of their foot was like the sole of a calf's foot, and they sparkled like the appearance of glowing brass. And they had the hands of a man under their wings on their four sides; and they had faces, and wings on the four sides. And the wings of one were joined to the wings of another. They turned not when they went: but every one went straight forward. And as for the likeness of their faces: there was the face of a man, and the face of a lion on the right side of all the four; and the face of an ox, on the left side of all the four; and the face of an eagle over all the four. And their faces, and their wings were stretched upward;

two wings of every one were joined, and two covered their bodies; and every one of them went straight forward; whither the impulse of the spirit was to go, thither they went; and they turned not when they went. And as for the likeness of the living creatures their appearance was like that of burning coals of fire, and like the appearance of lamps. This was the vision running to and fro in the midst of the living creatures, a bright fire, and lightning going forth from the fire. And the living creatures ran and returned like flashes of lightning. Now as I beheld the living creatures, there appeared upon the earth by the living creatures one wheel with four faces. And the appearance of the wheels, and the work of them was like the appearance of the sea; and the four had all one likeness; and their appearance and their work was as it were a wheel in the midst of a wheel. When they went, they went by their four parts; and they turned not when they went. The wheels had also a size, and a height, and a dreadful appearance and the whole body was full of eyes round about all the four. And when the living creatures went, the wheels also went together by them; and when the living creatures were lifted up from the earth, the wheels also were lifted up with them. Whithersoever the spirit went, thither as the spirit went the wheels also were lifted up withal, and followed it; for the spirit of life was in the wheels. When those went these went, and when those stood these stood, and when those were lifted up from the earth, the wheels also were lifted up together, and followed them; for the spirit of life was in the wheels. And over the heads of the living creatures was the likeness of the firmament, as the appearance of crystal terrible to behold, and stretched out over their heads above. And under the firmament were their wings straight, the one toward the other, every one with two wings covered his body, and the other covered in like manner. And I heard the noise of their wings, like the noise of many waters, as it were the voice of the most high God, when they walked, it

was like the voice of a multitude, like the noise of an army, and when they stood, their wings were let down. For when a voice came from above the firmament, that was over their heads, they stood, and let down their wings. And above the firmament that was over their heads, was the likeness of a throne, as the appearance of the sapphire stone, and upon the likeness of the throne, was a likeness as of the appearance of a man above upon it. And I saw as it were the resemblance of amber as the appearance of fire within it round about; from his loins and upward, and from his loins downward, I saw as it were the resemblance of fire shining round about. As the appearance of the rainbow when it is in a cloud on a rainy day; this was the appearance of the brightness round about. This was the vision of the likeness of the glory of the Lord.<sup>88</sup>

### THE ATTRIBUTES OF GOD

#### *Spirituality*

God is a spirit; and they that adore Him, must adore Him in spirit and in truth.<sup>89</sup>

The Paraclete, the Holy Ghost, . . . will teach you all things.<sup>90</sup>

Let Us make man to Our image and likeness.<sup>91</sup>

We know from St. John that God is a spirit, and St. Peter tells us that the life which God bestows on men makes them "partakers of the divine nature."<sup>92</sup> But the spiritual treasure which God has put in men has been tarnished by the action of the senses and the flesh. Only a long and painful process of restoration can enable men to become spiritual again and to discern God as a pure spirit. Nothing gives

<sup>88</sup> Ezech. 1:1-28; 2:1.    <sup>89</sup> John 4:24.    <sup>90</sup> John 14:26.

<sup>91</sup> Gen. 1:26.    <sup>92</sup> II Pet. 1:4.

better proof of this than the tremendous effort required of both God and man to make possible this slow approach to the true life of the spirit.

"Thou shalt not make to thyself a graven thing, nor the likeness of any thing that is in heaven above, or in the earth beneath, nor of those things that are in the waters under the earth. Thou shalt not adore them, nor serve them."<sup>93</sup> "To whom then have you likened God? or what image will you make for Him? . . . Do you not know? Hath it not been heard? Hath it not been told you from the beginning? Have you not understood the foundations of the earth?"<sup>94</sup>

First of all God taught His people, by express command and later by the voice of the prophets, that nothing on earth or in heaven could reproduce Him or represent Him. His nature had nothing in common with anything that man could know or imagine; it was of a completely different order of being. Idols and even all images of God are false and worse than false, because they confine man to the realm of sense experience and thus debar him from the realm of the spirit. "You saw not any similitude in the day that the Lord God spoke to you in Horeb from the midst of the fire. Lest perhaps being deceived you might make you a graven similitude or image of male or female, the similitude of any beasts that are upon the earth, or of birds that fly under heaven, or of creeping things that move on the earth, or of fishes that abide in the waters under the earth. Lest perhaps lifting up thy eyes to heaven, thou see the sun and the moon and all the stars of heaven, and being deceived by error thou adore and serve them."<sup>95</sup>

But men, who were living on a sensual plane, were utterly

<sup>93</sup> Exod. 20:4-5.    <sup>94</sup> Isa. 40:18, 21.    <sup>95</sup> Deut. 4:15-19.

bewildered by these demands of a God whose spiritual essence was totally beyond their grasp. For many of them the effort was impossible and they returned to idolatry. "And this was the occasion of deceiving human life; for men serving either their affection or their kings, gave the incommunicable name to stones and wood."<sup>96</sup> And yet man truly possessed this spiritual nature with which God sought communion and to which He meant to reveal Himself. If men were deaf to God's invitations, sin was the cause: sin which darkened, weighed down, soiled their souls, dragging them toward earthly things, rendering them incapable of heavenly experience.<sup>97</sup>

How many appeals and warnings there are in the Bible to put man on his guard against the obstacles he must meet and overcome on his pathway! Even now the Church, wanting to persuade her children to praise God "in spirit and in truth," continues to put on their lips every day at the beginning of the Divine Office the words of Psalm 94: "Today if you shall hear His voice, harden not your hearts as in the provocation, according to the day of temptation in the wilderness."<sup>98</sup> The prophet Isaias in his turn reminds Israel of the true reason why man becomes unfit for spiritual experience: "Our wicked doings are with us, and we have known our iniquities, in sinning and lying against the Lord; and we have turned away so that we went not after our God,

<sup>96</sup> Wisd. 14:21.

<sup>97</sup> "But the sensual man perceiveth not these things that are of the Spirit of God . . . because it is spiritually examined" (I Cor. 2:14). "For the flesh lusteth against the spirit" (Gal. 5:17). "For the wisdom of the flesh is death; but the wisdom of the spirit is life and peace" (Rom. 8:6).

<sup>98</sup> Ps. 94:8-9.

but spoke calumny and transgression; we have conceived and uttered from the heart, words of falsehood."<sup>99</sup>

Even the miracles performed by God were powerless to enlighten blinded minds or to show them the true God, far greater than the idols which seduced their hearts. "Your fathers tempted Me, they proved Me, and saw My works. Forty years long was I offended with that generation, and I said: These always err in heart."<sup>100</sup> God's deeds impressed men less than the concupiscence of their senses, the pride of life, the attraction to material pleasure, the ambition to set themselves up as gods: "And they have not hearkened to Me nor inclined their ear, but have hardened their neck."<sup>101</sup>

If man is to reach the peak of his being by recovering the spiritual nature originally bestowed upon him, he must free himself from all that dims his vision and blocks his path. Only by his spiritual nature may he enter into communion with God who is a spirit. But how can he recover this spiritual nature, buried as it is beneath concupiscence and lost in the darkness of sin? The history of Israel illustrates the mechanism of divine pedagogy aimed at this goal. The means to the end were varied, but the general pattern showed clearly that God intended to remove His people from the seductions and ease of the world. That is why He led

<sup>99</sup> Isa. 59:12-13. <sup>100</sup> Ps. 94:9-10.

<sup>101</sup> Jer. 7:26. The same spiritual blindness would prevent the Pharisees from accepting Christ's testimony and the crowd from rising above their physical appetites. "Jesus answered them, and said: Amen, amen I say to you, you seek Me, not because you have seen miracles, but because you did eat of the loaves, and were filled" (John 6:26). "For they understood not concerning the loaves; for their heart was blinded" (Mark 6:52).

them into solitude. But solitude alone was not sufficient to spiritualize creatures who brought with them their material nature and carnal desires. "And they tempted God in their hearts, by asking meat for their desires."<sup>102</sup> The result was that God "gave them their request and sent fullness into their souls."<sup>103</sup> Disgust, trials, and humiliations of the flesh afflicted them as soon as their sensate desires were satisfied. Very few can bear these trials and humiliations and the majority turn away in rebellion as soon as God sends them.

To prevent souls from following false paths is not alone sufficient for their welfare. Even if they realize that God is a spirit, their whole attitude to sacred things must still be spiritualized. As long as the soul stresses miracles, wonders and signs, seeking these phenomena for their own sake, it remains on the level of sense experience instead of transcending sense to touch the spiritual reality which alone matters. Thus, although Moses had given the bronze serpent as a pledge of salvation, Ezechias had to break it when he saw it adored by the people who no longer perceived the inner meaning beyond the symbol. Yet the understanding required was not beyond human capabilities. All that was needed was a purified heart, as we see in the wise man who wrote, referring to the same serpent: "For he that turned to it was not healed by that which he saw, but by Thee the Savior of all."<sup>104</sup> "For it was neither herb, nor mollifying plaster that healed them, but Thy word, O Lord, which healeth all things."<sup>105</sup>

<sup>102</sup> Ps. 77:18.

<sup>103</sup> Ps. 105:15. Rather than "fullness," a more exact rendering of the Hebrew is "decay" or "desolation." The new Latin version of the Psalter uses *tabes* here [Translator's note].

<sup>104</sup> Wisd. 16:7.    <sup>105</sup> Wisd. 16:12.

The redeeming mystery of the Old Testament was truly the word of God which was designed to help men to know, at least to some extent, their own spiritual nature. It is true that no one has seen God. Yet throughout the Old Testament God manifested Himself by means of His word which therefore had to be expressed in a way that would reveal Him without distortion and would even bear witness to Him in truth. From the first day of creation His word was shown as invisible, mysterious and omnipotent. "For He spoke and they were made."<sup>106</sup> On Sinai too God revealed Himself by His word and asked Moses to engrave it on the tablets of the law in order that this letter, this written word might keep the Spirit of God present and active in the midst of His people. By His word also plagues were banished, the guilty were punished, just men were enraptured, while awaiting the day when it would finally dwell with men and accomplish their salvation. "For while all things were in quiet silence, and the night was in the midst of her course, Thy almighty word leapt down from heaven from Thy royal throne."<sup>107</sup>

But only men of God can grasp the meaning of this word,<sup>108</sup> for to carnal ears it seems nothing more than noise. The people said to Moses: "Approach thou rather; and hear all things that the Lord our God shall say to thee, and thou shalt speak to us, and we will hear and will do them."<sup>109</sup> Does this not mean that the word is above all a spiritual reality? But it is also eminently intelligible and permits the meeting of two minds. By His word God, a pure spirit, reveals Himself to the weak mind of man, that mind

<sup>106</sup> Ps. 32:9.    <sup>107</sup> Wisd. 18:14-15.

<sup>108</sup> "He that is of God, heareth the words of God" (John 8:47).

<sup>109</sup> Deut. 5:27.

which needs the veil of the senses in order to grasp the message which God has addressed to all humanity. "Day to day uttereth speech. . . . Their sound hath gone forth into all the earth."<sup>110</sup> Though the word strikes the ear, it is addressed to the spirit. Its message is essentially spiritual. Throughout the Old Testament the mission of the word is to purge out gradually the sensual manifestations of divine omnipotence while enhancing the value and the subject matter of faith.<sup>111</sup> The sage who understood the spiritualizing role of the word called Moses "God's mouthpiece": "With his words he made prodigies to cease."<sup>112</sup> In the course of time the extraordinary divine manifestations which struck the eyes and enthralled the senses gradually became rarer. Divine action was divested of its exterior impressions, became more spiritual. A hint of this process is found in the message which God sent to his people from the burning bush: "You heard the voice of His words, but you saw not any form at all."<sup>113</sup> It was more than an instrument for this work of spiritualization; it served also to transmit a message which also was increasingly spiritual.<sup>114</sup>

Despite its high moral value, the law regulated material attitudes and required external actions. But with the prophets the divine word took on the aspect which is expressed so well by St. Paul: "For the word of God is living and effectual, and more piercing than any two edged sword; and

<sup>110</sup> Ps. 18:1-5.

<sup>111</sup> "Faith then cometh by hearing; and hearing by the word of Christ" (Rom. 10:17).

<sup>112</sup> Ecclus. 45:2. <sup>113</sup> Deut. 4:12.

<sup>114</sup> This would be true until Christ, the Word of God, would utter the holy words which would need no revision. "The words that I have spoken to you are spirit and life" (John 6:64).

reaching unto the division of the soul and the spirit, of the joints and the marrow, and is a discerner of the thoughts and intents of the heart."<sup>115</sup> By the word of God, Israel gradually realized what a distance separated its God from other gods. The prophet Isaias and later the author of the Book of Wisdom did not conceal their scorn for the gods of clay or wood, created by men's imagination and formed by their hands, in contrast to the God that Israel adored—the one, true God whose immaterial essence was revealed by the clear mirror of a wholly spiritual word. For indeed the word was wholly spiritual. A day came when Israel perceived not only the spiritual character but also the spiritual meaning of the word which permitted a glimpse of the nature of the Creator. One of the most impressive events in the history of Israel was the moment when God's word revealed the soul to itself, demanded a more interior attitude, explained just what God required of man. "The eyes of them that see shall not be dim, and the ears of them that hear shall hearken diligently. And the heart of fools shall understand knowledge."<sup>116</sup> Finally, after many trials, the spiritual treasure hidden in the law cried out its secret to the assembled people: "And they read in the book of the law of God distinctly and plainly to be understood; and they understood when it was read. . . . All the people wept when they heard the words of the law. . . . They understood the words that he had taught them."<sup>117</sup>

What had they understood, those men formerly deaf and blind, but at length awakened by their trials to an understanding of the meaning of divine truth to which they turned freely and lovingly? "With all their will they sought Him,

<sup>115</sup> Heb. 4:12. <sup>116</sup> Isa. 32:3-4. <sup>117</sup> II Esd. 8:8, 9, 12.

and they found Him.”<sup>118</sup> Their hearts burst all bonds and tasted wonderful joy when the law was read to them. They had been touched and “released” by the great spiritual principle in it. Over and above the details of its many ordinances, they perceived its spiritual worth and unity. They had an inkling of the fundamental fact that the spirit is truth and consequently the divine word is absolutely stable and eternal.<sup>119</sup> “The beginning of Thy words is truth: all the judgments of Thy justice are forever.”<sup>120</sup> Thus Old Testament men were enlisted in the way of love by clinging to spiritual truth and by living in faithful obedience to the law which they saw as a tree of life and a word spoken by a spiritual God. This is not the place to show the close relationship between the spirit and love. It is noteworthy, however, that all the texts, especially those of the wisdom books, which deal with the Holy Spirit, reveal love in God and lead men by the paths of love. The spirit is said to be “one, manifold, subtle, active . . . containing all spirits, intelligible, pure, subtle.”<sup>121</sup>

Does not this explain its ease in communicating, in reaching far, in bringing spirits together to unite them in charity? God’s faithful servants must have understood ever more clearly that their sharing in knowledge and love was directly related to their sharing in the spirit of God. Israel did not reach this certainty by philosophical reasoning or abstract

<sup>118</sup> II Par. 15:15.

<sup>119</sup> “Heaven and earth shall pass away, but My word shall not pass away” (Mark 13:31). “If you continue in My word . . . you shall know the truth, and the truth shall make you free” (John 8:31–32). “Now the Lord is a Spirit. And where the Spirit of the Lord is, there is liberty” (II Cor. 3:17).

<sup>120</sup> Ps. 118:160. <sup>121</sup> Wisd. 7:22–23.

ideas, but by direct experience. As men depended upon God and obeyed His law, they developed the inner life of the spirit which was the unspotted mirror of divine majesty, the true image of His goodness.<sup>122</sup> The spirit led men by the way of love. Thus little by little the mysterious commandment to love the Lord God with the whole heart was illuminated by the God who was a pure spirit and who required only love from those to whom He gave a share of His spirit. A truly boundless horizon opened before the gaze of men’s minds and hearts. The purpose of Old Testament revelation was to make known this spiritual God and to communicate His spirit of love to the minds and hearts of men. David already foreshadowed the invocation to a Holy Spirit when he exclaimed: “Create a clean heart in me, O God; and renew a right spirit within my bowels. Cast me not away from Thy face; and take not Thy holy spirit from me. Restore unto me the joy of Thy salvation.”<sup>123</sup>

If we recall how the Israelites had bowed to idols shaped by their own hands and to images of animals, reptiles or birds,<sup>124</sup> we can measure what progress had been made, under God’s guidance, and we can understand the reason for the exodus and the desert, the sufferings, trials and punishments which afflicted that stiff-necked people. As the spiritual destiny of the world was in their hands, was it not essential that they awaken to spiritual realities, even at the cost of suffering? Yet very few in Israel understood the reason for the discipline imposed upon those guided by God. Few glimpsed the stakes of the tremendous struggle between matter and spirit. Nor need such blindness surprise us, since we ourselves are frequently scandalized when God repeats

<sup>122</sup> Cf. Wisd. 7:26. <sup>123</sup> Ps. 50:11–14. <sup>124</sup> Cf. Deut. 4:18.

in our midst the same drama enacted of old with Israel. Let us rather heed the joyful songs of the souls who had reached the goal, who had discovered the life of the spirit and knew that the spirit of God lived within themselves. Since they no longer find anything which resembles Him whom they have glimpsed, they are neither hindered nor attracted by any obstacle in heaven or on earth: "For what have I in heaven? and besides Thee what do I desire upon earth?"<sup>125</sup> There is a twofold proof that among the holiest souls of Israel Yahweh had already found "adorers . . . in spirit and in truth":<sup>126</sup> first, the holy of holies wherein dwelt only the invisible divine presence; secondly, the Israelites themselves, real giants of faith who staked their whole lives and the future of succeeding generations upon a single "word" of God expressed by their tongues and their hearts.

### *Majesty*

A high and glorious throne from the beginning is the place of our sanctification, O Lord, the hope of Israel.<sup>127</sup>

My kingdom is not of this world.<sup>128</sup>

O clap your hands, all ye nations; shout unto God with the voice of joy. For the Lord is high, terrible; a great King over all the earth.<sup>129</sup> He hath subdued the people under us; and the na-

<sup>125</sup> Ps. 72:25.    <sup>126</sup> John 4:23.    <sup>127</sup> Jer. 17:12-13.

<sup>128</sup> John 18:36.

<sup>129</sup> The Old Testament sheds strong light on God's transcendence and His title of universal King. In the New Testament the royal title is conferred more particularly upon Christ as Incarnate God. The interrogation and passion of Christ as reported by St. John are the most significant texts in this regard. But this in no way diminishes the sovereign authority of God. On the contrary, the Gospel stresses it even more than the Old Testament, since the Son of man, though Lord and Master, submits His person and His work to His divine

tions under our feet. . . . For God is the King of all the earth; sing ye wisely. God shall reign over the nations; God sitteth on His holy throne. The princes of the people are gathered together, with the God of Abraham; for the strong gods of the earth are exceedingly exalted.<sup>130</sup>

The poetry of the messianic psalm invites us to advance to the threshold of the eternal kingdom. "The Lord maketh the flood to dwell; and the Lord shall sit king forever."<sup>131</sup> "The Lord hath reigned, let the people be angry; He that sitteth on the cherubims; let the earth be moved. The Lord is great in Sion, and high above all people. Let them give praise to Thy great name, for it is terrible and holy."<sup>132</sup>

The true God, Lord of heaven and earth, master of the universe, received the homage of all that He possessed:

Thine, O Lord, is magnificence, and power, and glory, and victory; and to Thee is praise, for all that is in heaven, and in earth, is Thine; Thine is the kingdom, O Lord, and Thou art above all princes. Thine are riches, and Thine is glory; Thou hast dominion over all, in Thy hand is power and might; in Thy hand greatness, and the empire of all things.<sup>133</sup>

This praise burst forth from all the sacred books, and especially the psalms which raise their alleluias to the glory of the supreme God. We are shown that a true kingdom and real sovereignty belong to Him because He is exalted infinitely above all else.

The Lord is high above all nations; and His glory above the heavens.<sup>134</sup>

Father. Many Gospel texts could be profitably read from this viewpoint and compared to the Old Testament texts to be quoted here.

<sup>130</sup> Ps. 46:2-4, 8-10.    <sup>131</sup> Ps. 28:10.    <sup>132</sup> Ps. 98:1-3.

<sup>133</sup> I Par. 29:11-12.    <sup>134</sup> Ps. 112:4.



O Israel, how great is the house of God, and how vast is the place of His possession! It is great, and hath no end; it is high and immense.<sup>135</sup>

But our God is in heaven; He hath done all things whatsoever He would.<sup>136</sup>

For at His commandment favor is shown, and there is no diminishing of His salvation.<sup>137</sup>

God's supremacy derives also from His sovereign liberty. "His judgments are in all the earth."<sup>138</sup> His law existed before creation and proceeded from His wisdom which later would declare:

I came out of the mouth of the Most High. . . . I alone have compassed the circuit of heaven, and have penetrated into the bottom of the deep, and have walked in the waves of the sea, and have stood in all the earth: and in every people. . . . From the beginning, and before the world, was I created, and unto the world to come I shall not cease to be.<sup>139</sup>

Yahweh rules by the absolute authority of His divine wishes and by the action of His will.<sup>140</sup> Yahweh rules over all life. He keeps hidden the destiny of creatures and knows their inmost secrets.

<sup>135</sup> Bar. 3:24-25.    <sup>136</sup> Ps. 113:11.    <sup>137</sup> Eccus. 39:23.

<sup>138</sup> Ps. 104:7.    <sup>139</sup> Eccus. 24:5-14.

<sup>140</sup> St. John was to return to this Old Testament doctrine and would announce the triumph of God's reign: "And there were great voices in heaven saying: The kingdom of this world is become our Lord's and His Christ's, and He shall reign forever and ever, Amen. And the four and twenty ancients . . . adored God, saying: We give Thee thanks, O Lord God almighty, who art, and who wast, and who art to come; because Thou hast taken to Thee Thy great power, and Thou hast reigned" (Apoc. 11:15-17).

I am God, and there is no God beside, neither is there the like to Me: who shew from the beginning the things that shall be at last, and from ancient times the things that as yet are not done, saying: My counsel shall stand, and all My will shall be done, who call a bird from the east, and from a far country the man of My own will, and I have spoken, and will bring it to pass; I have created, and I will do it.<sup>141</sup>

Even man is an open book in the hand of God and cannot escape His sight. "Am I, think ye, a God at hand, saith the Lord, and not a God afar off? Shall a man be hid in secret places and I not see him, saith the Lord? Do not I fill heaven and earth, saith the Lord?"<sup>142</sup> The sinner may declare that none can see him: "Darkness compasseth me about, and the walls cover me, and no man seeth me; whom do I fear? The Most High will not remember my sins."<sup>143</sup> But no one can hide from God.<sup>144</sup>

Say not: I shall be hidden from God, and who shall remember me from on high? In such a multitude I shall not be known; for what is my soul in such an immense creation? Behold the heaven, and the heavens of heavens, the deep, and all the earth, and the things that are in them, shall be moved in His sight, the mountains also, and the hills, and the foundations of the earth; when God shall look upon them, they shall be shaken with trembling.<sup>145</sup>

Isaias told of Lucifer's efforts to hide from God: "I will ascend into heaven, I will exalt my throne above the stars of

<sup>141</sup> Isa. 46:9-11.    <sup>142</sup> Jer. 23:23-24.    <sup>143</sup> Eccus. 23:26.

<sup>144</sup> "The Lord . . . will bring to light the hidden things of darkness and will make manifest the counsels of the hearts; and then shall every man have praise from God" (I Cor. 4:5).

<sup>145</sup> Eccus. 16:16-19.

God, I will sit in the mountain of the covenant, in the sides of the north; I will ascend above the height of the clouds, I will be like the Most High.”<sup>146</sup> Ecclesiasticus asks, concerning sinners: “Why is earth and ashes proud?”<sup>147</sup> He then describes some of the terrifying punishments the Lord sends to sinners. Isaias describes God as judge: “He sitteth upon the globe of the earth. . . . He that bringeth the searchers of secrets to nothing, that hath made the judges of the earth as vanity. And surely their stock was neither planted, nor sown, nor rooted in the earth; suddenly He hath blown upon them, and they are withered.”<sup>148</sup>

But the same divine ruler who punishes the proud also strives to people His kingdom. The same texts which show the omnipotence of God likewise indicate who is to receive divine favor. “God hath overturned the thrones of proud princes, and hath set up the meek in their stead. God hath made the roots of proud nations to wither, and hath planted the humble of these nations.”<sup>149</sup>

Do not multiply to speak lofty things, boasting: let old matters depart from your mouth; for the Lord is a God of all knowledge, and to Him are thoughts prepared. The bow of the mighty is overcome, and the weak are girt with strength. . . . He raiseth up the needy from the dust, and lifteth up the poor from the dunghill; that he may sit with princes, and hold the throne of glory.<sup>150</sup>

Some of these words of Anna, mother of Samuel, were quoted by the Blessed Virgin Mary in her *Magnificat*. We may, therefore, see in this passage some of the true features of the kingdom to be founded by her Son.

<sup>146</sup> Isa. 14:13–14. <sup>147</sup> Eccus. 10:9. <sup>148</sup> Isa. 40:22–24.

<sup>149</sup> Eccus. 10:17–18. <sup>150</sup> I Kings 2:3–4, 8.

Isaias declares, speaking in the name of God:

Heaven is My throne, and the earth My footstool. . . . But to whom shall I have respect, but to him that is poor and little, and of a contrite spirit, and that trembleth at My words?<sup>151</sup>

For thus saith the High and the Eminent that inhabiteth eternity; and His name is Holy, who dwelleth in the high and holy place, and with a contrite and humble spirit, to revive the spirit of the humble, and to revive the heart of the contrite.<sup>152</sup>

Christ Himself repeated the substance of these words in describing the kingdom He came to establish. Zacharias had predicted that God would turn to the little ones.<sup>153</sup> The subjects of the kingdom were to be children and the weak, the humble and the poor.

Authority and rule belong to God alone and extend to the ends of the earth. To Him also is reserved the secret of hearts, for the soul and the mind elude human power and authority. Though God may delegate some of His powers<sup>154</sup> —“Fill the earth and subdue it”<sup>155</sup>—yet spiritual matters

<sup>151</sup> Isa. 66:1, 2. The first of these verses was quoted by St. Stephen (Acts 7:49).

<sup>152</sup> Isa. 57:15. <sup>153</sup> Zach. 13:7.

<sup>154</sup> There is extraordinary continuity between the theology of authority and temporal power as represented in the Old Testament and that which is outlined in the Epistles of St. Paul. The latter relies especially upon Christ’s words to Pilate: “Thou shouldst not have any power against Me, unless it were given thee from above” (John 19:11). Whether he speaks of the duties of servants toward their masters, of subjects toward their rulers, or of wives toward their husbands, he stresses that what is required is voluntary obedience offered with total liberty. Moreover, it is proper that man should be subject to higher authorities as if to God (Cf. Rom. 13; I Cor. 11; Col. 3).

<sup>155</sup> Gen. 1:28.

remain His own exclusive domain. "Behold all souls are Mine; as the soul of the father, so also the soul of the son is Mine."<sup>156</sup>

When Melchisedech claimed the right to bless Abraham and to remind him that he owed his victory to God, he thereby settled right at the beginning of biblical history the principle of the primacy of the spirit and the absolute power of God in that order. "Melchisedech . . . priest of the most high God, blessed him and said: Blessed be Abram by the most high God, who created heaven and earth. And blessed be the most high God, by whose protection the enemies are in thy hands."<sup>157</sup> Moses emphatically reminded the people that all authority and power derive their origin from God: "When the Most High divided the nations . . . He appointed the bounds of people."<sup>158</sup>

The history of the kingship in Israel illustrated and proclaimed with remarkable clarity this unique character of divine authority. Israel was a free people, made up of nomad tribes with no other bond of unity except a common faith. Yet this essentially religious unity gradually formed a national unity. Moses and the judges who succeeded him were merely representatives of God sent to the people while the one head, the true and only king of Israel, was Yahweh Himself. That was why Gedeon refused the powers of kingship which the people wished to impose upon him: "I will not rule over you, neither shall my son rule over you, but the Lord shall rule over you."<sup>159</sup> But a little later Samuel could no longer restrain the people who, under pressure of dangers from without, lost confidence in God's help and

<sup>156</sup> Ezech. 18:4.

<sup>157</sup> Gen. 14:18-20

<sup>158</sup> Deut. 32:8.

<sup>159</sup> Judg. 8:23.

demanded the authority and protection of a king. "Give us a king, to judge us. And Samuel prayed to the Lord. And the Lord said to Samuel: Harken to the voice of the people in all that they say to thee. For they have not rejected thee, but Me, that I should not reign over them. According to all their works, they have done from the day that I brought them out of Egypt until this day; as they have forsaken Me and served strange gods, so do they also unto thee. Now therefore hearken to their voice; but yet testify to them, and foretell them the right of the king that shall reign over them."<sup>160</sup>

God in His providence had foreseen Israel's desire and had decreed and revealed, in the books of Moses, the rights and duties of a kingdom which would allow the accomplishment of His plans in spite of man's infidelities. The kings of Israel were certainly characterized by human weakness and influenced by the customs of their time. Yet they showed some of the features of the Messias-King who would be poor, humble, chaste and gentle, who would come in total submission to the will of His Father, not to destroy the law, but to fulfill it.<sup>161</sup>

Thou shalt set him whom the Lord thy God shall choose out of the number of thy brethren. Thou mayst not make a man of another nation king, that is not thy brother. And when he is made king, he shall not multiply horses to himself, nor lead back the people into Egypt, being lifted up with the number of his horsemen, especially since the Lord hath commanded you to return no more the same way. He shall not have many wives, that may allure his mind, nor immense sums of silver and gold. But after he is raised to the throne of his kingdom, he shall copy

<sup>160</sup> I Kings 8:6-9.

<sup>161</sup> Cf. Matt. 5:17.

out to himself the Deuteronomy of this law in a volume. . . . And he shall have it with him, and shall read it all the days of his life, that he may learn to fear the Lord his God, and keep His words and ceremonies that are commanded in the law; and that his heart be not lifted up with pride over his brethren, nor decline to the right or to the left, that he and his sons may reign a long time over Israel.<sup>162</sup>

In accordance with this program, Yahweh chose men of God as kings of the people.<sup>163</sup> The kings were marked with a divine sign,<sup>164</sup> anointed, consecrated and sent by God. The Holy Spirit rested upon them and guided their steps.<sup>165</sup> This was true of Saul and of David at the beginning of their reigns. God gave Saul a new heart and he prophesied.<sup>166</sup> We can learn much from God's choice of David, for he was the youngest of his family and his family was the least important in Juda. He was a humble shepherd, but God had great plans for him. God knew the very depths of his soul: "for man seeth those things that appear, but the Lord beholdeth the heart."<sup>167</sup> Saul transgressed Yahweh's law by an act of arrogance and the kingdom was torn from him. David sinned too, and his hands shed so much blood that

<sup>162</sup> Deut. 17:15-20.

<sup>163</sup> Israel was established as a theocracy, that is, a regime directly controlled by divine law, with the voice of the inspired prophets enjoying greater authority than that of the kings. This restless and oppressed race was constantly seething with the thirst for justice and equality, finding all human authority intolerable, often rebelling against the divine yoke, although it alone they acknowledged as absolutely transcendental. It is significant that even now the Jews resist assimilation to the nations among which they are dispersed and they are forced by their vocation to submit to God alone.

<sup>164</sup> I Kings 10:1. <sup>165</sup> *Ibid.*, 10:6. <sup>166</sup> *Ibid.*, 10:9-10.

<sup>167</sup> I Kings 16:2.

in spite of his piety he was not to have the honor of building the Lord's temple. Solomon displeased the Lord by pride and excessive luxury. Upon his death the kingdom which he had raised to the height of glory was split by schism and ruined by decadence. It is evident that the alternating troubles and prosperity of the kings of Juda were a measure of the degree of their fidelity to God and their dependence upon Him. In spite of disasters which would normally have brought annihilation, the kingdom survived in Israel through God's forbearance solely in order that it might prepare the way for another kingdom, that of the King of kings, who was to claim His royal privileges when He became man. This had been prophesied by Balaam at the time when Israel was still wandering across the plains of Moab: "A star shall rise out of Jacob and a sceptre shall spring up from Israel. . . . Out of Jacob shall He come that shall rule."<sup>168</sup> Thus the whole of the Old Testament prepared the triumph of the divine kingdom proclaimed by Daniel. Even the portrait of the Messiah-King was already sketched by Scripture: in David, who foreshadowed His meekness and gentleness, and in Solomon, whose wisdom and glory astounded all nations.

Frequently the kings of Israel were deaf to the vehement and oft-repeated rebukes of the prophets. They forgot the law, though they had received full knowledge of it.<sup>169</sup> They rebelled when they were punished by God. But the kings of other nations were even more blind in their pride and domineering spirit. The Bible shows us how the rulers of

<sup>168</sup> Num. 24:17, 19.

<sup>169</sup> [The prince] "is God's minister to thee, for good" (Rom. 13:4).

Egypt and Assyria were served and adored like gods. This state of things, though widespread in antiquity, was not peculiar to that time but occurs throughout history. Thus the words of the author of the Book of Wisdom retain their full meaning across the centuries and can still be applied to princes and rulers of this world: "Hear therefore, ye kings, and understand; learn, ye that are judges of the ends of the earth. Give ear, you that rule the people, and that please yourselves in multitudes of nations; for power is given you by the Lord, and strength by the Most High, who will examine your works and search out your thoughts."<sup>170</sup>

The Book of Daniel, which is the book of the world's destiny, is also and especially the book of the divine kingdom, the book of the mighty King. In its account of events which mark the rebellion of human kingdoms against the divine kingship it reminds men again and again that "the Most High ruleth in the kingdom of men; and He will give it to whomsoever it shall please Him."<sup>171</sup> At a time of affliction Daniel prophesied to the Chaldean despot: "Thy kingdom shall remain to thee after thou shalt have known that power is from heaven."<sup>172</sup> Empires will crumble; only the kingdom of God will subsist.<sup>173</sup> "The God of heaven will set up a kingdom that shall never be destroyed, and His kingdom shall not be delivered up to another people, and it shall break in pieces, and shall consume all these kingdoms, and itself shall stand forever. "According as thou sawest that the stone

<sup>170</sup> Wisd. 6:2-4.    <sup>171</sup> Dan. 4:14.    <sup>172</sup> *Ibid.*, 4:23.

<sup>173</sup> "The Blessed and only Mighty, the King of kings and Lord of lords, who only hath immortality and inhabiteth light inaccessible, whom no man hath seen nor can see; to whom be honor and empire everlasting. Amen" (I Tim. 6:15-16).

was cut out of the mountain without hands, and broke in pieces, the clay, and the iron, and the brass, and the silver, and the gold."<sup>174</sup>

The Psalmist chanted: "Thy kingdom is a kingdom of all ages; and Thy dominion endureth throughout all generations."<sup>175</sup> Another psalm describes the benevolence of the King: "Thy throne, O God, is forever and ever, the sceptre of Thy kingdom is a sceptre of uprightness. Thou hast loved justice and hated iniquity."<sup>176</sup> The prophet's vision reaches its climax in the divine reign of the Son of Man, "whose kingdom is an everlasting kingdom, and all kings shall serve Him and shall obey Him."<sup>177</sup> Indeed, the Old Testament never ceases to proclaim the kingdom of God.

"The Lord hath prepared His throne in heaven; and His kingdom shall rule over all. Bless the Lord, all ye His angels; you that are mighty in strength and execute His word, hearkening to the voice of His orders. Bless the Lord, all ye His hosts; you ministers of His that do His will. Bless the Lord, all His works; in every place of His dominion, O my soul, bless thou the Lord."<sup>178</sup> "I am the Lord your Holy One, the Creator of Israel, your King."<sup>179</sup> Again toward the end of the Old Testament the same proclamation was uttered by Zacharias: "And the Lord shall be King over all the earth; in that day there shall be one Lord, and His name shall be one."<sup>180</sup>

<sup>174</sup> Dan. 2:44-45.    <sup>175</sup> Ps. 144:13.    <sup>176</sup> Ps. 144:7-8.

<sup>177</sup> Dan. 7:27.    <sup>178</sup> Ps. 102:19-22.    <sup>179</sup> Isa. 43:14.

<sup>180</sup> Zach. 14:9. "And when all things shall be subdued unto Him, then the Son also Himself shall be subject unto Him that put all things under Him, that God may be all in all" (I Cor. 15:28).

*Omnipotence*

I am the almighty God.<sup>181</sup>

That your faith might not stand on the wisdom of men, but on the power of God.<sup>182</sup>

At all times men have been deeply impressed by astounding manifestations of divine omnipotence, expressed first of all in the poem of creation which all religions have extolled. The originality of the Hebrew account lies in the fact that it attributed the work to its true author, Yahweh. What a distance separates the fantastic demiurges of other accounts from the strong and tranquil majesty of Genesis, where the birth of worlds is governed by a single divine thought, unfolding its mighty plan which none can fathom. "In the beginning God created heaven and earth. And the earth was void and empty . . . and the spirit of God moved over the waters."<sup>183</sup> The God of Israel does not reveal His plans to men, who cannot understand them. He merely exposes to their gaze the wonderful picture of His works, which declare His power and invite men to adore Him.<sup>184</sup>

Bless the Lord, O my soul; O Lord my God, Thou art exceedingly great. Thou hast put on praise and beauty, and art clothed with light as with a garment. Who stretchest out the heaven like a pavilion; who coverest the higher rooms thereof with water. Who makest the clouds Thy chariot; who walkest

<sup>181</sup> Gen. 17:1. <sup>182</sup> I Cor. 2:5. <sup>183</sup> Gen. 1:1-2.

<sup>184</sup> The New Testament did not undertake another detailed description of the works of creation, but it frequently alludes to God's power and majesty by using an expression commonly found in the Old Testament: "He who created heaven and earth and all things." The evangelists knew that their readers had meditated upon the great biblical stories, which they used, to some extent, as references.

upon the wings of the winds. Who makest Thy angels spirits; and Thy ministers a burning fire.<sup>185</sup>

God needs neither help nor counsel. His will, His power and His strength are in Himself alone.

Who hath forwarded the spirit of the Lord? or who hath been His counsellor, and hath taught Him? With whom hath He consulted, and who hath instructed Him, and taught Him the path of justice, and taught Him knowledge, and shewed Him the way of understanding?<sup>186</sup>

I am the Lord, that make all things, that alone stretch out the heavens, that establish the earth, and there is none with Me.<sup>187</sup>

By the word of the Lord the heavens were established; and all the power of them by the spirit of His mouth. . . . For He spoke and they were made; He commanded and they were created.<sup>188</sup>

But the power so brilliantly revealed in His works is nothing compared to the power of His dazzling presence.

Behold the giants groan under the waters, and they that dwell with them. Hell is naked before Him, and there is no covering for destruction. He stretched out the north over the empty space, and hangeth the earth upon nothing. . . . By His power the seas are suddenly gathered together, and His wisdom has struck the proud one. His spirit hath adorned the heavens, and His obstetric hand brought forth the winding serpent. Lo, these things are said in part of His ways; and seeing we have heard scarce a little drop of His word, who shall be able to behold the thunder of His greatness?<sup>189</sup>

<sup>185</sup> Ps. 103:1-4.

<sup>186</sup> Isa. 40:13-14.

<sup>187</sup> *Ibid.*, 44:24.

<sup>188</sup> Ps. 32:6, 9.

<sup>189</sup> Job 26:5-14.

In ancient times He appeared on the holy mountain<sup>190</sup> in shining majesty and power. "The Lord came from Sinai, and from Seir He rose up to us; He hath appeared from Mount Pharan. . . . In His right hand a fiery law."<sup>191</sup> So too He will appear again on the day of judgment when He will come "with much power and majesty."<sup>192</sup> "And who shall be able to think of the day of His coming? and who shall stand to see Him?"<sup>193</sup>

God's omnipotence is not shown merely at rare intervals throughout the ages; it is inseparable from His activity and it functions simultaneously with it.<sup>194</sup> As God's action never ceases, so His omnipotence is never hidden. What He does and what He says exceeds all limits and transcends all human reality. All divine things bear this seal of sublimity and efficacy, the unique characteristics of irresistible supernatural power. "Behold I am the Lord the God of all flesh; shall anything be hard for Me?"<sup>195</sup> "For as the heavens are exalted above the earth, so are My ways exalted above your ways, and My thoughts above your thoughts. . . . So shall My word be, which shall go forth from My mouth; it shall not return to Me void, but it shall do whatsoever I please."<sup>196</sup>

God's word is sufficiently powerful to be assured of infallible fulfillment. Jacob, whose descendents were to rule

<sup>190</sup> In a similar way He was to appear also on Mount Thabor to Peter, James and John. "And the disciples hearing, fell upon their face, and were very much afraid" (Matt. 17:6).

<sup>191</sup> Deut. 33:2. <sup>192</sup> Matt. 24:30. <sup>193</sup> Mal. 3:2.

<sup>194</sup> Christ implied this when the Jews reproached Him for performing a miracle on the sabbath: "My Father worketh until now; and I work" (John 5:17). His power and His action are inseparable.

<sup>195</sup> Jer. 32:27. <sup>196</sup> Isa. 55:9-11.

over the earth, was told by God: "I am God almighty, increase thou and be multiplied."<sup>197</sup> No one should be surprised if His mysterious wishes surpass human possibilities. God speaks and acts with irresistible power.

If thou say in thy heart: These nations are more than I, how shall I be able to destroy them? Fear not, but remember what the Lord thy God did to Pharaoh and to all the Egyptians . . . and the strong hand, and the stretched out arm, with which the Lord thy God brought thee out; so will He do to all the people, whom thou fearest. . . . Thou shalt not fear them, because the Lord thy God is in the midst of thee, a God mighty and terrible.<sup>198</sup>

The divine will alone determines the outcome of battle. Judas Machabeus knew this and did not hesitate to declare: "It is an easy matter for many to be shut up in the hands of a few; and there is no difference in the sight of the God of heaven to deliver with a great multitude or with a small company; for the success of war is not in the multitude of the army, but strength cometh from heaven."<sup>199</sup> "Machabeus . . . called upon the Lord, that worketh wonders, who giveth victory to them that are worthy, not according to the power of their arms, but according as it seemeth good to Him."<sup>200</sup>

However overwhelming obstacles may seem, the supreme divine will can always vanquish them: "If Babylon should

<sup>197</sup> Gen. 35:11. <sup>198</sup> Deut. 7:17-21. <sup>199</sup> I Mach. 3:18-19.

<sup>200</sup> II Mach. 15:21. The man who was blind from birth and cured by Christ knew why He was omnipotent: "Now we know that God doth not hear sinners; but if a man be a server of God, and doth His will, him He heareth. . . . Unless this man were of God, He could not do anything" (John 9:31, 33).

mount up to heaven, and establish her strength on high, from Me there should come spoilers upon her, saith the Lord.”<sup>201</sup>

The unique power of divine acts testified to the true God. The Egyptians acknowledged this when God multiplied the plagues among them while sparing Israel: “And I will make the land of Gessen wherein My people is, wonderful in that day, so that flies shall not be there; and thou shalt know that I am the Lord in the midst of the earth. And I will put a division between My people and thy people; tomorrow shall this sign be.”<sup>202</sup>

All power comes from God. To make sure that no one should be unaware of this, He often was pleased to confer it upon the weak. The more extraordinary it appeared in them, the more certain men could be that its source was divine. At a time when there were great and civilized nations of ancient lineage, the religion of the one God was entrusted to an unknown, unchronicled tribe, a handful of nomads. Moreover, within this tribe the priesthood and the kingship were often conferred upon men lacking both nobility and prestige, men who were timid and faint-hearted. To them was given the deposit of revelation and the tremendous honor of transmitting it to men.<sup>203</sup>

Twice Moses declined the mission entrusted to him and tried to escape from it. “I beseech thee, Lord, I am not elo-

<sup>201</sup> Jer. 51:53.      <sup>202</sup> Exod. 8:22-23.

<sup>203</sup> “But the foolish things of the world hath God chosen, that He may confound the wise; and the weak things of the world hath God chosen, that He may confound the strong. And the base things of the world and the things that are contemptible, hath God chosen, and things that are not, that He might bring to nought things that are; that no flesh should glory in His sight” (I Cor. 1:27-29).

quent. . . . I beseech thee, Lord, send whom Thou wilt send.”<sup>204</sup>

Gedeon admitted his poverty and helplessness, saying: “I beseech Thee, my Lord, wherewith shall I deliver Israel? Behold my family is the meanest in Manasses, and I am the least in my father’s house. And the Lord said to him: I will be with thee; and thou shalt cut off Madian as one man.”<sup>205</sup>

David is reminded of his humble birth by God Himself, doubtless as a way of keeping him humble and grateful: “I took thee from the pastures, from following the flock, that thou shouldst be ruler of My people Israel.”<sup>206</sup>

Jeremias, like Moses, pleaded his lack of eloquence in order to escape from the heavy task which God wished to impose upon him. “And I said: Ah, ah, ah, Lord God; behold, I cannot speak, for I am a child. And the Lord said to me: Say not: I am a child; for thou shalt go to all that I shall send thee; and whatsoever I shall command thee, thou shalt speak. Be not afraid at their presence; for I am with thee to deliver thee, saith the Lord.”<sup>207</sup>

Amos expressed the same idea: “I am a herdsman plucking wild figs. And the Lord took me when I followed the flock, and the Lord said to me: Go, prophesy to My people Israel.”<sup>208</sup>

God entrusted his power to little ones such as David, a child whom Goliath scorned but was strengthened by the Lord and proudly defied his enemy. “And David said to the Philistine: Thou comest to me with a sword, and with a spear, and with a shield, but I come to thee in the name of the Lord of hosts, the God of the armies of Israel, which

<sup>204</sup> Exod. 4:10, 13.      <sup>205</sup> Judg. 6:15-16.      <sup>206</sup> I Par. 17:7.

<sup>207</sup> Jer. 1:6-8.      <sup>208</sup> Amos 7:14-15.



thou hast defied. This day, and the Lord will deliver thee into my hand, and I will slay thee. . . . And all the assembly shall know, that the Lord saveth not with sword and spear; for it is His battle.”<sup>209</sup>

Even a woman was sent to the enemy as agent of God’s power: “For this will be a glorious monument for Thy name, when he shall fall by the hand of a woman. For Thy power, O Lord, is not in a multitude, nor is Thy pleasure in the strength of horses, nor from the beginning have the proud been acceptable to Thee; but the prayer of the humble and the meek hath always pleased Thee.”<sup>210</sup>

When the people praised Judith, whose strength was derived from chastity and fidelity, they attributed the merit of victory to God Himself: “Thou art the glory of Jerusalem, thou art the joy of Israel, thou art the honor of our people. For thou hast done manfully, and thy heart has been strengthened, because thou hast loved chastity. . . . The hand of the Lord hath strengthened thee, and therefore thou shalt be blessed forever.”<sup>211</sup>

All this testimony is aptly expressed by the name “rock” applied to God to indicate how strong and steadfast was the help He gave.<sup>212</sup> Throughout the ages God’s power is mighty, sublime and totally efficacious in the accomplishment of His inscrutable plans. When His omnipotence takes the form of punishment or makes a gesture of mercy, it is allied to His divine justice and works constantly for the benefit of humanity. By declaring His requirements and helping in the work of redemption, God clearly pointed out the path of virtue, law, salvation—the path that was truly His. The first

<sup>209</sup> I Kings 17:45–47.    <sup>210</sup> Judith 9:15–16.

<sup>211</sup> Judith 15:10–11.

<sup>212</sup> In the Hebrew of Psalm 17 God is called “my rock.”

words of the revelation given to Abraham were: “I am the almighty God; walk before Me and be perfect.”<sup>213</sup> Soon afterward, events showing the signs of God’s omnipotence proved that His ways were right and just and true.<sup>214</sup> Omnipotence also served the justice and holiness of God: “Thy power and Thy justice, O God, even to the highest great things Thou hast done; O God, who is like to Thee?”<sup>215</sup> “Thy arm is with might. Let Thy hand be strengthened and Thy right hand exalted; justice and judgment are the preparation of Thy throne. Mercy and truth shall go before Thy face.”<sup>216</sup>

The Old Testament declares emphatically that the kingdom of goodness and truth, of order and peace will some day be re-established by divine omnipotence. In vain will godless and evil men revolt against it. A just man confronted with the schemes of sinners can rely with full trust upon God’s sovereign power. “O God, who shall be like to Thee? hold not Thy peace, neither be Thou still, O God. For lo, Thy enemies have made a noise; and they that hate Thee have lifted up the head. . . . O my God, make them like a wheel and as stubble before the wind. As fire which burneth the wood and as a flame burning mountains. So shalt Thou pursue them with Thy tempest and shalt trouble them in Thy wrath. Fill their faces with shame; and they shall seek Thy name, O Lord.”<sup>217</sup>

<sup>213</sup> Gen. 17:1. Omnipotence would be most evident in the work of sanctification, a task so difficult that the apostles asked: “Who then can be saved?” And Jesus answered: “With men it is impossible; but not with God; for all things are possible with God” (Mark 10:26–27).

<sup>214</sup> Cf. Ps. 118:137–38.    <sup>215</sup> Ps. 70:18–19.

<sup>216</sup> Ps. 88:14–15.    <sup>217</sup> Ps. 82:1–2; 14–17.

In the work of power and justice the elements of nature are God's docile servants: "There are spirits that are created for vengeance, and in their fury they lay on grievous torments. In the time of destruction they shall pour out their force; and they shall appease the wrath of Him that made them."<sup>218</sup>

Nature points out the right path to men and gives proof of God's fidelity and goodness. God in turn adapts His power to man's weakness and limited ability.

But executing Thy judgments by degrees, Thou gavest them place of repentance. . . . For so much then as Thou art just, Thou orderest all things justly; thinking it not agreeable to Thy power to condemn him who deserveth not to be punished. For Thy power is the beginning of justice; and because Thou art Lord of all, Thou makest Thyself gracious to all. For Thou showest Thy power, when men will not believe Thee to be absolute in power, and Thou convincest the boldness of them that know Thee not. But Thou being master of power, judgest with tranquillity and with great favor disposest of us; for Thy power is at hand when Thou wilt. But Thou hast taught Thy people by such works, that they must be just and humane, and hast made Thy children to be of a good hope, because in judging Thou givest place for repentance for sins.<sup>219</sup>

Yet this graciousness in no way detracts from the divine quality of God's action. The signs of mercy and tender love shown to men leave untouched His sublimity and His mystery. Between Him and men there is no proportion. "For My thoughts are not your thoughts; nor your ways My ways, saith the Lord."<sup>220</sup> On the other hand, His justice itself is also kindness. While human justice compares man to

<sup>218</sup> Ecclus. 39:33-34. <sup>219</sup> Wisd. 12:10-19. <sup>220</sup> Isa. 55:8.

his fellow man and often crushes him, divine justice guides him through unexpected paths, those of charity. God thinks of saving, not of judging and destroying. "I will not execute the fierceness of My wrath . . . because I am God, and not man."<sup>221</sup> When God punishes, it is for the purpose of conversion and that is the principal effort of the infinite divine power. Isaias represented the Redeemer as saying: "I, that speak justice, and am a defender to save."<sup>222</sup> Of course, omnipotence served justice as well as mercy. "For mercy and wrath are with Him. He is mighty to forgive, and to pour out indignation."<sup>223</sup> Indeed, the entire Old Testament bears witness that omnipotence achieves the triumph of both mercy and justice. "My salvation shall be forever, and My justice shall not fail."<sup>224</sup> But in the accomplishment of His purposes God used means which were so mysterious that men renounced the attempt to understand and took refuge in attitudes of reverent fear and adoration. "God hath softened my heart, and the Almighty hath troubled me."<sup>225</sup> God's omnipotence and goodness are so wonderfully displayed in His works that only trust and adoration can fittingly voice His praise. "Thy power and Thy justice, O God, even to the highest great things Thou hast done; O God, who is like to Thee?"<sup>226</sup>

### *Holiness*

I the Lord your God am holy.<sup>227</sup>

Holy, holy, holy, Lord God almighty, who was, and who is, and who is to come.<sup>228</sup>

In the year that king Ozias died, I saw the Lord sitting upon

<sup>221</sup> Osee 11:9. <sup>222</sup> Isa. 63:1. <sup>223</sup> Ecclus. 16:12.

<sup>224</sup> Isa. 51:6. <sup>225</sup> Job 23:16. <sup>226</sup> Ps. 70:19.

<sup>227</sup> Lev. 19:2. <sup>228</sup> Apoc. 4:8.

a throne high and elevated; and His train filled the temple. Upon it stood the seraphims; the one had six wings, and the other had six wings; with two they covered His face, and with two they covered His feet, and with two they flew. And they cried one to another, and said: Holy, holy, holy, the Lord God of hosts, all the earth is full of His glory. And the lintels of the doors were moved at the voice of him that cried, and the house was filled with smoke.<sup>229</sup>

“Holy, holy, holy!” This is the acclamation of every creature in the presence of the divine reality, ineffable in its transcendence and perfection. This is the primary revelation, peculiar to the Old Testament, expressed in simple words often repeated: “Our God is holy.” In our day too the Church still repeats the same words of the prophet when inviting us to adore Him who is about to become present upon the altar: “Holy, holy, holy, Lord God of hosts!”

The attributes of God described thus far were related by analogy to human experiences which somewhat elucidated them. The ordinary ideas of spirit, life, kingship, power kept their meaning even when transposed to God’s level; the mind could find its bearings by them. But it is totally different with divine holiness, which meets neither similarity nor analogy in human life. Nothing can give even a remote idea of this matchless sanctity. “*Tu solus sanctus.*” Nothing on earth will provide a basis of comparison for this specifically divine reality. Indeed, holiness seems to be a fundamental and distinctive attribute of God. It belongs only to Him; it can come only from Him; it cannot possibly be ascribed to anything created. God is, therefore, absolutely transcendent. “Who is like to Thee, among the strong, O

<sup>229</sup> Isa. 6:1–4.

Lord? Who is like to Thee, glorious in holiness?”<sup>230</sup> In the same way that God had declared: “See ye that I alone am, and there is no other God besides Me.”<sup>231</sup> He said also: “I the Lord your God am holy.”<sup>232</sup> “To whom have you likened Me, and made Me equal, and compared Me, and made Me like?”<sup>233</sup>

For God to swear by His holiness is the same as to swear by Himself. “The Lord God hath sworn by His holiness.”<sup>234</sup> “The Lord God hath sworn by His own soul.”<sup>235</sup>

As holiness is not merely one attribute among others but is truly God’s distinctive characteristic, it follows that wherever it is found, He can be recognized. It is His own sign and seal. “Thou shalt make also a plate of the purest gold, wherein thou shalt grave with engraver’s work: Holy to the Lord.”<sup>236</sup> Nothing renders Him greater glory than the manifestation of His holiness. “I will be sanctified in them that approach to Me, and I will be glorified in the sight of all the people.”<sup>237</sup>

In the midst of theophanies and miracles God’s holiness shines forth. “Sing ye to the Lord a new canticle; because He hath done wonderful things. His right hand hath wrought for Him salvation, and His arm is holy.”<sup>238</sup>

In paying Him homage, men merely follow the example of the angels whom the prophet showed us adoring the thrice holy God with ceaseless acclamations. It is truly admirable that the Hebrew people should have perceived this tran-

<sup>230</sup> Exod. 15:11. In the Apocalypse we also find that first place is given to this attribute of glorious sanctity, extolled by the whole company of the elect.

<sup>231</sup> Deut. 32:39. <sup>232</sup> Lev. 19:2. <sup>233</sup> Isa. 46:5.

<sup>234</sup> Amos 4:2. <sup>235</sup> Amos 6:8. <sup>236</sup> Exod. 28:36.

<sup>237</sup> Lev. 10:3. <sup>238</sup> Ps. 97:1–2.

scendent character of divine holiness and should have tried to express the mystery it implies—a mystery of prime importance since it is the foundation on which rests the prayer of adoration.<sup>239</sup> Adoration is an effort to proclaim holiness as the supreme divine reality, the peerless glory which is God's alone. The more a soul has an awareness of the holiness of God, the more religious that soul is. Because the men of the Old Testament possessed this awareness to a high degree, they felt a reverential fear of God, a fear which is unknown to many Christians of our day. In the presence of the awesome splendor of divine sanctity the men of the Bible were conscious of the abyss which separated God from creatures.

God's holiness, even more than His majesty and power, inspires fear in men who enter His presence.<sup>240</sup> Job was overwhelmed by the feeling of his own nothingness.<sup>241</sup> When Yahweh approached, Moses and Elias veiled their faces. "Moses hid his face; for he durst not look at God."<sup>242</sup> "And when Elias heard it, he covered his face with his mantle, and coming forth stood in the entering in of the cave."<sup>243</sup> Daniel fainted and fell prostrate on the ground: "And I being left alone saw this great vision; and there remained no strength in me, and the appearance of my countenance was changed in me, and I fainted away and retained no strength. And I heard the voice of His words; and when I heard, I lay in a consternation, upon my face, and my face was close to

<sup>239</sup> The Hebrew word, *quadosh*, which expresses the concept of holiness, has the meaning, "holiness that is transcendent and set apart."

<sup>240</sup> Similarly Peter said after the miraculous draught of fishes: "Depart from me, for I am a sinful man, O Lord" (Luke 5:8).

<sup>241</sup> Job 42:6. <sup>242</sup> Exod. 3:6. <sup>243</sup> III Kings 19:13.

the ground."<sup>244</sup> Even the seraphim hid themselves with their wings in God's presence and the men of Bethsames, who had seen the ark, asked: "Who shall be able to stand before the Lord, this holy God?"<sup>245</sup>

Thus God's infinite holiness sets Him apart from all else and everything that is vowed or consecrated to God is likewise set apart and consequently is removed from ordinary use. *Removed from secular use* was the original meaning of the word *holy* as applied to things, places, ministers of worship. Vestments for religious rites, oil for anointing, offerings and victims were all *holy*. "Anything that is devoted to the Lord . . . shall be holy of holies to the Lord."<sup>246</sup> The places where God dwelt were holy; the temple where He was present was called *the holy place* or *the holy of holies*. The tabernacle and the altar of sacrifices, the places where God appeared, the whole city of Jerusalem, the days consecrated to divine worship: all these were holy. "The altar . . . shall be most holy. Every one that touches it shall be holy."<sup>247</sup> "Come not nigh hither, . . . for the place whereon thou standest is holy ground."<sup>248</sup> "Great is the Lord . . . in the city of our God, in His holy mountain. With the joy of the whole earth is Mount Sion founded."<sup>249</sup> "Keep you My sabbath, for it is holy unto you."<sup>250</sup>

Even more holy were the persons who by function or by dedication had been separated from the world and consecrated to divine worship.<sup>251</sup> "And let no one come into the

<sup>244</sup> Dan. 10:8-9. <sup>245</sup> I Kings 6:20. <sup>246</sup> Lev. 27:28.

<sup>247</sup> Exod. 29:37. <sup>248</sup> Exod. 3:5. <sup>249</sup> Ps. 47:1-2.

<sup>250</sup> Exod. 31:14.

<sup>251</sup> Similarly in the primitive Church those among the disciples who were consecrated to God and vowed to His service were singled out and called "the saints." (Acts 9:13).

house of the Lord, but the priests, and they that minister of the Levites; let them only come in, because they are sanctified.”<sup>252</sup> “[The priests] . . . shall be holy to their God, and shall not profane His name; for they offer . . . the bread of their God, and therefore they shall be holy.”<sup>253</sup> Those chosen by God as prophets or vowed to divine service are also holy: “Before I formed thee in the bowels of thy mother, I knew thee; and before thou camest forth out of the womb, I sanctified thee, and made thee a prophet unto the nations.”<sup>254</sup> And finally, the whole nation, having been chosen by God as His nation, His possession, was a nation separated from others, a holy people.<sup>255</sup> “If therefore you will hear My voice, and keep My covenant, you shall be My peculiar possession, above all people: for all the earth is Mine. And you shall be to Me a priestly kingdom and a holy nation.”<sup>256</sup>

The glory of Israel lies in its deep consciousness of the transcendence of divine holiness, which is so lofty that it sets apart not only God Himself but everything that is consecrated to Him or draws near to Him. “He is a holy God, and mighty and jealous.”<sup>257</sup> God indeed takes special care to safeguard His holiness, striving to keep it intact among men whose essential duty is to keep His name holy. Again and again He complained that His holiness had been desecrated and that men had cast a slur upon it. “They profaned My holy name.”<sup>258</sup> Men defiled what was vowed and consecrated to God, what belonged to Him by reason of His holiness. They committed spiritual prostitution. “And thou

<sup>252</sup> II Par. 23:6.      <sup>253</sup> Lev. 21:6.      <sup>254</sup> Jer. 1:5.

<sup>255</sup> Cf. I Cor. 1:2; I Pet. 2:9.      <sup>256</sup> Exod. 19:5-6.

<sup>257</sup> Jos. 24:19.      <sup>258</sup> Ezech. 36:20

tookest thy beautiful vessels, of My gold, and My silver, which I gave thee, and thou madest thee images of men, and hast committed fornication with them. . . . And My bread which I gave thee, the fine flour and oil and honey, wherewith I fed thee, thou hast set before them for a sweet odor.”<sup>259</sup>

Nothing so pains God as such insults to His holiness. So inviolable, so sacred, so cherished is His sanctity that He uses the fullness of His omnipotence to prevent desecration. “But I spared them for the sake of My name, lest it should be profaned before the nations. . . . But I turned away My hand, and wrought not for My name’s sake.” “And I have regarded My own holy name, which the house of Israel hath profaned among the nations to which they went in. . . . It is not for your sake that I will do this, O house of Israel, but for My holy name’s sake.”<sup>260</sup>

Yet such a viewpoint is far from exhausting the notion of holiness for us, or even for the authors of the Old Testament. Alongside the texts which exalt God’s greatness and transcendence, the Bible contains references to another theme, expressed in this quotation from Leviticus: “You shall be holy, because I am holy.”<sup>261</sup> Here is a totally new and unexpected view of divine sanctity, seemingly incompatible with the preceding notion. Does the same God who seemed so intent on maintaining His separation from the world and from creatures now speak differently? The authors of the Old Testament have not hesitated to put such words in the mouth of the mighty, omnipotent, transcendent God. In some instances they have even recorded words which prove

<sup>259</sup> Ezech. 36:17, 19.      <sup>260</sup> Ezech. 20:14, 22; 36:21-22.

<sup>261</sup> Lev. 11:46.

more clearly that the thrice holy God desires to draw near to His creatures and to bestow upon them the very thing that is His unique prerogative, His sanctity. He said to His people: "I am the Lord that sanctify you."<sup>262</sup> The prophet Ezechiel records even more amazing words of God: "I will be sanctified in them."<sup>263</sup> The fact is that God's holiness is shown just as truly by His condescension as by His transcendence. "Who is as the Lord our God, who dwelleth on high and looketh on the low things in heaven and in earth."<sup>264</sup> The Psalmist, therefore, does not hesitate to beg God for mercy in the name of His holiness: "O my God, I shall cry by day, and Thou wilt not hear, and by night, and it shall not be reputed as folly in me. But Thou dwellest in the holy place."<sup>265</sup>

But especially in the scene on Mount Horeb the qualities of divine holiness are magnificently portrayed. The impact of His transcendence is felt, but the mercy of the thrice holy one is equally evident. "Come not nigh hither, put off the shoes from thy feet; for the place whereon thou standest is holy ground. . . . And the Lord said to him: I have seen the affliction of My people in Egypt, and I have heard their cry because of the rigor of them that are over the works; and knowing their sorrow, I am come down to deliver them."<sup>266</sup> These two characteristics are narrowly bound together in the revelation of the divine name which then took place. "But, come, and I will send thee to Pharaoh. . . . Lo, I shall go. . . . If they should say to me: What is His name? what shall I say to them? God said to Moses: I am

<sup>262</sup> Lev. 20:8.    <sup>263</sup> Ezech. 28:25.    <sup>264</sup> Ps. 112:5-6.

<sup>265</sup> Ps. 21:3-4.    <sup>266</sup> Exod. 3:5, 7-8.

who am. He said: Thus shalt thou say to the children of Israel: He who is, hath sent me to you."<sup>267</sup>

God's sanctity is an absolute in itself, but the creature viewing it sees a combination of transcendence and mercy. Transcendence is seen in the very act of creation; mercy appears in God's gracious gesture of revealing Himself and giving Himself to those whom He has created. Consequently the creature looking toward God must see with one glance both transcendence and mercy, that is to say, the mystery of His holiness. Of course, the Old Testament men did not draw up abstract definitions in this way but the words and the episodes of the Bible make it quite obvious that these ideas were in nowise foreign to them. It is vividly clear that they had a true and deep sense of the mystery of God's holiness.

The sacred authors knew that creatures were infinitely remote from the all holy God and unworthy to stand in His presence. They knew too that sin had transformed this separation into a radical opposition. "Woe is me, because I have held my peace; because I am a man of unclean lips, and I dwell in the midst of a people that hath unclean lips, and I have seen with my eyes the King, the Lord of hosts."<sup>268</sup> They know that holy men, and even angels, dare not appear before God. "What is man that he should be without spot, and he that is born of a woman that he should appear just? Behold among His saints none is unchangeable."<sup>269</sup> "Shall man be justified in comparison of God, or shall a man be more pure than his Maker? Behold they that serve Him are not steadfast, and in His angels He found wickedness. How much more shall they that dwell in houses

<sup>267</sup> Exod. 3:10, 13-14.    <sup>268</sup> Isa. 6:5.    <sup>269</sup> Job 15:14-15.

of clay, who have an earthly foundation, be consumed as with the moth?"<sup>270</sup>

They suggest that no creature is worthy of subsisting in the presence of the Creator, who drew everything from nothingness. "The heavens are not pure in His sight."<sup>271</sup> "Can man be justified compared with God, or he that is born of a woman appear clean? Behold even the moon doth not shine, and the stars are not pure in His sight. How much less man that is rottenness and the son of man who is a worm?"<sup>272</sup>

These words of Scripture show a true concept of divine transcendence and holiness. Yet the Bible contains an awareness that mercy is likewise a part of God's holiness. The prophet Habacuc, conscious of man's radical impurity, asked: "Wast Thou not from the beginning, O Lord my God, my holy one? . . . Thy eyes are too pure to behold evil."<sup>273</sup> The Psalmist, on realizing his sin, cried out in the presence of God: "If Thou, O Lord, wilt mark iniquities, Lord, who shall stand it?"<sup>274</sup> Nevertheless he continued by asserting that "with Thee there is merciful forgiveness."<sup>275</sup> What could give him such confidence, except the certainty that infinite mercy is found in the heart of God's sanctity? "I have waited for Thee, O Lord. My soul hath relied on His word; my soul hath hoped in the Lord. Because with the Lord there is mercy."<sup>276</sup>

By His mercy the infinitely holy God persists in seeking the sanctification of His sinful creatures. A text from the prophet Osee depicts this wonderful mercy: "How shall I

<sup>270</sup> Job 4:17-19.

<sup>271</sup> Job 15:15.

<sup>272</sup> Job 25:4-6.

<sup>273</sup> Hab. 1:12-13.

<sup>274</sup> Ps. 129:3.

<sup>275</sup> Ps. 129:5.

<sup>276</sup> Ps. 129:4-7.

deal with thee, O Ephraim, shall I protect thee, O Israel? . . . My heart is turned within Me, My repentance is stirred up. I will not execute the fierceness of My wrath; I will not return to destroy Ephraim, because I am God, not man, the holy one in the midst of thee."<sup>277</sup>

This mercy and gentleness would one day be fully visible in the Child of the manger, the holy one of Israel.<sup>278</sup> But the inspired authors assert that God, because He is holy, must be kind: "The Lord God, merciful and gracious, patient and of much compassion, and true."<sup>279</sup> Who could tell how fruitful was such a conviction or how vast the horizons it opened before men's eyes?

God's holiness is in Himself and proceeds from Him alone, as He stated very clearly: "I am the Lord that sanctify you."<sup>280</sup> As God alone is holy, it follows that the possibility and the degree of holiness in creatures depends entirely upon God's sanctifying action. Men must, therefore, take great care not to attribute to themselves what is a wholly gratuitous gift from above. "Not to us, O Lord, not to us; but to Thy name give glory."<sup>281</sup> This sanctifying action of God takes many different forms. However adaptable and gracious it may be, men are often overwhelmed by it on their first experience, because of their great weakness. "My heart is broken within me, all my bones tremble. I am become as a drunken man and as a man full of wine, at the presence of the Lord and at the presence of His holy words."<sup>282</sup> But the shock once sustained proves rich in con-

<sup>277</sup> Osee 11:8-9.

<sup>278</sup> "The goodness and kindness of God our Savior appeared" (Titus 3:4).

<sup>279</sup> Exod. 34:6.

<sup>280</sup> Lev. 20:8.

<sup>281</sup> Ps. 113:9.

<sup>282</sup> Jer. 23:9.

sequences. "I Daniel was much troubled with my thoughts, and my countenance was changed in me; but I kept the word in my heart. . . . And I Daniel languished, and was sick for some days; and when I was risen up, . . . I was astonished at the vision, and there was none that could interpret it." <sup>283</sup>

Generally it is a prelude to more interior experiences. Thus, in the vision of Isaias, scarcely had he contemplated in great fear the terrifying and dazzling appearance of divine holiness than he began to feel this holiness acting within him to purify him. "And one of the seraphims flew to me, and in his hand was a live coal, which he had taken with the tongs off the altar. And he touched my mouth, and said: Behold this hath touched thy lips, and thy iniquities shall be taken away, and thy sin shall be cleansed." <sup>284</sup>

Such purification is often accompanied and prolonged by a process of illumination and of spiritualization.

And I will pour upon you clean water, and you shall be cleansed from all your filthiness, and I will cleanse you from all your idols. And I will give you a new heart, and put a new spirit within you; and I will take away the stony heart out of your flesh, and will give you a heart of flesh. And I will put My spirit in the midst of you; and I will cause you to walk in My commandments, and to keep My judgments, and do them. And you shall dwell in the land which I gave to your fathers, and you shall be My people, and I will be your God.<sup>285</sup>

When a man is infused with divine holiness, he receives not only light but also love, wonderfully sympathetic and merciful love, which comforts him by its sweet presence.

<sup>283</sup> Dan. 7:28; 8:27.    <sup>284</sup> Isa. 6:6-7.    <sup>285</sup> Ezech. 36:25-28.

"The Lord is merciful and just, and our God sheweth mercy. The Lord is the keeper of little ones. I was humbled, and He delivered me. Turn, O my soul, into thy rest, for the Lord hath been bountiful to thee." <sup>286</sup> Some men, on receiving this revelation of God's holiness, felt transformed by it, raised above themselves. "For Thou art my lamp, O Lord; and Thou, O Lord, wilt enlighten my darkness. . . . God, His way is immaculate, the word of the Lord is tried by fire; He is the shield of all that trust in Him. . . . Making my feet like the feet of harts, and setting me upon my high places. He teacheth my hands to war and maketh my arms like a bow of brass. Thou hast given me the shield of my salvation, and Thy mildness hath multiplied me." <sup>287</sup>

The more this holiness is communicated to men, the better they realize that it is ineffable and incomprehensible. Then their eyes open to gaze upon the unfathomable depths of divine splendor.

He hath made all things good in their time and hath delivered the world to their consideration, so that man cannot find out the work which God hath made from the beginning to the end.<sup>288</sup>

And hardly do we guess aright at things that are upon earth; and with labor do we find the things that are before us. But the things that are in heaven, who shall search out? <sup>289</sup>

When a man hath done, then shall he begin; and when he leaveth off, he shall be at a loss.<sup>290</sup>

Feeling helpless before the divine holiness, man would doubtless prefer to say nothing, to take refuge in silence, which, in a way, is the only praise befitting its divine object.

<sup>286</sup> Ps. 114:5-7.    <sup>287</sup> II Kings 22:29-36.    <sup>288</sup> Eccles. 3:11.  
<sup>289</sup> Wisd. 9:16.    <sup>290</sup> Ecclus. 18:6.



St. Jerome had translated Psalm 64:2 as: "Silence is Thy praise." St. Augustine asked: "What can be said in speaking of You? And yet woe to those who speak not of You, for in speaking of all else they are mute."<sup>291</sup> But Ecclesiasticus urges us, nevertheless, to praise the divine glory and holiness. "Blessing the Lord, exalt Him as much as you can, for He is above all praise. When you exalt Him put forth all your strength, and be not weary; for you can never go far enough. Who shall see Him, and declare Him? and who shall magnify Him as He is from the beginning?"<sup>292</sup>

Such, then, is the Old Testament view of God's sanctity: an intimate union of transcendence and mercy which the inspired writers knew profoundly and praised constantly. In the sacred texts God appears just as jealous to safeguard His transcendent sanctity by remaining separated from men as He is eager to communicate that same sanctity to men. He insists that His holiness be respected; but He insists no less that it be diffused. "Hallowed be Thy name, Thy kingdom come." Christians repeatedly ask that God's name be hallowed in them, that His kingdom come to them. They should realize more clearly that by these words that extol God's sanctity, they glorify His transcendence and at the same time they beg for an outpouring of divine mercy upon themselves and upon the whole world.

And yet how desirable it is that we should conform to this process of divine sanctification, this imprinting of love's hot seal upon our souls! "In My holy mountain, . . . they shall please Me, and there will I require your firstfruits, and the chief of your tithes with all your sanctifications. I will

<sup>291</sup> St. Augustine: *Confessions*, I, chap. 4, 4.

<sup>292</sup> Ecclus. 43:33-35.

accept of you for an odor of sweetness . . . and I will be sanctified in you in the sight of the nations."<sup>293</sup>

By "revealing the outlines and portraying the lineaments of the Creator,"<sup>294</sup> the Bible has advanced the knowledge of God. But the supreme light which God has given about His nature in the Old Testament is unquestionably the revelation of His holiness. For sanctity combines all the divine perfections in a perfectly woven fabric of ineffable value. A man who is sanctified by God receives and knows the living unity and mysterious splendor of the divine Being. "The voice of His word [was] like the voice of a multitude."<sup>295</sup> This communication is intimate and profound, because wholly interior. Only as he experiences the effects of this holiness upon himself, does man gradually discover its full worth. Moreover, such notions as omnipotence, kingship and spirituality, when applied to God even by analogy, provide a purely human mode of knowledge, but holiness acting within us confers knowledge that is not only superior but of a totally different order. The notion of sanctity could not be based on purely human elements for man does not possess the principle of sanctity in himself. He becomes conscious of this reality only to the extent that God communicates it to him. But this holiness is not distinct from God Himself. Therefore, by making men "partakers of the divine nature,"<sup>296</sup> by allowing them to discover by experience what He is, God reveals His sanctity to them. But inevitably this "experience of God" overflows our capacity for knowl-

<sup>293</sup> Ezech. 20:40-41.

<sup>294</sup> From Pius XII's address to the Pontifical Academy of Sciences, November 22, 1951.

<sup>295</sup> Dan. 10:6. <sup>296</sup> II Pet. 1:4.

edge and constantly exceeds the laws of our minds. For in the living revelation which is sanctity, men perceive God as the being in whom apparently contradictory attributes co-exist and function: distance and nearness, transcendence and mercy, distinction and unity. They also discover that justice and kindness, power and gentleness reinforce each other and that these contrasts form the glory of divine holiness.

Moses is famous because he bore witness to the divine transcendence on Mount Horeb, but even more because he related his intimate experience of divine holiness. In the presence of the thrice holy God he was filled with ecstasy. The account in the Book of Exodus gives the impression of a truly ineffable experience. "And when the Lord was come down in a cloud, Moses stood with Him, calling upon the name of the Lord. And when He passed before him, he said: O the Lord, the Lord God, merciful and gracious, patient and of much compassion, and true, who keepest mercy unto thousands; who takest away iniquity, and wickedness, and sin."<sup>297</sup>

The Bible has recorded other similar experiences, but because each was strictly personal, each was translated in a different way. Tobias, who merited interior illumination by his heroic acceptance of blindness, exclaimed: "Thou art just, O Lord, and all Thy judgments are just, and all Thy ways mercy, and truth, and judgment."<sup>298</sup> Jonathan of the Machabees witnessed a striking miracle which elicited a prayer of adoration and thanksgiving from him and from the whole people assembled in the holy place. "O Lord God, Creator of all things, dreadful and strong, just and merciful,

<sup>297</sup> Exod. 34:5-7.      <sup>298</sup> Tob. 3:2.

who alone art the good king, who alone art gracious, who alone art just, and almighty, and eternal, . . . who didst choose the fathers and didst sanctify them, receive the sacrifice for all Thy people Israel, and preserve Thy own portion, and sanctify it. . . . Establish Thy people in Thy holy place, as Moses hath spoken."<sup>299</sup>

In the mystery of His holiness God reveals Himself as He is.<sup>300</sup> That is why man receives the revelation from above only as an illumination and as a fully gratuitous gift. This illumination reveals that the peak and the source of the divine perfections is an overflowing fullness, a limitless power of expansion, an infinite need to give and to share. God's holiness resembles both a refuge and a peak: a refuge where God's nature and God's secret can be glimpsed; a peak from which flow all the streams of perfection contained in its hidden springs. Man gradually perceives these perfections in the divine holiness, just as he perceives in the prism the colors which make up the light of the sun. To learn God's perfections by slow progress is not at all the same as to have them revealed by the light of His holiness. A few men of the Old Testament received such a revelation. Particularly the Psalmist saw truth and mercy, light and love, glowing in the heart of God's holiness. "All the ways of the Lord are mercy and truth."<sup>301</sup> "Withhold not Thou, O Lord, Thy tender mercies from me; Thy mercy and Thy truth have

<sup>299</sup> II Mach. 1:24-29.

<sup>300</sup> "Dearly beloved, we are now the sons of God; and it hath not yet appeared what we shall be. We know, that when He shall appear, we shall be like to Him, because we shall see Him as He is. And everyone that hath this hope in Him, sanctifieth himself, as He also is holy" (I John 3:2-3).

<sup>301</sup> Ps. 24:10.

always upheld me.”<sup>302</sup> “Send forth Thy light and Thy truth; they have conducted me and brought me unto Thy holy hill and into Thy tabernacle.”<sup>303</sup>

God’s holy words spring from truth. “The beginning of Thy words is truth.”<sup>304</sup> The word once uttered takes root, yields sheaves of dazzling light. “The declaration of Thy words giveth light. . . . Thy word is a lamp to my feet and a light to my paths.”<sup>305</sup>

The Old Testament contained the seeds of the revelation of divine holiness; “the holy one of Israel,” who was to come here below as “light of the world” would manifest that sanctity in His own person. That light, whose brilliance was veiled,<sup>306</sup> would be revealed to men as a light of love. In revealing His love to men, God was not revealing a new perfection. He was merely leading them to the wellspring from which flowed all His glory.

Thus, divine holiness consists substantially of light and love. God’s perfection lies in the fact that for Him to be what He is in the truth and permanence of His being suffices to illuminate and transform all things. To communicate His holiness God radiates the light of His glory upon a soul and marks it with the “figure of his substance.”<sup>307</sup> By divine action “the image of the invisible God”<sup>308</sup> is then stamped upon the soul. Doubtless that is why the Old Testament considers the notion of fidelity as eminently characteristic of God’s action and holiness. *Holy God; Faithful God:* these two expressions are closely connected in meaning—prob-

<sup>302</sup> Ps. 39:12.    <sup>303</sup> Ps. 42:3.    <sup>304</sup> Ps. 118:160.

<sup>305</sup> Ps. 118:130, 105.

<sup>306</sup> “He came unto His own, and His own received Him not” (John 1:11).

<sup>307</sup> Heb. 1:3.    <sup>308</sup> Col. 1:15.

ably because the word *fidelity* includes the ideas of truth, of unfailing light and of ever active love. Fidelity is the movement by which God constantly gives Himself to His creatures. When the bright rays of His truth and love shine mercifully upon them, they gradually become clothed in the raiment of sanctity. God continually affirms this fidelity. The Psalmist and the prophets keep repeating: “God is faithful.” They prove it by referring to personal experience and by interpreting the whole history of Israel. “The Lord is faithful in all His words and holy in all His works.”<sup>309</sup> “The mercies of the Lord I will sing forever. I will show forth Thy truth with my mouth to generation and generation. For Thou hast said: Mercy shall be built up forever in the heavens; Thy truth shall be prepared in them. . . . The heavens shall confess Thy wonders, O Lord; and Thy truth in the church of the saints. . . . O Lord God of hosts, who is like to Thee? Thou art mighty, O Lord, and Thy truth is round about Thee.”<sup>310</sup>

Unassailable confidence in God’s fidelity is based upon the promises and the blood of the covenant.

He hath remembered His covenant forever; the word which He commanded to a thousand generations.<sup>311</sup>

The Lord is sweet, His mercy endureth forever, and His truth to generation and generation.<sup>312</sup>

It is good to give praise to the Lord and to sing to Thy name, O most High. To show forth Thy mercy in the morning, and Thy truth in the night.<sup>313</sup>

The mercy of the Lord is from eternity and unto eternity upon them that fear Him; and His justice unto children’s children, to such as keep His covenant.<sup>314</sup>

<sup>309</sup> Ps. 144:13.    <sup>310</sup> Ps. 88:1–3, 6, 9.    <sup>311</sup> Ps. 104:8.

<sup>312</sup> Ps. 99:5.    <sup>313</sup> Ps. 91:1–2.    <sup>314</sup> Ps. 102:17–18.

It is evident that the light and love of divine sanctity shine less brightly and clearly in the Old Testament than in the New Testament, where the fullness of revelation would come with Christ. But the entire Old Testament displays the effects of this sanctity infinitely eager to communicate itself and wonderfully faithful. Should it be asked why fidelity is the most eloquent feature of divine holiness, it suffices to answer that although it is shown by the reconciliation and reunion of the Creator and His creatures in the context of history, yet it denotes something even greater, transcending the realm of time: the unchanging and endless reality of love. Even human fidelity indicated a constant, intense and active relationship of one person to another. With God, fidelity is nothing less than the very life of divine love. God could not be different in His work from what He is in Himself. His fidelity to us expresses His loving and constant effort to enlighten us, to shape us to His resemblance, to communicate His own sanctity by drawing us to the heart of His own being. Thus, by His fidelity—touching proof of His love—God imbues us with something of His ineffable holiness; He allows us to explore the inner depths of mystery in Him.<sup>315</sup> Although God's perfection is transcendent, yet He wills to communicate divine sanctity to men. "Be holy," He keeps repeating to them. Does the Bible present any examples in which this holiness—or even a faint image of it—is attained by men?

Although the existence of authentic saints in the Old Testament cannot be doubted,<sup>316</sup> their sanctity is not, as a

<sup>315</sup> "God is faithful; by whom you are called unto the fellowship of His Son Jesus Christ" (I Cor. 1:9).

<sup>316</sup> The grace of Christ is the source of all sanctification. "For

rule, proposed as an example. The term *saint*, in the sense we give it now, is scarcely used there. The reason is that the Old Testament had to place all possible emphasis upon the unique fount of all holiness: on the one and only "saint," God Himself. However privileged, purified or "sanctified" a creature may be, he always risks distorting or betraying divine holiness which is too bright for his gaze and too lofty for his reach. Creatures are too weak and imperfect to reflect God's sanctity; their brief existence is too puny a mirror to catch the rays of His light. True, the word *holy* is often applied to the people of Israel, ("Thou art a holy people to the Lord thy God"),<sup>317</sup> but it is clear that this refers to their being set apart from others, to their belonging to God. It does not indicate holiness possessed by them as their own privilege.

Is there here below no image or true reflection of divine holiness? The Bible does not seem to find any here on earth, but rather leaps across the centuries to bring us to "new heavens and a new earth,"<sup>318</sup> that is, the new Jerusalem which Yahweh will create. There at last is perceived the genuine reflection of divine holiness. Only the holy city, the city of God, changeless, universal and permanent will reflect the splendor of divine holiness in a true and constant way. It will give glory to God. The prophets yearned for this new Jerusalem. They were well aware why it would be holy: because God would dwell there. "For the Lord hath chosen Sion; He hath chosen it for His dwelling. This is My rest forever and ever; here will I dwell, for I have chosen it."<sup>319</sup>

both He that sanctifieth, and they who are sanctified, are all of one" (Heb. 2:11).

<sup>317</sup> Deut. 7:6; 14:2, 21. <sup>318</sup> Isa. 65:17. <sup>319</sup> Ps. 131:13-14.

“And I will dwell in the midst of thee.”<sup>320</sup> “And all . . . shall call thee the city of the Lord, the Sion of the holy one of Israel.”<sup>321</sup>

The holy temple of Jerusalem on top of the mountain—“a mountain in which God is well pleased to dwell”<sup>322</sup>—was only an image of the heavenly city. “O Jerusalem: . . . the glory of the Lord is risen upon thee.”<sup>323</sup> “Jerusalem is built as a city, which is compact together.”<sup>324</sup> Throughout the ages and from all points of the universe God assembles His chosen ones and in His Church He will build the heavenly Jerusalem, the holy assembly of Israel, a living and immortal sanctuary. “The name of the city from that day, ‘The Lord is there.’”<sup>325</sup> “Jerusalem shall be called the city of truth, and the mountain of the Lord of hosts, the sanctified mountain.”<sup>326</sup>

The city will reflect the divine perfections of peace, purity, and happiness. “They shall not hurt nor kill in all My holy mountain, saith the Lord.”<sup>327</sup> God Himself ultimately will give a name to this holy city: “For thy name shall be named to thee by God forever; the peace of justice and honor of piety.”<sup>328</sup>

The Old Testament keeps repeating the word *holy* as the only fitting praise of the infinite perfections of God. The God of Israel is holy: “They shall lean upon the Lord, the holy one of Israel, in truth.”<sup>329</sup> He who will come as the light and the salvation of all nations is also holy: “Thy Redeemer, the holy one of Israel.”<sup>330</sup> Holy too is the Spirit which will

<sup>320</sup> Zach. 2:11.      <sup>321</sup> Isa. 60:14.      <sup>322</sup> Ps. 67:17.

<sup>323</sup> Isa. 60:1.      <sup>324</sup> Ps. 121:3.      <sup>325</sup> Ezech. 48:35.

<sup>326</sup> Zach. 8:3.      <sup>327</sup> Isa. 65:25.      <sup>328</sup> Bar. 5:4.

<sup>329</sup> Isa. 10:20.      <sup>330</sup> Isa. 41:14.

be poured forth upon the world: “And who shall know Thy thought, . . . except Thou send Thy Holy Spirit from above.”<sup>331</sup>

God’s sanctity is changeless, infinite, eternal: “Thou art always the selfsame and Thy years shall not fail.”<sup>332</sup> His holiness is supremely active and effective. “From eternity and to eternity thou art God.”<sup>333</sup> Though His holiness infinitely transcends all human concepts, God invites men of good will to share it: “I will be sanctified in those who approach to Me.”<sup>334</sup> The accumulation of ages and the agelessness of eternity will not suffice to acclaim adequately this sanctity which is the peak of divine revelation in the Old Testament: “Holy, holy, holy, the Lord God of hosts.”<sup>335</sup>

<sup>331</sup> Wisd. 9:17.      <sup>332</sup> Ps. 101:28.      <sup>333</sup> Ps. 89:2.

<sup>334</sup> Lev. 10:3.      <sup>335</sup> Isa. 6:3.

## Chapter 3

# THE SOUL

### YEARNING FOR GOD

For we know that every creature groaneth and travaileth in pain, even till now.<sup>1</sup>

Now the God of hope fill you with all joy and peace in believing; that you may abound in hope, and in the power of the Holy Ghost.<sup>2</sup>

For in this also we groan, desiring to be clothed upon with our habitation that is from heaven.<sup>3</sup>

And they cried to the Lord in their tribulation; and He delivered them out of their distress.<sup>4</sup>

In the preceding pages we have seen how Holy Scripture presented for our belief the great data on the reality of God in the way He willed to make the revelation. The dazzling light focused upon His transcendence and His infinite perfections might well have overpowered us. Though we are capable of perceiving this light, as we were designed with a

<sup>1</sup> Rom. 8:22.    <sup>2</sup> Rom. 15:13.    <sup>3</sup> II Cor. 5:2.

<sup>4</sup> Ps. 106:6.

view to divine knowledge, yet we are extremely limited in natural capacity, as well as being wounded and enslaved by the appeal of the senses. Yet this same light reveals also a divine plan imbued with love and kindness. Far from abandoning men to their wretched condition, God repeatedly reveals to them, in ways adapted to their state, something of His ineffable mystery. He calls them to the knowledge and love of Himself, to an awareness of a supernatural vocation which prevails in spite of all obstacles.

This divine guidance corresponds to an interior aspiration which is deeply rooted in the soul. There is a yearning within us, a thirst for truth, beauty, justice and love, a thirst which no human satisfaction can quench. It is an aching anxiety for those who ignore the wellspring of living water. The thirst becomes all the more intense in souls that have once sipped the waters, but are then prevented from satisfying their increased desires because of various entanglements and fundamental weakness.

St. Paul tells us that the Spirit Himself cries out and groans within us. The same Spirit spoke to us hitherto in the majestic voice of the God of Genesis, the God of Abraham, the patriarchs and Moses. From the sad captivity of our soul the Spirit utters an irresistible appeal to Him whose image we mysteriously reflect. The Spirit seeks us even more eagerly than we seek Him, calling us by the very pangs of thirst which are felt by even the most fallen natures. The Spirit longs to be *our* God, for He created us to His image and resemblance, destined us for infinite happiness. "Thou hast made us for Thyself, O God, and our hearts are restless until they rest in Thee."<sup>5</sup>

<sup>5</sup> St. Augustine states also (*De Trinitate* I, 8) that the contempla-

If the soul trusts this Spirit which throbs within and breathes forth in prayer, it will return spontaneously to its divine fountainhead. The inner impulse, which had led it to seek its last end outside itself, will guide it to the trysting place. God comes and truly lives within us, more intimately than our own self within us. As true object of our faculties, He arouses them so that they can receive Him in an infinitely simple relationship within the grasp of each of us. This intimate and eminently personal impulse is prayer.

Because prayer contains the object of its search, although only as a promise, this object is already granted. God is given to us by the hope which raises us toward Him. The soul discovers traces of Him on every path, is conscious of being surrounded by Him, longs to surrender to Him in perfect trust.

If we seek an echo of this inner drama experienced by all souls, though each is called by its own name, if we seek its expression in a chant we ourselves may gladly intone, we can find it in the Psalms, a long, tender lament with overtones of absolute, unflagging trust. This chant has resounded throughout the ages, a music which accompanies each stage of the slow, brief marching of our mortal lives toward eternal life. We need only let our own prayer sing in the Psalmist's text which give us indomitable hope of the good to which our soul aspires through God's loving will.

tion of God is promised as the final end of all our actions and the eternal perfection of all our joys. But this contemplation will be perfect only in the future life, when we shall see God face to face and thus reach perfect happiness. Here below we attain only an imperfect contemplation of divine truth, "through a glass in a dark manner" (I Cor. 13:12). Cf. *Summa theol.*, IIa, IIae, q. 180, art. 4.

My soul hath desired Thee in the night; yea, and with my spirit within me in the morning early I will watch to Thee.<sup>6</sup>

And they cried to the Lord in their tribulation; and He delivered them out of their distresses.<sup>7</sup>

And hope confoundeth not; because the charity of God is poured forth in our hearts, by the Holy Ghost, who is given to us.<sup>8</sup>

The inner thirst for God is nothing less than a proof of the divine love which tends to give itself while allowing the soul to take the initiative by receiving love freely. Man, conscious of his utter poverty, is invited to turn toward God. "Thou sayest: I am rich, and made wealthy, and have need of nothing; and knowest not that thou art wretched, and miserable, and poor, and blind, and naked."<sup>9</sup> The soul which reaches the point of realizing its own poverty, which then becomes increasingly conscious of it, which finds no sufficiency and considers itself without resources is already tending toward fulfillment, by its very knowledge of its own worthlessness, by its soft and tender lament. In its consciousness of an absence it finds a promise of help from above which will answer its expectations by the gifts of freedom and happiness.

"Blessed are the poor." To desire much it is necessary to have nothing and to realize it. "The soul obtains from Him as much as it hopes for from Him."<sup>10</sup> "God would never inspire me with desires which cannot be realized."<sup>11</sup> Our

<sup>6</sup> Isa. 26:9.    <sup>7</sup> Ps. 106:6.    <sup>8</sup> Rom. 5:5.

<sup>9</sup> Apoc. 3:17.

<sup>10</sup> St. John of the Cross, *op. cit.* I, p. 441.

<sup>11</sup> St. Thérèse of the Child Jesus, *The Story of a Soul*.

greatest desire, our deepest desire, is the desire for the reality of God Himself. This desire is from God, who empties the soul in order to fill it completely.<sup>12</sup> "O God, my God, to Thee do I watch at break of day. For Thee my soul hath thirsted; for Thee my flesh, O how many ways! In a desert land, and where there is no way, and no water; so in the sanctuary have I come before Thee, to see Thy power and Thy glory. For Thy mercy is better than lives; Thee my lips shall praise. . . . If I have remembered Thee upon my bed, I will meditate on Thee in the morning; because Thou hast been my helper."<sup>13</sup>

But before this cry is uttered, before man turns to God as the one true wellspring, his desires must be purified. Man, whose heart was made for the infinite, feels a burning thirst in the desert of life. "They marched three days through the wilderness and found no water."<sup>14</sup> What tremendous dangers are encountered on the journey—dangers of reaching for the first water that is found, of greedily seeking material satisfactions, of being deceived by mirages or, worse yet, of drinking at poisoned wells. Scripture tells us that when the Israelites reached the water hole of Mara, they rushed eagerly to the spring, for they were exhausted by the long march. But alas, "they could not drink the waters of Mara, because they were bitter; whereupon he gave a name also agreeable to the place, calling it Mara, that is, bitterness."<sup>15</sup>

They were cruelly disappointed. The water could not quench their thirst and brought them death rather than re-

<sup>12</sup> "If thou didst know the gift of God, and who He is that saith to thee: Give me to drink, thou perhaps wouldst have asked of Him, and He would have given thee living water" (John 4:10).

<sup>13</sup> Ps. 62:1-4, 7-8. <sup>14</sup> Exod. 15:22. <sup>15</sup> Exod. 15:23-24.

lief; apt symbol of the unhealthy waters where man often moistened his lips! God was striving to arouse man's desire for living waters but saw him turn away voluntarily. "For My people have done two evils. They have forsaken Me, the fountain of living water, and have digged to themselves cisterns, broken cisterns, that can hold no water."<sup>16</sup> If men would only return to the true wellspring, their thirst for the infinite would be satisfied. "All you that thirst, come to the waters; and you that have no money make haste."<sup>17</sup> When shall men repeat, from the depths of their own experience, these inspired words: "For with Thee is the fountain of life."<sup>18</sup> When shall they repeat with the Psalmist, realizing that nothing can take God's place: "As the hart panteth after the fountains of water; so my soul panteth after Thee, O God. My soul hath thirsted after the strong living God; when shall I come and appear before the face of God?"<sup>19</sup>

Indeed nothing can substitute for God. As long as the soul has not found Him or recovered Him, its earthly food leaves it incurably empty and hungry. It "refuses to be comforted."<sup>20</sup> Knowing that help can come from God alone, the soul lets nothing impair its indefectible hope. The dangers surrounding it and the enemies seeking its destruction constitute the first and most urgent motive of its appeal to God.

I cried to the Lord with my voice; with my voice I made supplication to the Lord. In His sight I pour out my prayer, and before Him I declare my trouble. When my spirit failed me, then Thou knewest my paths. In this way wherein I walked, they have hidden a snare for me. I looked on my right hand, and beheld, and there was no one that would know me. Flight hath

<sup>16</sup> Jer. 2:13. <sup>17</sup> Isa. 55:1. <sup>18</sup> Ps. 35:10.

<sup>19</sup> Ps. 41:1-2. <sup>20</sup> Ps. 76:3.



failed me; and there is no one that hath regard to my soul. I cried to Thee, O Lord; I said: Thou art my hope, my portion in the land of the living. Attend to my supplication, for I am brought very low. Deliver me from my persecutors, for they are stronger than I. Bring my soul out of prison, that I may praise Thy name; the just wait for me until Thou reward me.<sup>21</sup>

But while the soul appeals, God molds it to His desires. He teaches it gradually to ask less for help from exterior dangers and enemies, more for inner perfection. He makes it desire and request the spirit of justice, of truth, of uprightness, in a word, conformity to the divine will.

Hear, O Lord, my prayer; give ear to my supplication in Thy truth; hear me in Thy justice. And enter not into judgment with Thy servant; for in Thy sight no man living shall be justified. For the enemy hath persecuted my soul; he hath brought down my life to the earth. He hath made me to dwell in darkness as those that have been dead of old; and my spirit is in anguish within me; my heart within me is troubled. I remembered the days of old, I meditated on all Thy works; I meditated upon the works of Thy hands. I stretched forth my hands to Thee; my soul is as earth without water unto Thee. Hear me speedily, O Lord; my spirit hath fainted away. Turn not away Thy face from me, lest I be like unto them that go down into the pit. Cause me to hear Thy mercy in the morning, for in Thee have I hoped. Make the way known to me, wherein I should walk, for I have lifted up my soul to Thee. Deliver me from my enemies, O Lord, to Thee have I fled; teach me to do Thy will, for Thou art my God. Thy good spirit shall lead me into the right land; for Thy name's sake, O Lord, Thou wilt quicken me in Thy justice. Thou wilt bring my soul out of trouble; and in Thy mercy Thou wilt destroy my enemies.<sup>22</sup>

<sup>21</sup> Ps. 141.<sup>22</sup> Ps. 142.

Little by little the soul becomes conscious of a danger more fearful than external threats. Though it is interior, present within itself, yet at first it was not perceived. This danger stems from its own faults, its innumerable acts of rebellion which have kept it separated from God. "Show, O Lord, Thy ways to me and teach me Thy paths. Direct me in Thy truth and teach me, for Thou art God my Savior, and on Thee have I waited all the day long. Remember, O Lord, Thy bowels of compassion and Thy mercies that are from the beginning of the world. The sins of my youth and my ignorances, do not remember. According to Thy mercy remember Thou me; for Thy goodness' sake, O Lord."<sup>23</sup>

Soon, under the inspiration of divine light, the soul glimpses and discovers that underlying its sins is its *state* of sin. God brings it down to the depths of its wretchedness. Echoing from the abyss, its appeal will reverberate all the better.

Out of the depths I have cried to Thee, O Lord; Lord hear my voice. Let Thy ears be attentive to the voice of my supplication. If Thou, O Lord, wilt mark iniquities, Lord, who shall stand it. For with Thee there is merciful forgiveness; and by reason of Thy law, I have waited for Thee, O Lord. My soul hath relied on His word; my soul hath hoped in the Lord. From the morning watch even until night, let Israel hope in the Lord. Because with the Lord there is mercy, and with Him plentiful redemption. And He shall redeem Israel from all its iniquities.<sup>24</sup>

No one has surpassed David in knowledge of the misery of sinful man and of the mercy of God.

<sup>23</sup> Ps. 24:4-7.<sup>24</sup> Ps. 129.

Have mercy on me, O God, according to Thy great mercy. And according to the multitude of Thy tender mercies blot out my iniquity. Wash me yet more from my iniquity, and cleanse me from my sin. For I know my iniquity, and my sin is always before me. To Thee only have I sinned, and have done evil before Thee; that Thou mayest be justified in Thy words, and mayest overcome when Thou art judged. For behold I was conceived in iniquities, and in sins did my mother conceive me. For behold Thou hast loved truth; the uncertain and hidden things of Thy wisdom Thou hast made manifest to me. Thou shalt sprinkle me with hyssop, and I shall be cleansed; Thou shalt wash me, and I shall be made whiter than snow. To my hearing Thou shalt give joy and gladness; and the bones that have been humbled shall rejoice. Turn away Thy face from my sins, and blot out all my iniquities. Create a clean heart in me, O God, and renew a right spirit within my bowels. Cast me not away from Thy face; and take not Thy holy spirit from me.<sup>25</sup>

With a yet keener sense of its destitution and a deeper humility the soul utters its anguished cry to God. "Be pleased, O Lord, to deliver me; look down, O Lord, to help me. . . . I am a beggar and poor; the Lord is careful for me. Thou art my helper and my protector; O my God, be not slack."<sup>26</sup> The sinner even dares to tell God that His glory is at stake in the matter of responding to the appeal addressed to Him. Even faced with God's silence, the soul straightway intones its gratitude for the help that is sure to come. "Consider, and hear me, O Lord my God. Enlighten my eyes that I never sleep in death; lest at any time my enemy say: I have prevailed against Him. They that trouble me will rejoice when I am moved; but I have trusted in Thy mercy. My

<sup>25</sup> Ps. 50:1-13.      <sup>26</sup> Ps. 39:14, 18.

heart shall rejoice in Thy salvation; I will sing to the Lord, who giveth me good things; yea I will sing to the name of the Lord the most high."<sup>27</sup>

### SELF-ABASEMENT

But God has not yet answered man's cry of appeal. He knows, of course, better than the soul itself, all its distress, its needs, its destitution. But He wants it to gain a keener consciousness of its poverty and become more and more humble. "Behold you are of nothing, and your work of that which hath no being."<sup>28</sup> "Be afflicted, and mourn, and weep. . . . Be humbled in the sight of the Lord and He will exalt you."<sup>29</sup>

"God resists the proud"<sup>30</sup> but reveals Himself to the hungry and thirsty, the poor and humble. God strives to form this true humility. Neither surrounding dangers nor the knowledge of the miserable state in which sin has left man can suffice to give it to him. The terrible and often subtle temptation to be self-sufficient and to set himself up as a god still persists. Man must reach the point of knowing that he is nothing. "Behold, you are of nothing," God had said through the prophet Isaias.<sup>31</sup> Others had already experienced this, especially the Psalmist, whose poems prove how dreadfully hard and painful the experience was. We feel also that only when man is dizzy before the yawning abyss of his own misery and nothingness, only when he reaches the very threshold of despair, does he acquire the proper dispositions to turn to God as his only strength and

<sup>27</sup> Ps. 12:4-6.      <sup>28</sup> Isa. 41:24.      <sup>29</sup> Jas. 4:9-10.

<sup>30</sup> Jas. 4:6.      <sup>31</sup> Isa. 41:24.

his unique support. "The Lord is nigh unto all them that call upon Him" <sup>32</sup> "with a contrite and humbled heart." <sup>33</sup> God then stoops toward them, opens the gates of hope and guides them on the path.<sup>34</sup>

Encountering God's silence and the long delay in its liberation, the soul is bewildered by the view of surrounding dangers and even more by the awareness of its faults and wretchedness. It finally reaches the point of wondering: "What am I before God?" "Lord, what is man, that Thou art made known to him? Or the son of man, that Thou makest account of him? Man is like to vanity; his days pass away like a shadow." <sup>35</sup>

In vain does he remember the kingship God entrusted to him at the time of creation; this power only makes him realize his weakness all the more keenly. "Thou hast made him a little less than the angels, Thou hast crowned him with glory and honor and hast set him over the works of Thy hands. Thou hast subjected all things under his feet, all sheep and oxen, moreover the beasts also of the fields. The birds of the air, and the fishes of the sea, that pass through the paths of the sea." <sup>36</sup> But this greatness passes away rapidly and is constantly threatened. "I have said: You are

<sup>32</sup> Ps. 144:18.    <sup>33</sup> Ps. 50:19.

<sup>34</sup> We see in the Gospel how many trials God sends His servants in order to cut furrows of humility in their souls. St. Peter is an outstanding example.

<sup>35</sup> Ps. 143:3-4.

<sup>36</sup> Ps. 8:6-9. The literal sense of the psalm applies to man in general and is relevant here. In the Epistle to the Hebrews the author would interpret it in relation to Christ: "But we see Jesus, who was made a little lower than the angels, for the suffering of death, crowned with glory and honor" (Heb. 2:9).

gods <sup>37</sup> and all of you the sons of the Most High. But you like men shall die, and shall fall like one of the princes." <sup>38</sup>

Man truly passes away swiftly as a shadow. He sinks into silence, abashed by the vanity, the vanishing, the collapse of all things.

I was dumb and was humbled, and kept silence from good things; and my sorrow was renewed. My heart grew hot within me, and in my meditation a fire shall flame out. I spoke with my tongue: O Lord, make me know my end. And what is the number of my days, that I may know what is wanting to me. Behold Thou hast made my days measurable, and my substance is as nothing before thee. And indeed all things are vanity, every man living. Surely man passeth as an image; yea, and he is disquieted in vain. He storeth up, and he knoweth not for whom he shall gather these things. And now, what is my hope? Is it not the Lord? And my substance is with Thee. . . . I was dumb and I opened not my mouth, because Thou hast done it. . . . Thou hast corrected man for iniquity. And Thou hast made his soul to waste away like a spider; surely in vain is any man disquieted. . . . Be not silent, for I am a stranger with Thee, and a sojourner as all my fathers were. O forgive me, that I may be refreshed, before I go hence and be no more.<sup>39</sup>

For an instant man thinks of fleeing, of going into hiding, hoping thus to escape his sad lot. But that is folly, for none can escape from God.

Lord, Thou hast proved me and known me; Thou hast known my sitting down and my rising up. Thou hast understood my thoughts afar off; my path and my line Thou hast searched out. And Thou hast foreseen all my ways, for there is no speech

<sup>37</sup> Cf. John 10:35.    <sup>38</sup> Ps. 81:6-7.    <sup>39</sup> Ps. 38:3-14.

in my tongue. Behold, O Lord, Thou hast known all things, the last and those of old; Thou hast formed me and hast laid Thy hand upon me. Thy knowledge is become wonderful to me; it is high, and I cannot reach to it. Whither shall I go from Thy spirit? or whither shall I flee from Thy face? If I ascend into heaven, Thou art there; if I descend into hell, Thou art present. If I take my wings early in the morning, and dwell in the uttermost parts of the sea, even there also shall Thy hand lead me; and Thy right hand shall hold me. And I said: Perhaps darkness shall cover me, and night shall be my light in my pleasures. But darkness shall not be dark to Thee, and night shall be light as the day. . . . For Thou hast possessed my reins; Thou hast protected me from my mother's womb. . . . Thy eyes did see my imperfect being, and in Thy book all shall be written; days shall be formed, and no one in them. But to me, Thy friends, O God, are made exceedingly honorable. . . . I rose up and am still with Thee.<sup>40</sup>

Nothing subsists beyond His ken; His servants have felt the effects of His vigilance.<sup>41</sup> Nothing is hidden from Him; man is constantly in His sight.

For the wisdom of God is great, and He is strong in power, seeing all men without ceasing.<sup>42</sup>

The Lord hath looked from heaven; He hath beheld all the sons of men. From His habitation which He hath prepared, He hath looked upon all that dwell on the earth. He who hath made

<sup>40</sup> Ps. 138:1-18.

<sup>41</sup> The same divine gaze scrutinized Nathanael (John 1:43, 51), the Samaritan woman and the woman taken in adultery (John 4; 8), the rich young man and St. Peter himself (Mark 10:21; John 1:42; Luke 22:61).

<sup>42</sup> Ecclus. 15:19.

the hearts of every one of them; who understandeth all their works.<sup>43</sup>

Their ways are always before Him, they are not hidden from His eyes. . . . And all their works are as the sun in the sight of God; and His eyes are continually upon their ways.<sup>44</sup>

He knoweth all the work of man.<sup>45</sup>

The Most High . . . will examine your works and search out your thoughts.<sup>46</sup>

The amazement of the soul confronted by this secret presence which pursues and surrounds it is represented by Agar, fleeing from Sara in the desert. "And she called the name of the Lord that spoke unto her: Thou the God who hast seen me. For she said: Verily have I seen the hinder parts of Him that seeth me."<sup>47</sup>

God, who sees everything, likewise hears every cry rising to Him from the earth. Therefore the faithful soul will lift its voice of prayer to Him—prayer which must persist even when no answer comes. "My eyes also shall be open, and My ears attentive to the prayer of him that shall pray in this place."<sup>48</sup> "I cried to the Lord with my voice; to God with my voice, and He gave ear to me."<sup>49</sup> "O my God, I shall cry by day, and Thou wilt not hear; and by night, and it shall not be reputed as folly in me."<sup>50</sup> Let the soul, then, be sure of

<sup>43</sup> Ps. 32:13-15; cf. Heb. 4:12-13: "For the word of God is living and effectual, and more piercing than any two edged sword; and reaching unto the division of the soul and the spirit, of the joints also and the marrow, and is a discerner of the thoughts and intents of the heart. Neither is there any creature invisible in His sight; but all things are naked and open to His eyes, to whom our speech is."

<sup>44</sup> Ecclus. 17:13, 16. <sup>45</sup> Ecclus. 15:20. <sup>46</sup> Wisd. 6:4.

<sup>47</sup> Gen. 16:13.

<sup>48</sup> II Par. 7:15. <sup>49</sup> Ps. 76:1. <sup>50</sup> Ps. 21:3.

having been heard and try to wait patiently, with sentiments not only of dependence or resignation, but with trust, for God does not delay to show Himself to all who hope in Him.

### SURRENDER AND TRUST

Thou art my protector and my refuge; my God, in Him will I trust.<sup>51</sup>

Whom having not seen, you love; in whom also now, though you see Him not, you believe; and believing shall rejoice with joy unspeakable and glorified; receiving the end of your faith, even the salvation of your souls.<sup>52</sup>

God shows His presence and the secrets of His all-pervading goodness to those who have entrusted themselves completely to Him. Divine providence extends to every creature, but those who are deprived of everything can count on God in a special way. Their trust will not be disappointed.<sup>53</sup> Enlightened by this spectacle and emboldened by the example of others who have trod the same path and have found life therein, the soul surrenders to its God with total trust and absolute renunciation. As it seeks out the source of its desires, the origin of the violent appeal uttered from the depths of its misery and shadows, a great peace and certainty grow within it. For the soul comes to know to whom it has entrusted itself<sup>54</sup> not merely by the witness of others but by its own inner experience. Hope, like faith, gives us its object, gives us God. We hope in God, but God

<sup>51</sup> Ps. 90:2.    <sup>52</sup> I Pet. 1:8-9.

<sup>53</sup> From the very beginning of His public life, our Lord demanded similar trust from His disciples (cf. Matt. 6:25, 34).

<sup>54</sup> "For I know whom I have believed, and I am certain that He is able to keep that which I have committed unto Him" (II Tim. 1:12).

is both the object and the goal of our desires. He fills the absence He has caused. He alone is substantially all that we are not and toward which we aspire. The realization of our utter misery is a wonderfully satisfying truth, for by the unquenchable thirst for the infinite which arises in our souls, it brings us the fiery presence of Him who contains all things. Thus, here below the reality of God is the ineffable treasure of the soul which realizes its own nothingness and perseveres in hope. As God was its beginning, He is also its end. He guides the soul and fills it in proportion as it trusts Him. All servile fear vanishes thenceforth. Love responds to hope and the soul pours forth a hymn of thanksgiving which it would wish to hear re-echoed by the whole world. All around him man perceives proof of the wisdom of divine rule and providence.<sup>55</sup>

How great are Thy works, O Lord? Thou hast made all things in wisdom; the earth is filled with Thy riches. So is this great sea, which stretcheth wide its arms; there are creeping things without number: creatures little and great. There the ships shall go. This sea dragon which Thou hast formed to play therein. All expect of Thee that Thou give them food in season. What Thou givest to them they shall gather up; when Thou openest thy hand, they shall all be filled with good. But if Thou turnest away Thy face, they shall be troubled; Thou shalt take away their breath, and they shall fail, and shall return to their dust. Thou shalt send forth Thy spirit, and they shall be created; and Thou shalt renew the face of the earth.<sup>56</sup>

<sup>55</sup> Christ was to use simple images: the birds, the flowers of the field, the life of nature used in parables designed to inspire souls to perceive the benefits conferred by divine providence, to practice filial trust and self-surrender.

<sup>56</sup> Ps. 103:24-30.

Everything testified to divine goodness; not only the material world and living creatures, but also the heart and soul of man.

Praise ye the Lord, because psalm is good; to our God be joyful and comely praise. . . . Who healeth the broken of heart and bindeth up their bruises. Who telleth the number of the stars and calleth them all by their names. . . . The Lord lifteth up the meek, and bringeth the wicked down even to the ground. . . . Who covereth the heaven with clouds and prepareth rain for the earth. Who maketh grass to grow on the mountains, and herbs for the service of men. Who giveth to beasts their food, and to the young ravens that call upon Him.<sup>57</sup>

The same idea is expressed again and developed on a deeper level in Psalm 64: "Thou hast visited the earth and hast plentifully watered it; Thou hast in many ways enriched it. . . . Thou shalt bless the crown of the year of Thy goodness."<sup>58</sup>

Elsewhere the sacred texts show that just men who have invoked God in the hour of trouble have had their prayers granted. Thus Judith, wearing a hair shirt and with her head covered with ashes, asked the Lord to crown with success the plan she had formed to save her country:

Assist, I beseech Thee, O Lord God, me a widow. . . . For Thou hast done the things of old. . . . For all Thy ways are prepared, and in Thy providence Thou hast placed Thy judgments. Look upon the camp of the Assyrians now. . . . They know not that Thou art our God, who destroyest wars from the beginning, and the Lord is Thy name. Lift up Thy arm . . . and crush their power with Thy power. . . . Bring to pass, O Lord, that his pride may be cut off with his own sword. . . . Give

<sup>57</sup> Ps. 146:1-7.    <sup>58</sup> Ps. 64:10, 12.

constancy in my mind, that I may despise him; and fortitude that I may overthrow him. For this will be a glorious monument for Thy name, when he shall fall by the hand of a woman. For Thy power, O Lord, is not in a multitude, nor is Thy pleasure in the strength of horses, nor from the beginning have the proud been acceptable to Thee; but the prayer of the humble and the meek hath always pleased Thee. O God of the heavens, creator of the waters, and Lord of the whole creation, hear me a poor wretch, making supplication to Thee and presuming of Thy mercy. Remember, O Lord, Thy covenant, and put Thou words in my mouth, and strengthen the resolution in my heart, that Thy house may continue in Thy holiness. And all nations may acknowledge that Thou art God, and there is no other besides Thee.<sup>59</sup>

Esther also obtained mercy for her people by a fervent and humble prayer to God:

And she prayed to the Lord the God of Israel saying: O my Lord, who alone art our king, help me a desolate woman, and who have no other helper but Thee. My danger is in my hands. I have heard of my father that Thou, O Lord, didst take Israel from among all nations. . . . We have sinned in Thy sight, and therefore Thou hast delivered us into the hands of our enemies. For we have worshipped their gods; Thou art just, O Lord. And now they are not content to oppress us with most hard bondage, but attributing the strength of their hands to the power of their idols, they design to change Thy promises and destroy Thy inheritance, and shut the mouths of them that praise Thee, and extinguish the glory of Thy temple and altar. . . . Remember, O Lord, and show Thyself to us in the time of our tribulation, and give me boldness, O Lord, king of gods, and of all power. Give me a well-ordered speech in my mouth in the presence of the lion. . . . Deliver us by Thy hand, and help me, who have no other helper, but Thee, O Lord, who has the knowledge of all

<sup>59</sup> Judith 9:3-19.

things. And Thou knowest that I hate the glory of the wicked. . . . Thou knowest my necessity, that I abominate the sign of my pride and glory . . . and that Thy handmaid hath never rejoiced, since I was brought hither unto this day, but in Thee, O Lord, the God of Abraham. O God, who art mighty above all, hear the voice of them, that have no other hope, and deliver us from the hand of the wicked, and deliver me from my fear.<sup>60</sup>

God hearkens not only to certain chosen souls whom Scripture cites as examples, but to all who trust in Him. All feel the effects of His goodness and mercy.

Give glory to the Lord, for He is good; for His mercy endureth forever. Let them say so that have been redeemed by the Lord, whom He hath redeemed from the hand of the enemy. . . . They wandered in a wilderness, in a place without water; they found not the way of a city for their habitation. They were hungry and thirsty; their soul fainted in them. And they cried to the Lord in their tribulation; and He delivered them out of their distresses. And He led them into the right way, that they might go to a city of habitation. . . . He broke their bonds in sunder. . . . Because He hath broken gates of brass and burst iron bars. . . . Their soul abhorred all manner of meat, and they drew nigh even to the gates of death. And they cried to the Lord in their affliction, and He delivered them out of their distresses. . . . And He helped the poor out of poverty, and made Him families like a flock of sheep. . . . Who is wise, and will keep these things, and will understand the mercies of the Lord.<sup>61</sup>

Though blasphemers, on seeing that they are not punished for their evil deeds, may declare that "there is no God,"<sup>62</sup> the just man knows that one day God will strike such sinners.

<sup>60</sup> Esther 14:3-19.    <sup>61</sup> Ps. 106.    <sup>62</sup> Ps. 52:1.

Why dost thou glory in malice, thou that art mighty in iniquity? . . . Thou hast loved malice more than goodness, and iniquity rather than to speak righteousness. Thou hast loved all the words of ruin, O deceitful tongue. Therefore will God destroy thee forever; He will pluck thee out and remove thee from thy dwelling place, and thy root out of the land of the living. The just shall see and fear, and shall laugh at him, and say: Behold the man that made not God his helper. . . . But I, as a fruitful olive tree in the house of God, have hoped in the mercy of God forever, yea forever and ever.<sup>63</sup>

The soul has but one resource: to rely upon God totally with absolute surrender and trust.

In Thee, O Lord, I have hoped, let me never be put to confusion; deliver me in Thy justice and rescue me. Incline Thy ear unto me, and save me. Be Thou unto me a God, a protector and a place of strength; that Thou mayest make me safe. . . . For Thou art my patience, O Lord; my hope, O Lord, from my youth. By Thee have I been confirmed from the womb; from my mother's womb Thou art my protector. . . . Cast me not off in the time of old age; when my strength shall fail, do not Thou forsake me. . . . But I will always hope.<sup>64</sup>

The soul rests "in the shadow of the omnipotent God."

He that dwelleth in the aid of the Most High shall abide under the protection of the God of Jacob. He shall say to the Lord: Thou art my protector and my refuge; my God, in Him will I trust. For He hath delivered me from the snare of the hunters and from the sharp word. He will overshadow thee with His shoulders, and under His wings thou shalt trust. His truth shall compass thee with a shield; thou shalt not be afraid of the terror of the night. Of the arrow that flieth in the day, of the business that

<sup>63</sup> Ps. 51.    <sup>64</sup> Ps. 70.

walketh about in the dark, of invasion, or of the noonday devil. A thousand shall fall at thy side, and ten thousand at thy right hand, but it shall not come nigh thee. . . . Thou hast made the Most High thy refuge. There shall no evil come to thee; nor shall the scourge come near thy dwelling. For He hath given his angels charge over thee, to keep thee in all thy ways. In their hands they shall bear thee up, lest thou dash thy foot against a stone. Thou shalt walk upon the asp and the basilisk, and thou shalt trample under foot the lion and the dragon. Because he hoped in Me I will deliver him; I will protect him because he hath known My name. He shall cry to Me, and I will hear him; I am with him in tribulation, I will deliver him, and I will glorify him. I will fill him with length of days; and I will show him My salvation.<sup>65</sup>

The calm waters bring interior peace while the strength of an intimate personal experience leads to a state of faith and trust which are thenceforth unwavering. "When I called upon Him, the God of my justice heard me; when I was in distress, Thou hast enlarged me."<sup>66</sup> "Our God is our refuge and strength; a helper in troubles, which have found us exceedingly. Therefore we will not fear, when the earth shall be troubled and the mountains shall be removed into the heart of the sea. . . . God is in the midst thereof, it shall not be moved."<sup>67</sup>

The soul goes a step farther, becoming an apostle and striving to lead others to entrust themselves to God.

<sup>65</sup> Ps. 90. The psalm expresses the soul's faith in God's protection. This faith was so common in Israel that the devil used verses of the psalm to tempt Christ in the desert (Matt. 4:6). The people also quoted it when they insulted Him on the Cross (Matt. 27:43). But Jesus was the most holy example of "hope that could never be confounded."

<sup>66</sup> Ps. 4:2. <sup>67</sup> Ps. 45:2-3, 6.

O ye sons of men, how long will you be dull of heart? Why do you love vanity and seek after lying? Know ye also that the Lord hath made His holy one wonderful; the Lord will hear me when I shall cry unto Him. Be ye angry, and sin not; the things you say in your hearts, be sorry for them upon your beds. Offer up the sacrifice of justice, and trust in the Lord; many say: Who showeth us good things? The light of Thy countenance O Lord, is signed upon us; Thou hast given gladness in my heart. By the fruit of their corn, their wine, and oil, they are multiplied. In peace in the selfsame I will sleep, and I will rest, for Thou, O Lord, singularly hast settled me in hope.<sup>68</sup>

Such was the state of soul of the penitent King David. "Restore unto me the joy of Thy salvation, and strengthen me with a perfect spirit. I will teach the unjust Thy ways."<sup>69</sup>

Then the soul's distress is transformed into joy. "When the Lord brought back the captivity of Sion, we became like men comforted. Then shall they say among the Gentiles: the Lord hath done great things for them. . . . They that sow in tears shall reap in joy. Going they went and wept, casting their seeds. But coming they shall come with joyfulness, carrying their sheaves."<sup>70</sup> Thereupon a song of praise bursts forth; the soul sings of the blessings God has poured on it and this praise becomes the soul's habitual state of mind:

Praise the Lord, ye children: praise ye the name of the Lord. Blessed be the name of the Lord, from henceforth now and forever. From the rising of the sun unto the going down of the same, the name of the Lord is worthy of praise. The Lord is high above all nations; and His glory above the heavens. Who is as the Lord our God, who dwelleth on high and looketh down on the low

<sup>68</sup> Ps. 4:3-10. <sup>69</sup> Ps. 50:14-15. <sup>70</sup> Ps. 125:1-3; 6-8.



things in heaven and in earth? Raising up the needy from the earth, and lifting up the poor out of the dunghill, that He may place him with princes, with the princes of His people. Who maketh a barren woman to dwell in a house, the joyful mother of children.<sup>71</sup>

Praise the Lord, O my soul, in my life I will praise the Lord; I will sing to my God as long as I shall be. . . . Blessed is he who hath the God of Jacob for his helper, whose hope is in the Lord his God, who made heaven and earth, the sea and all things that are in them, who keepeth truth forever; who executeth judgment for them that suffer wrong; who giveth food to the hungry. The Lord looseth them that are fettered; the Lord enlighteneth the blind. . . . The Lord shall reign forever; thy God, O Sion, unto generation and generation.<sup>72</sup>

Blessed art Thou, O Lord the God of Israel, our father from eternity to eternity. Thine, O Lord, is magnificence, and power, and glory, and victory, and to Thee is praise, for all that is in heaven, and in earth, is Thine. Thine is the kingdom, O Lord, and Thou art above all princes. Thine are riches and Thine is glory. Thou hast dominion over all; in Thy hand is power and might; in Thy hand greatness and the empire of all things. Now therefore our God we give thanks to Thee and we praise Thy glorious name.<sup>73</sup>

<sup>71</sup> Ps. 112.    <sup>72</sup> Ps. 145:1-7, 10.    <sup>73</sup> I Par. 29:10-13.

## Chapter 4



# CHARITY

Hear, O Israel, the Lord our God is one Lord.<sup>1</sup>

For both He that sanctifieth, and they who are sanctified, are all of one.<sup>2</sup>

He that abideth in charity, abideth in God, and God in him.<sup>3</sup>

God and the soul are the two actors in the great drama recorded in the Bible. But this book of God and men would not have fulfilled its role if it merely noted the infinite distance between God and men. Only by showing to what extent man was created to be united to God does the Bible carry out the fullness of its mission.

To lead man to this union, God did not hesitate to dictate a law of love and fidelity: "Thou shalt love." The only way to achieve union is by charity. The commandments and regulations of the Mosaic law are centered around the first great commandment and the second precept of love of neighbor. The first requires that God be loved with a love of absolute preference, entailing, if necessary, the sacrifice

<sup>1</sup> Deut. 6:4; Mark 12:29.    <sup>2</sup> Heb. 2:11.    <sup>3</sup> I John 4:16.

of all that is most dear to man. The second commandment, far surpassing the maxim: "Do not do unto others what you would not have them do unto you," treads the path of positive charity which molds hearts in the image of God. These two principal commandments, which Christ later called the whole of the law and the prophets, both follow the same path, that of charity. But in setting man upon the path of charity which leads to union, God Himself also treads the same path. Long before the coming of Christ, the Old Testament bears witness that God is totally "ours." This nearness, this possession of God is shown in many ways. The God of the Old Testament is not far away; He is the God of the Covenant, the God of Israel, the God of our fathers, *our* God: *Dominus Deus noster*, as the chosen people keep repeating.

But this intimate relationship depends upon certain conditions. It is granted only to the poor, the humble, the good. They alone will know by personal experience that God is theirs. Even here on earth God becomes their reward and their inheritance. This prepares the way for the "Emmanuel" who would come one day to dwell among us, to manifest God's love for men in its fullness and perfection.

#### UNION WITH GOD

I will give My law in their bowels, and I will write it in their heart; and I will be their God.<sup>4</sup>

And by this we know that we have known Him, if we keep His commandments.<sup>5</sup>

It was, of course, conceivable that union could be achieved between God, a pure spirit, and that which in man

<sup>4</sup> Jer. 31:33.    <sup>5</sup> I John 2:3.

was a true but infinitely remote resemblance of Him. Otherwise God would not have commanded it. In order that man might achieve this union and not wander astray, in order that he might detect what would lead him to God in the pattern of his days, in order that this relationship would be clearly evident to everyone, God, in His overabundant kindness and goodness, had to express Himself in a concrete way, in a language to which men were accustomed. He had to express in human terms the spiritual principles which would give true life to man.

That is why God conformed to earthly customs and promulgated a law perfectly adapted in its form to the manners and customs of the people to which it was addressed. Four books of the Old Testament make up the compendium of this law: Exodus, Leviticus, Numbers and Deuteronomy.<sup>6</sup>

It is not our task to analyze the law, to clarify its constituent parts, or to retrace its history. Let it suffice to recall how excellent it was by quoting the words of St. Paul, who praised it even when he ventured to demand that men advance beyond it. The law was "ordained by angels in the hand of a mediator. . . . The law was our pedagogue in Christ."<sup>7</sup> Such, indeed, was the true role of the law in the Old Testament.

Since its function was to lead to Christ, we wish to point out its close connection with the New Law and to show that these ancient decrees, apparently obsolete, prepared men to

<sup>6</sup> Christ, as well as the people in general, also used the word "law" in a more general sense, stressing the unity of inspiration in Scripture by including the psalms and the prophets as well as the Pentateuch (cf. John 10:34; 12:34; 15:25).

<sup>7</sup> Gal. 3:19, 24.

understand more fully and to assimilate more readily the spirit of the “new commandment.” It must not be forgotten that the origin of the law is necessarily found in the Spirit of God Himself. The law cannot be reduced to a body of juridical and social precepts; in its essence it is spiritual<sup>8</sup> and its decrees are in line with the same law of charity and love that would be instituted by Christ. That is why, even in those far-away days, the sacred authors rightfully declared: “Blessed are the undefiled in the way, who walk in the law of the Lord.”<sup>9</sup> Men of faith, therefore, heed the injunctions of the law not as mere principles of natural ethics, but as God’s own words, rich in meaning and sweet in savor. “Thy word is a lamp to my feet and a light to my paths. . . . The declaration of Thy words giveth light.”<sup>10</sup>

The law illuminated men’s path and guided them toward union with God. “He will teach us His ways and we will walk in His paths; for the law shall come forth from Sion, and the word of the Lord from Jerusalem.”<sup>11</sup> God’s true servants understood the divine words in a spiritual sense and, even in those ancient times, they detected in the heart of God’s law the great principle of charity which was its foundation — “Thou shalt love.”

A holy spirit is fully and perfectly expressed only by love. By its very nature love is a revelation of the spirit, its supreme expression and its highest life. Union will take place between God and man by love or charity. It is a wholly spiritual reality flowing from a divine wellspring. Charity,

<sup>8</sup> “Wherefore the law indeed is holy, and the commandment holy, and just, and good. . . . For we know that the law is spiritual” (Rom. 7:12, 14).

<sup>9</sup> Ps. 118:1. <sup>10</sup> Ps. 118:105, 130. <sup>11</sup> Isa. 2:3.

here on earth as in the life of glory, can bring to union with God only those who live according to the spirit. Thus we can see clearly the path by which God led His chosen people, the same path as for all souls seeking union with Him. The “promised land” of union is entered only by those who follow perfectly the law of love. “But this shall be the covenant that I will make with the house of Israel, after those days, saith the Lord: I will give My law in their bowels, and I will write it in their hearts, and I will be their God, and they shall be My people.”<sup>12</sup> “Thou shalt love the Lord thy God with thy whole heart, and with thy whole soul, and with thy whole strength.”<sup>13</sup> Thou shalt love thy neighbor as thyself.”<sup>14</sup> Christ Himself has assured us that “on these two commandments dependeth the whole law and the prophets.”<sup>15</sup>

The Old Testament stressed the close connection between the great commandment of love of God and what St. James calls “the royal law” of love of neighbor.<sup>16</sup> The pages which follow aim to reveal what God required by these two commandments and how they were linked together.<sup>17</sup>

<sup>12</sup> Jer. 31:33; cf. Heb. 8:10. <sup>13</sup> Deut. 6:5.

<sup>14</sup> Lev. 19:18. <sup>15</sup> Matt. 22:40. <sup>16</sup> Jas. 2:8.

<sup>17</sup> The fact that these two commandments were not joined together in the Old Testament as in the Gospel may give rise to doubts as to whether they really appeared to Israel as the foundation and soul of the law. The first is prominent in the Book of Deuteronomy; the second occurs in the midst of various laws in the Book of Leviticus. But the Gospel proves the contrary, for Christ’s answer to a question by a doctor of the law (Matt. 22:37) and a scribe (Mark 12:29) showed that the men of the Old Law had not failed to realize the importance of the two great precepts and the connection between them.

## THE FIRST AND GREATEST COMMANDMENT

*Duties of the people and the priests*

Thou shalt love the Lord thy God with thy whole heart, and with thy whole soul, and with thy whole strength.<sup>18</sup>

I have seen an end of all perfection; Thy commandment is exceeding broad.<sup>19</sup>

Love . . . is the fulfilling of the law. . . . For the end of the law is Christ.<sup>20</sup>

God's love for us is an exclusive and jealous love; the whole of biblical history illustrates this most wonderfully. God loves us and never ceases to love us. We should return this love "because He hath first loved us."<sup>21</sup> But let us not be mistaken; the love that God expects from us must have the same exclusive and jealous quality because God alone is worthy of being loved. As the cause and goal of all love, He deserves to occupy in our soul, not only the first place, but the whole of ourselves. "Thou shalt love the Lord thy God with thy whole heart, and with thy whole soul, and with thy whole strength."<sup>22</sup> He alone is to be adored: "I am the Lord thy God . . . Thou shalt not have strange gods before Me. . . . I am the Lord thy God, mighty, jealous."<sup>23</sup>

His name alone is deserving of respect based on love: "Thou shalt not take the name of the Lord thy God in vain."<sup>24</sup> By love we shall dedicate ourselves completely to Him. "Thou shalt fear the Lord thy God, and serve Him only; to Him thou shalt adhere, and shall swear by His name. He is thy praise, and thy God."<sup>25</sup> Certain times are re-

<sup>18</sup> Deut. 6:5.    <sup>19</sup> Ps. 118:96.    <sup>20</sup> Rom. 13:10; 10:4.

<sup>21</sup> I John 4:10.    <sup>22</sup> Deut. 6:5.    <sup>23</sup> Exod. 20:1, 3, 5.

<sup>24</sup> Exod. 20:7.    <sup>25</sup> Deut. 10:20-21.

served exclusively to the service of this love: "See that thou keep My sabbath, because it is a sign between Me and you in your generations: that you may know that I am the Lord who sanctify you."<sup>26</sup> This commandment of love should be ever in man's mind, the subject of all his thought, the aim of all his actions.

Hear, O Israel, the Lord our God is one Lord. . . . And these words which I command thee this day, shall be in thy heart, and thou shalt tell them to thy children, and thou shalt meditate upon them sitting in thy house, and walking on thy journey, sleeping and rising. And thou shalt bind them as a sign on thy hand, and they shall be and shall move between thy eyes. And thou shalt write them in the entry, and on the doors of thy house.<sup>27</sup>

This precept, which the Jews repeat every day as a profession of faith, was not addressed only to the chosen people. On several occasions God called all nations to observe it: "There shall be all one law and judgment both for you and for them who are strangers in the land. . . . The same law shall be for all."<sup>28</sup> "Neither with you only do I make this covenant and confirm these oaths. But with all that are present and that are absent."<sup>29</sup>

The law is universal, perpetual, absolute. Whoever hears the divine commandment is held to a response which requires complete self-dedication by a definite choice to love

<sup>26</sup> Exod. 31:13. When Christ performed miracles on the sabbath (Matt. 12:10-17) He did it, not to disparage the sabbath itself, but to restore the spirit of charity which should animate the law (Matt. 12:1-8).

<sup>27</sup> Deut. 6:4, 6-9.    <sup>28</sup> Num. 15:15, 29.

<sup>29</sup> Deut. 29:14-15.

with the whole heart, soul, and strength. "You who in time past were not a people, but are now the people of God."<sup>30</sup> "Unto whom coming, as to a living stone, rejected indeed by men, but chosen and made honorable by God. Be you also as living stones built up, a spiritual house, a holy priesthood."<sup>31</sup>

By obeying the divine commandment, by giving his love to God, man enters a new order, that of charity. Though by his nature he continues to belong to the "world," by the object of his choice, which is God, he is raised to a supernatural life which separates him from "earthly" men. Jesus Christ uttered these definite words: "I pray not for the world, but for them whom Thou hast given Me, because they are Thine. . . . They are not of the world, as I also am not of the world. I pray not that Thou should take them out of the world, but that Thou shouldst keep them from evil."<sup>32</sup>

In the world the little flock of believers always forms a group set apart, victims of every contradiction, a people whose essential vocation—sanctity—requires that they be cut off from "the world." "You shall be holy unto Me because I the Lord am holy, and I have separated you from other people, that you should be Mine."<sup>33</sup>

Israel heeded the Lord's summons by freely promising to obey the divine commandment.

<sup>30</sup> I Pet. 2:10 (a free translation of Osee 2:25).

<sup>31</sup> I Pet. 2:4-5. <sup>32</sup> John 17:9, 15-16.

<sup>33</sup> Lev. 20:26. "But now, being made free from sin and become servants to God, you have your fruit unto sanctification, and the end life everlasting" (Rom. 6:23). "You are not of the world" (John 15:19). "For this is the will of God, your sanctification" (I Thess. 4:3). "As He chose us in Him before the foundation of the world, that we should be holy and unspotted in His sight in charity" (Eph. 1:4).

And Josue said to the people: You will not be able to serve the Lord, for He is a holy God, and mighty and jealous, and will not forgive your wickedness and sins. . . . And the people said to Josue: No, it shall not be so, as thou sayest, but we will serve the Lord. And Josue said to the people: You are witnesses, that you yourselves have chosen you the Lord to serve Him. And they answered: We are witnesses. Now therefore, said he, put away strange gods from among you, and incline your hearts to the Lord the God of Israel. And the people said to Josue: We will serve the Lord our God, and we will be obedient to His commandments.<sup>34</sup>

And he went in to confirm as usual the covenant, that they should seek the Lord the God of their fathers with all their heart and with all their soul. And if any one, said he, seek not the Lord the God of Israel, let him die, whether little or great, man or woman. And they swore to the Lord with a loud voice, . . . with all their heart they swore, and with all their will they sought Him, and they found Him, and the Lord gave them rest round about.<sup>35</sup>

The vow which bound Israel to God separated it from all else and ordained the people to a supernatural life, a life of sanctity: "You shall be My peculiar possession, above all people . . . a holy nation."<sup>36</sup>

But by what paths might man enter this realm of sanctity? What consequences are involved in the divine commandment? At no time did God ever cease to communicate to men His own sanctity which, as we have seen, is absolutely transcendent. But God does not reveal this plan to men as a fantastic ideal of such towering height as to be impossible of attainment. It is presented as an accessible goal, a duty

<sup>34</sup> Jos. 24:19-24.

<sup>35</sup> II Par. 15:12-15.

<sup>36</sup> Exod. 19:5-6.

which cannot be evaded. The two precepts of love and sanctity are closely connected and therefore it becomes possible for man to consent joyously to being cut off from his sensual concupiscences, to being removed from the material sphere where worldly men carry on their activities. The children of the promise, the true Israelites, have a vocation which is folly in the eyes of the world. God Himself is Israel's patrimony and Israel in turn is His chosen portion.<sup>37</sup> That is why divine jealousy imposed a severe discipline upon Israel and separated her from other nations by rigid practices. For the same reason, too, God accepted Israel as His chosen people.

A vast number of Mosaic precepts emphasized this quality of being set apart, reserved for God. The whole nation bore the mark of it, even on the flesh: "An infant of eight days old shall be circumcised among you, every man child in your generations."<sup>38</sup> The commemoration of the liberation from Egypt was the occasion for a more solemn consecration to God of those who were saved: "Sanctify unto Me every firstborn."<sup>39</sup> An even better living proof of Israel's belonging to God is found in the tribe of Levi, representing the people and consecrated to the service of the temple: "I have taken the Levites from the children of Israel, . . . and the Levites shall be Mine. For every firstborn is Mine."<sup>40</sup>

<sup>37</sup> Christ clearly explained the consequences of this choice: "If you had been of the world, the world would love its own; but because you are not of the world, but I have chosen you out of the world, therefore the world hateth you" (John 15:19).

<sup>38</sup> Gen. 17:12. Circumcision was the sign of a wholly moral, interior severance (cf. Rom. 2:25-29).

<sup>39</sup> Exod. 13:2. <sup>40</sup> Num. 3:12-13.

In the Mosaic prescriptions every precaution was taken to give the people a particular system of worship which distinguished them from surrounding nations, to such an extent that it became virtually impossible for them to mingle their lives with others. History shows, however, that most of the time these precautions were in vain. Human weakness, as well as the contagion and attraction of example, make this quite understandable. Yet always in the course of the centuries there was found among the people a "small remnant" which, through love of the Lord, chose to remain faithful to His commandments.

God was never weary of bestowing His gifts on men. Likewise He never ceased hoping for their response to His love. So many precepts stood guard to keep the chosen people pure and intact that it seemed plausible to hope that an appropriate response would come from them. Had the little tribe been wholly faithful, it would have offered to God, along with its own humble homage, that of all the nations which it represented. "And you shall be to Me a priestly kingdom, and a holy nation."<sup>41</sup>

The greatest commandment was a sacred law which made ever-increasing demands. God's faithful servants were separated from the world and called to lead the world to Him, appointed as mediators before the divine throne, chosen as His witnesses. "You are My witnesses, saith the Lord, and I am God."<sup>42</sup>

Throughout the Bible there recurs an invariable law:

<sup>41</sup> Exod. 19:6. Only Christ Himself, on coming to the world, would exemplify perfectly this law of separation and of jealous possession by God (cf. Luke 20:25).

<sup>42</sup> Isa. 43:12.

whenever a relationship of love arises between God and His creature, it confirms the latter as mediator and intercessor. To this vocation God called great leaders, the kings and the prophets, but also humble servants and even the nation as a whole at times when it was dedicated to love Him alone.<sup>43</sup> But unfortunately, there was rarely found the generous fidelity which aimed to offer God a love completely free of selfish interest and capable of increasing to the dimensions of His divine love. But God's will follows inescapable laws. As the whole nation could not understand or accomplish His demands, He gave a special and direct call to certain individuals whom He consecrated more jealously to His service, that is, the priests.

For the lips of the priest shall keep knowledge, and they shall seek the law at his mouth; because he is the angel of the Lord of hosts.<sup>44</sup>

And for these things who is so sufficient? For we are not as many, adulterating the word of God; but with sincerity, but as from God, before God, in Christ we speak.<sup>45</sup>

God requires that priests be truly withdrawn from all else in order to serve Him. He demands that they abandon all earthly ambition and all possessive spirit in order that they may be consecrated to Him alone.

And the Lord said to Aaron: You shall possess nothing in their land, neither shall you have a portion among them; I am

<sup>43</sup> The same requirement is found in the New Testament: "Unto whom coming, as to a living stone, rejected indeed by men, but chosen and made honorable by God. Be you also as living stones built up, a spiritual house, a holy priesthood" (I Pet. 2:4).

<sup>44</sup> Mal. 2:7. <sup>45</sup> II Cor. 2:17.

thy portion and inheritance in the midst of the children of Israel.<sup>46</sup>

The priests and Levites, and all that are of the same tribe, shall have no part nor inheritance with the rest of Israel, because they shall eat the sacrifices of the Lord, and His oblations, and they shall receive nothing else of the possession of their brethren; for the Lord Himself is their inheritance, as He hath said to them.<sup>47</sup>

God chose them and drew them from the midst of their brethren.<sup>48</sup> He alone becomes their sole possession, their treasure and their glory. "The oil of the holy unction of his God is upon him. I am the Lord."<sup>49</sup> God reminds them that the priestly office requires sanctity.<sup>50</sup> "They shall be holy to their God, and shall not profane His name; for they offer the burnt offering of the Lord, and the bread of their God, and therefore they shall be holy."<sup>51</sup>

Sanctity is required of them because of their consecration which vows them to God and to the rites of expiation.<sup>52</sup>

And thou shalt consecrate the hand of them all, and shalt sanctify them, that they may do the office of priesthood unto Me.<sup>53</sup>

<sup>46</sup> Num. 18:20. <sup>47</sup> Deut. 18:1-2.

<sup>48</sup> "Neither doth any man take the honor to himself, but he that is called by God, as Aaron was" (Heb. 5:4). "You have not chosen Me, but I have chosen you" (John 15:16).

<sup>49</sup> Lev. 21:12.

<sup>50</sup> A sacred requirement which the present rite of ordination still emphasizes.

<sup>51</sup> Lev. 21:6.

<sup>52</sup> "For every highpriest taken from among men is ordained for men in the things that appertain to God, that he may offer up gifts and sacrifices for sins" (Heb. 5:1).

<sup>53</sup> Exod. 28:41.

And Aaron shall bear the iniquities of these things, which the children of Israel have offered and sanctified, in all their gifts and offerings.<sup>54</sup>

And the Lord said to Aaron: Thou and thy sons and thy father's house with thee shall bear the iniquity of the sanctuary.<sup>55</sup>

God punished with a severity which we may find bewildering every neglect of the duties of the cult, even every slight wavering in faith or loyalty.

And Nadab and Abiu, the sons of Aaron, taking their censers, put fire therein, and incense on it, offering before the Lord strange fire, which was not commanded them. And fire coming out from the Lord destroyed them, and they died before the Lord.<sup>56</sup>

And the Lord said to Moses and Aaron: Because you have not believed Me, to sanctify Me before the children of Israel, you shall not bring these people into the land, which I will give them.<sup>57</sup>

In being so exacting, God shows what He expects of the priests. Not only does He assign to them the role of mediators, but He confers on them the fearful honor of following the law of love with the greatest possible perfection and of expressing it by both interior and exterior worship.<sup>58</sup> Thus Phinees and Esdras were praised for their burning zeal.

<sup>54</sup> Exod. 28:38.    <sup>55</sup> Num. 18:1.    <sup>56</sup> Lev. 10:1-2.

<sup>57</sup> Num. 20:12.

<sup>58</sup> A fully efficacious mediation requires the holiness of the mediator, expressed by perfect charity. The Old Law, "a bringing in of a better hope" (Heb. 7:19), could not confer such perfection. It was attained only in Christ, born not of the line of Aaron and the tribe of Levites, but of the royal lineage of Juda, priest according to the order of Melchisedech. The institution of this new priesthood which sealed the ancient promises in the blood of the new covenant by no means broke away from the levitical priesthood in the spiritual

And the covenant of the priesthood forever shall be both to him and his seed, because he hath been zealous for his God, and hath made atonement for the wickedness of the children of Israel.<sup>59</sup>

[Esdras] . . . had prepared his heart to seek the law of the Lord, and to do and to teach in Israel the commandments and judgment . . . praying and beseeching and weeping, and lying before the temple of God.<sup>60</sup>

Jonathan of the Machabees, whose efforts led to an alliance of peace with other nations, declared: "We, though we needed none of these things, having for our comfort the holy books that are in our hands, chose rather to send to you to renew the brotherhood and friendship, lest we should become strangers to you altogether."<sup>61</sup>

Also Simon Machabeus, without counting the cost, "resisted and fought for his nation, and laid out much of his money, and armed the valiant men of his nation, and gave them wages . . . and sought by all means to advance his people."<sup>62</sup>

Again and again in ancient times holy priests led the people back to God's paths, renewed for them the spiritual meaning of the law of love "to which they listened with tears," and inspired them with joy in the cult of adoration of the true God. "Then all the people together made haste, and fell down to the earth upon their faces, to adore the Lord their God, and to pray to the almighty God the Most High. . . . Then [the highpriest] coming down, lifted up

sense, but portrayed more clearly the essence of the ideal which the highpriests whom we mention here were striving to attain.

<sup>59</sup> Num. 25:13.    <sup>60</sup> I Esd. 7:10; 10:1.

<sup>61</sup> I Mach. 12:9-10.    <sup>62</sup> I Mach. 14:32, 35.



his hands over all the congregation of the children of Israel, to give glory to God with his lips, and to glory in His name.”<sup>63</sup>

Filled with admiration of the priestly office, the people join the inspired author in praying to God “that He might give wisdom into our heart to judge His people in justice, that the good things might not be abolished, and He made their glory in their nation everlasting.”<sup>64</sup>

Thus the priest’s life publicly testified that men should love God with *all* their heart and *all* their strength and that they should serve Him alone. This in itself would have sufficed to make the priesthood a necessary institution and endow it with a permanent and universal quality, like the covenant itself, over and above the particular forms proper to the Old Testament.

For thus saith the Lord: There shall not be cut off from David a man to sit upon the throne of the house of Israel. Neither shall there be cut off from the priests and Levites a man before My face to offer holocausts and to burn sacrifices, and to kill victims continually. . . . If My covenant with the day can be made void, and My covenant with the night, that there should not be day and night in their season, also My covenant with David My servant may be made void, that he should not have a son to reign upon his throne, and with the Levites and priests My ministers. As the stars of heaven cannot be numbered nor the sand of the sea be measured, so will I multiply the seed of David My servant, and the Levites My ministers.<sup>65</sup>

St. Augustine declared that the New Testament began with Abraham. It can be said likewise that the covenant and cult entrusted to the Levites originated a priesthood which,

<sup>63</sup> Eccus. 50:19, 22.    <sup>64</sup> Eccus. 45:31.    <sup>65</sup> Jer. 33:17–22.

even in those times, was destined to observe the law as perfectly as possible. The law prepared the way for the one, true Priest. The consummation of the law was love. St. Augustine said also that the law was pregnant with Christ.<sup>66</sup>

“I have given you your brethren the Levites and have delivered them for a gift to the Lord.”<sup>67</sup> “They shall be priests to Me by a perpetual ordinance.”<sup>68</sup>

Thenceforth we may believe that God’s appeal would not be in vain, but would elicit the proper response. The Lord was to receive love for love.

### *Offerings and sacrifices*

A sacrifice to God is an afflicted spirit; a contrite and humbled heart, O God, Thou wilt not despise. . . . Then shalt Thou accept the sacrifice of justice, oblations and whole burnt offerings.<sup>69</sup>

Unto whom coming, . . . to offer up spiritual sacrifices, acceptable to God by Jesus Christ.<sup>70</sup>

God’s jealous love demands that we respond by a love that gives Him absolute preference. The Church has understood this so well that she puts on our lips in the “Act of Charity” the words: “O my God, I love Thee above all things, with my whole heart and soul.” The whole of the Old Testament shows man this divine choice, or rather, this prime place that God should have in our lives. Clearly it is not sufficient to give God “His share,” to acknowledge by mere external cult, that we belong to Him because we are His creatures. What is called for is an offering of self which pledges our whole life to Him, just as God plights His

<sup>66</sup> Cf. *Sermo 20, de sanctis.*    <sup>67</sup> Num. 18:6.

<sup>68</sup> Exod. 29:9.    <sup>69</sup> Ps. 50:19, 21.    <sup>70</sup> I Pet. 2:4–5.

total love. But in addition to this, our offering must necessarily reflect our status as sinners.

From the very beginning sin changed the nature of the relationship between God and man. This relationship should have been a bond of love, but sin is essentially the rejection of that love—not only the rejection but even the refusal. Each time we sin we renounce and reject love. Thereupon whatever offerings we may make in our role as creatures have lost their primary significance as signs of His ownership of us.<sup>71</sup> To offset this refusal, sacrifice must express more than love, must signify the renunciation of sin and the preference for God: this constitutes the very essence of sacrifice. There must be included also all the sentiments of expiation and humble compunction whereby man begs to be reinstated in grace and affirms the conversion of his heart. We must consider from this viewpoint the concepts of offering and of sacrifice, ideas which play such a preponderant role in the Old Testament and are a corollary of the divine commandment to “love the Lord thy God.”

Pagan religions hoped to win divine favor by gifts and holocausts. Israel was often tempted to adopt a similar attitude. Even in the time of Ecclesiasticus the people had to be reminded of the transcendent doctrine imparted from the beginning, which revealed the moral and spiritual basis of sacrifice. What is wanted is the pure intention of our heart

<sup>71</sup> “If we say that we have fellowship with Him, and walk in darkness, we lie, and do not the truth. But if we walk in the light, as He also is in the light, we have fellowship one with another. . . . If we say that we have no sin, we deceive ourselves, and the truth is not in us. If we confess our sins, He is faithful and just, to forgive us our sins” (I John 1:6–10). “For all have sinned, and do need the glory of God” (Rom. 3:23).

turned toward God. “The Lord had respect to Abel, and to his offerings. But to Cain and his offerings, He had no respect; and Cain was exceedingly angry, and his countenance fell. And the Lord said to him: Why art thou angry? and why is thy countenance fallen? If thou do well, shalt thou not receive? but if ill, shall not sin forthwith be present at the door? but the lust thereof shall be under thee, and thou shalt have dominion over it.”<sup>72</sup>

The Psalmist asks God to create in him a pure heart, knowing that God looks favorably upon whatever proceeds from a cleansed soul. “Then shalt Thou accept the sacrifice . . . oblations and whole burnt offerings . . . upon Thy altar.”<sup>73</sup> Sin separated man from God by diverting his heart from its true direction: “But your iniquities have divided between you and your God, and your sins have hid His face from you that He should not hear.”<sup>74</sup> But sin is not a permanent obstacle. Divine mercy will accept sacrifice as a sign of interior conversion, if it be sincere: “And My people, upon whom My name is called, being converted, shall make supplication to Me, and seek out My face, and do penance for their most wicked ways; then will I hear from heaven, and will forgive their sins and will heal their land.”<sup>75</sup> What God constantly seeks is the heart of man. Once He receives it, His mercy will fill the chasm that was excavated by sin; the spiritual bond will be formed again; gifts will be accepted. “Until their uncircumcised mind be ashamed; then shall they pray for their sins. And I will remember My covenant, that I made with Jacob, and Isaac, and Abraham.”<sup>76</sup> “In the land in which they shall please Me, and

<sup>72</sup> Gen. 4:5–7.

<sup>73</sup> Ps. 50:21.

<sup>74</sup> Isa. 59:2.

<sup>75</sup> II Par. 7:14.

<sup>76</sup> Lev. 26:40–41.

there will I require your firstfruits, and the chief of your tithes with all your sanctifications. I will accept of you for an odor of sweetness.”<sup>77</sup>

The prophets especially insist upon interior conversion, upon worship in spirit and in truth rendered by a loyal heart permanently amended, a pure and faithful heart in which flourishes love of neighbor. They denounce as lies and hypocrisy mere external worship from which the heart is absent.<sup>78</sup> “Behold in the day of your fast your own will is found, and you exact of all your debtors. Behold you fast for debates and strife, and strike with the fist wickedly. Do not fast as you have done until this day, to make your cry to be heard on high. Is this such a fast as I have chosen: for a man to afflict his soul for a day?”<sup>79</sup>

Whenever men reject God’s love-infused law, He rejects their sacrifices.

To what purpose do you offer Me the multitude of your victims, saith the Lord? I am full, I desire not holocausts of rams, and fat of fatlings, and blood of calves, and lambs, and buck goats. . . . Offer sacrifice no more in vain. . . . Wash yourselves, be clean, take away the evil of your devices from My eyes; cease to do perversely.<sup>80</sup>

If I should be hungry, I would not tell thee; for the world is Mine, and the fullness thereof. Shall I eat the flesh of bullocks? or shall I drink the blood of goats?<sup>81</sup>

I hate and have rejected your festivities, and I will not re-

<sup>77</sup> Ezech. 20:40.

<sup>78</sup> Christ was to speak similarly: “You are they who justify themselves before men, but God knoweth your hearts; for that which is high to men, is an abomination before God” (Luke 16:15).

<sup>79</sup> Isa. 58:3–5. <sup>80</sup> Isa. 1:11–16. <sup>81</sup> Ps. 49:12–13.

ceive the odor of your assemblies. And if you offer Me holocausts and your gifts, I will not receive them; neither will I regard the vows of your fat beasts.<sup>82</sup>

To what purpose do you bring Me frankincense from Saba, and the sweet smelling cane from a far country? Your holocausts are not acceptable, nor are your sacrifices pleasing to Me.<sup>83</sup>

If ritual sacrifice be dissociated from its interior and moral meaning, it lacks its main ingredient. It brings a bountiful harvest to a life faithful in the observance of the commandments, but it is sterile and incurs condemnation for those who make their offering while planning evil in their hearts and committing sins. “Pray not for this people. . . . When they fast I will not hear their prayers; and if they offer holocausts and victims, I will not receive them.”<sup>84</sup> “For I desired mercy, and not sacrifice; and the knowledge of God more than holocausts.”<sup>85</sup>

No sacrifice can find favor in God’s sight if the law of love is neglected.<sup>86</sup> When the people ask what sacrifice they should make, the prophet gives the answer.

What shall I offer to the Lord that is worthy? Wherewith shall I kneel before the high God? Shall I offer holocausts unto Him, and calves of a year old? May the Lord be appeased with thousands of rams, or with many thousands of fat he-goats? Shall I give my firstborn for my wickedness, the fruit of my body for the sin of my soul? I will show thee, O man, what is good, and

<sup>82</sup> Amos 5:21–22. <sup>83</sup> Jer. 6:20. <sup>84</sup> Jer. 14:11–12.

<sup>85</sup> Osee 6:6.

<sup>86</sup> If the spirit is absent, the observance of the letter of the law is not only worthless, but displeases God, as, for instance, in the observance of the sabbath to the detriment of charity. In this connection Christ was to repeat Osee’s words.

what the Lord requireth of thee: verily, to do judgment, and to love mercy, and to walk solicitous with thy God.<sup>87</sup>

When you fasted and mourned in the fifth and the seventh month for these seventy years, did you keep a fast unto Me? . . . Are not these the words which the Lord spoke by the hand of the former prophets, when Jerusalem as yet was inhabited. . . . Thus saith the Lord of hosts, saying: Judge ye true judgment and show ye mercy and compassion, every man to his brother. And oppress not the widow, and the fatherless, and the stranger, and the poor; and let not a man devise evil in his heart against his brother.<sup>88</sup>

God's revelation invited men to complete reintegration and total conversion of the heart and actions. Only on this condition could sacrifice acquire its spiritual meaning and prove truly efficacious, truly accepted by God.

Now therefore saith the Lord: Be converted to Me with all your heart, in fasting, and in weeping, and in mourning. And rend your hearts, and not your garments, and turn to the Lord your God.<sup>89</sup>

If you will hearken to Me, saith the Lord, . . . they shall come from the cities of Juda, and from the places round about Jerusalem, and from the land of Benjamin, and from the plains, and from the mountains, and from the south, bringing holocausts, and victims, and sacrifices, and frankincense, and they shall bring in an offering into the house of the Lord.<sup>90</sup>

This law holds good for all time, in every place, among all races. "The children of the stranger that adhere to the Lord, to worship Him, and to love His name, to be His servants, and that holdeth fast My covenant, I will bring

<sup>87</sup> Mich. 6:6-8.

<sup>88</sup> Zach. 7:5-10.

<sup>89</sup> Joel 2:12.

<sup>90</sup> Jer. 17:24-26.

them into My holy mount, and will make them joyful in My house of prayer; their holocausts, and their victims shall please Me upon My altar, for My house shall be called the house of prayer, for all nations."<sup>91</sup>

The essential conditions of any truly religious life and the basis of any sacrifice truly acceptable to God must be a real conversion of the heart and will to divine love and a conversion of habits and of all life to infinite good. Moreover there could be no question of reconciling various spiritual and material exigencies, of entertaining the desire for evil while offering God a hypocritical worship. Ezechiel was filled with horror when he saw in a dream the temple desecrated and soiled by impure sacrifices offered there. Its walls covered with paintings testified how many idols men continued to adore.<sup>92</sup> God does not permit any idols in our hearts. He wants not only the first place, but the whole of our homage: "I am the Lord, this is My name; I will not give My glory to another nor My praise to graven things."<sup>93</sup> He punishes ruthlessly those who offer Him sacrilegious worship. But on the other hand, He shows overwhelming generosity to faithful souls: "I will take you to Myself for My people; I will be your God."<sup>94</sup>

Indeed, that is the whole question. Will God be "our God" or not? Will we love Him alone above all things and love all else in Him? The Bible requires a love of absolute preference involving our whole self, a love proceeding not only from the mind but from faith expressed in the actions of our whole life. The connection between gifts and sacrifice is so close and so profound, it is so clearly evident that gifts

<sup>91</sup> Isa. 56:6-7.

<sup>92</sup> Cf. Ezech. 5:5-18.

<sup>93</sup> Isa. 42:8.

<sup>94</sup> Exod. 6:7.

and sacrifices are the sacraments of true love, that Holy Scripture is content to teach it in the great precept of divine love: "Thou shalt love . . . with all thy heart, with all thy strength, with all thy mind." And so we see that on every page sacrifice appears as the necessary and spontaneous expression of man's link with God. It is the means whereby man cuts himself off from sin and chooses God in his mind and his heart.

Though wooed by God, the heart of man is still weak, prone to be satisfied with the least effort, tempted to keep back something for self by subtle compromise. To protect man from himself, Moses and his followers multiplied their regulations, leaving nothing to personal discretion, allowing no negligence. They constantly recalled the sacred character of a gift freely offered and the interior sentiments which should accompany it. They spurred men's hearts toward sincerity and perfection in giving.

Of the countless details so fully recorded in the Pentateuch, we shall note here only the two requisites of generosity and perfection. Generosity first of all: there must be no force or pressure, for man is free in making his offering<sup>95</sup> and its value depends upon his generosity. "Speak to the children of Israel, that they bring firstfruits to Me; of every man that offereth of his own accord, you shall take them."<sup>96</sup> "But every one shall offer according to what he hath, according to the blessing of the Lord his God, which He shall give him."<sup>97</sup>

<sup>95</sup> Cf. Acts 5:2-6. Ananias was free to dispose of his possessions as he pleased, but by a lie he usurped the honor of a complete sacrifice. In a scene reminiscent of the Old Testament, he and his wife were struck dead as a punishment of their fraud.

<sup>96</sup> Exod. 25:2.      <sup>97</sup> Deut. 16:17.

God, of course, has no need of our material gifts; what He loves and esteems is the "humble and contrite heart," spontaneous love which wonderfully enhances the least actions. David understood this well (and the people with him) when he uttered his admirable prayer on the eve of building the temple. He emphasized that the readiness to offer gifts generously and wholeheartedly is the fruit of a very special grace from God.

I with all my ability have prepared the expenses for the house of my God. Gold . . . and silver . . . brass . . . iron . . . wood . . . onyx stones . . . and all manner of precious stones. . . . Now over and above the things which I have offered into the house of my God, I give of my own proper goods, gold and silver for the temple of my God. . . . Now if any man is willing to offer, let him fill his hand today, and offer what he pleaseth to the Lord. Then the heads of families, and the princes . . . gave for the works of the house of the Lord. . . . And the people rejoiced when they promised their offerings willingly, because they offered them to the Lord with all their heart; and David the king rejoiced also with a great joy. And he blessed the Lord before all the multitude and he said: Blessed art Thou, O Lord the God of Israel, our Father from eternity to eternity. Thine, O Lord, is magnificence, and power, and glory, and victory; and to Thee is praise; for all that is in heaven and in earth is Thine; Thine is the kingdom, O Lord, and Thou art above all princes. Thine are riches, and Thine is glory, Thou hast dominion over all, in Thy hand is power and might; in Thy hand greatness and the empire of all things. Now therefore our God we give thanks to Thee and we praise Thy glorious name. Who am I, and what is my people, that we should be able to promise Thee all these things? All things are Thine, and we have given Thee what we received of Thy hand. . . . I know my

God that Thou provest hearts and lovest simplicity, wherefore I also in the simplicity of my heart, have joyfully offered all these things; and I have seen with great joy Thy people, which are here present, offer Thee their offerings. O Lord God of Abraham, and of Isaac, and of Israel our fathers, keep forever this will of their hearts, and let this mind remain always for the worship of Thee.<sup>98</sup>

The second quality strongly emphasized with regard to sacrifices is the mark of perfection.<sup>99</sup> The gift must be unconditional and final. "Seeing Thou blessest it, O Lord, it shall be blessed forever."<sup>100</sup> "But a beast that may be sacrificed to the Lord, if any one shall vow, shall be holy, and cannot be changed, that is to say, neither a better for a worse, nor a worse for a better."<sup>101</sup>

The oblation must be without blemish, because it is offered to God. "The man of the house of Israel, and of the strangers who dwell with you, that offereth his oblation, either paying his vows or offering of his own accord, whatsoever it be which he presenteth for a holocaust of the Lord. . . . If it have a blemish you shall not offer it, neither

<sup>98</sup> I Par. 29:2-18.

<sup>99</sup> The victim's perfection, as required by the Mosaic code, was right and fitting as an expression of two symbolic meanings. First, as an image of things to come: the victim's perfection represented that of the Lamb of God who was to be welcomed by John the Baptist. Secondly, as a substitute for sinners: the offering of a victim without blemish was a foretoken expressing the desire for a perfect gift, worthy of God. Christ, in turn, was to require a total and flawless sacrifice of anyone who wished to follow Him with complete dedication: "If thou wilt be perfect, go sell what thou hast . . . and come follow Me" (Matt. 19:21).

<sup>100</sup> I Par. 17:27. <sup>101</sup> Lev. 27:9-10.

shall it be acceptable. . . . If it be blind, or broken, or have a scar . . . you shall not offer them . . . because they are all corrupted and defiled; you shall not receive them."<sup>102</sup>

The minute prescriptions of the Book of Leviticus regulate the rite of immolation so precisely that the scene seems to take place before our eyes. This underlines the seriousness of the act to be performed. Because man makes his sacrifice to an infinitely holy God who sees and sounds all hearts, he must offer the best of his possessions, he must first be purified, and then approach the altar with feelings of fear. "Every man of your race that approacheth to those things that are consecrated, and which the children of Israel have offered to the Lord, in whom there is uncleanness, shall perish before the Lord. I am the Lord. . . . But when he hath washed his flesh with water, and the sun is down, then being purified, he shall eat of the sanctified things, because it is his meat."<sup>103</sup>

In this way the moral aim behind these external and legal purifications became evident to men who gradually understood the spirit of sacrifice. Loving allegiance was expressed by the offering of the best of one's possessions as a voluntary homage of the human person to God. The official rite of sacrifice dictated by God Himself to Moses marked this in a striking way by living symbols. The victim represents the soul, which gives itself to a God, whose jealous love is manifest in every gesture of the priest. The object vowed to God must first be consecrated, so that it becomes irrevocably His and may no longer serve a profane purpose. The imposition of hands is the symbolic gesture which sets apart and marks

<sup>102</sup> Lev. 22:18-25.

<sup>103</sup> Lev. 22:3, 6-7.

with a permanent seal all that is dedicated to the Lord.<sup>104</sup> "And when the Levites are before the Lord, the children of Israel shall put their hands upon them. . . . The Levites also shall put their hands upon the heads of the oxen. . . . And thou shalt separate them from the midst of the children of Israel, to be Mine."<sup>105</sup> By extension, the same gesture signified that the victim offered in expiation, reparation or thanksgiving became a substitute for man who immolated himself by the assent of his heart. "And he shall put his hand upon the head of the victim, and it shall be acceptable, and help to its expiation."<sup>106</sup>

The blood of the victim, considered as the principle of life, is poured out on the altar, and in this act the soul, released from every obstacle, completely liberated, can pour itself out before God wholly exposed to His eyes. "Only beware of this, that thou eat not the blood, . . . but thou shalt pour it upon the earth as water."<sup>107</sup> "Because the life of the flesh is in the blood; and I have given it to you, that you may make atonement with it upon the altar for your souls, and the blood may be for an expiation of the soul."<sup>108</sup>

The blood is a symbol of a life ready to give itself totally: it is likewise a testimony of the covenant between the soul and God: "This is the blood of the covenant which the Lord hath made with you."<sup>109</sup> So spoke Moses as he sprinkled

<sup>104</sup> The imposition of hands is still practiced in the rite of baptism. It occurs at the moment when the priest beseeches God to break the bonds of sin and to mark the child with the sign of His wisdom. It acquires its full meaning in the ordination of priests.

<sup>105</sup> Num. 8:10-14. <sup>106</sup> Lev. 1:4. <sup>107</sup> Deut. 12:23-24.

<sup>108</sup> Lev. 17:11.

<sup>109</sup> Exod. 24:8; cf. Heb. 9:16: "For where there is a testament, the death of the testator must of necessity come in."

the assembled people with blood brought from the altar. Mysteriously, one might even say *mystically*, new life springs from the blood that was shed. "And the priest shall take of the blood with his finger, and shall touch the horns of the altar of holocaust, and shall pour out the rest at the foot thereof. . . . And he shall pray for him, and it shall be forgiven him."<sup>110</sup>

Thenceforth the victim was a holy and sacred thing, so totally transferred to God that it had to be completely consumed. The priest's own privileged offering was indeed totally destroyed and sacrifice by fire became an expressive symbol of the action of a God who had declared that He was Himself a devouring fire. But, while the best part of the offering was always completely consumed by fire on the altar of the temple, the parts considered unclean, as they were a reminder of sin which has thenceforth been banished, were burnt at a distance.<sup>111</sup> "All the fat shall be the Lord's. By a perpetual law for your generations, and in all your habitations; neither blood nor fat shall you eat at all. . . . And the rest of the body he shall carry forth without the camp into a clean place where the ashes are wont to be poured out, and he shall burn them upon a pile of wood, they shall be burnt in the place where the ashes are poured out."<sup>112</sup>

The victim's blood poured out is a symbol of the soul; the fire on the altar is a figure of divine love which purifies and transforms. These highly significant yet woefully in-

<sup>110</sup> Lev. 4:30-31.

<sup>111</sup> Cf. Heb. 13:11-16: "Wherefore Jesus also that He might sanctify the people by His own blood, suffered without the gate." Cf. also John 1:29: "Behold the Lamb of God, behold Him who taketh away the sin of the world."

<sup>112</sup> Lev. 3:17; 4:12.

adequate images represent the contract of love between God and the soul.

*Sacrifice, the expression of love*

O Lord, . . . Thou hast broken my bonds: I will sacrifice to Thee the sacrifice of praise.<sup>113</sup>

I beseech you . . . that you present your bodies a living sacrifice, holy, pleasing unto God, your reasonable service.<sup>114</sup>

Sacrifice because of sin corresponds clearly to the ideas of expiation and reparation. But in itself sacrifice is also the necessary expression of a will pledged with all fervor to serve one who is loved above all else.<sup>115</sup> That being so, sacrifice is the will's one way to atone for past faults, to express eagerness to serve, or to sing the praise rising from the heart. The will is spontaneously immolated to God's good pleasure.<sup>116</sup>

The first pages of the Sacred Book show us that the numerous holocausts offered to Yahweh were almost all sacrifices of thanksgiving. This is explained by the worthiness of the patriarchs and their deep awareness of divine transcendence. Yet the greater part of the Bible is haunted by the

<sup>113</sup> Ps. 115:7.      <sup>114</sup> Rom. 12:1.

<sup>115</sup> "And he that taketh not up his cross, and followeth Me, is not worthy of Me. He that findeth his life, shall lose it" (Matt. 10:38-39).

<sup>116</sup> Under the New Testament dispensation only one sacrifice can be offered, that of Christ, for by His unique oblation He secured eternal perfection for those who are sanctified. "Now where there is a remission of sins, there is no more an oblation for sin" (Heb. 10:18). But it is important to note that sharing the life of Christ means sharing, in every way and voluntarily, the sacrifice of praise and expiation which He came to offer. "Behold I come . . . that I should do Thy will, O my God" (Ps. 39:8-9).

idea of penance and by the offering of sacrifices of expiation, proving the people's profound realization of the offense to God, their will to return to Him, their trust in divine mercy. They had been given absolute assurance of that mercy. Was it not affirmed in the precepts God gave to Moses regarding propitiatory sacrifices? "But the fat he shall burn . . . and the priest shall pray for him and for his sin, and it shall be forgiven him."<sup>117</sup> The sacrifice of expiation was, therefore, highly esteemed by faithful servants of Yahweh. We see an admirable example of this in the holy man Job who, fearing lest his sons might have sinned in the course of a banquet, "sent to them, and sanctified them, and rising up early offered holocausts for every one of them. For he said: Lest perhaps my sons have sinned."<sup>118</sup>

But ritual sacrifice was in vain if not accompanied by the proper interior sentiments. On the other hand, God always responds mercifully if these sentiments be present, whatever form of expression they may take. Prayer, fasting and penance, besides being signs of a sincere conversion, were also powerful means of obtaining divine pardon.<sup>119</sup> Even the pagan and impious city of Ninive experienced God's mercy.

And Jonas began to enter into the city . . . and he cried, and said: Yet forty days, and Ninive shall be destroyed. And the men of Ninive believed in God; and they proclaimed a fast, and put on sackcloth from the greatest to the least. And the word came to the king of Ninive; and he rose up out of his

<sup>117</sup> Lev. 4:26; cf. Lev. 4:31, 35; 5:10.      <sup>118</sup> Job. 1:5.

<sup>119</sup> Christ was to stress the efficacy of these practices, as well as the interior attitude that should inspire them: "But thou, when thou fastest, anoint thy head and wash thy face, that thou appear not to men to fast, but to thy Father who is in secret; and thy Father who seeth in secret, will repay thee" (Matt. 6:17-18).



throne and cast away his robe from him, and was clothed with sackcloth, and sat in ashes. And he caused it to be proclaimed. . . . Let neither men nor beasts . . . feed, nor drink water. . . . And let men . . . cry to the Lord with all their strength, and let them turn every one from his evil way, and from the iniquity that is in their hands. Who can tell if God will turn, and forgive; and will turn away from His fierce anger, and we shall not perish? And God saw their works, that they were turned from their evil way; and God had mercy with regard to the evil which He had said that He would do to them, and He did it not.<sup>120</sup>

It is true that often men's hearts inclined to humility and repentance only because of imminent punishment. But God does not disdain these first steps toward Him. "Thus saith the Lord the God of Israel: Forasmuch as thou hast heard the words of the book, and thy heart hath been moved to fear, and thou hast humbled thyself before the Lord, hearing the words against this place, and the inhabitants thereof, . . . and thou hast rent thy garments, and wept before Me, I also have heard thee, saith the Lord."<sup>121</sup>

It often happens also that men repent and beg God's help in order to win a victory.<sup>122</sup> "So when they had all done this together, and had craved mercy of the Lord with weeping and fasting, lying prostrate on the ground for three days continually, Judas exhorted them to make themselves ready."<sup>123</sup>

Already on Mount Sinai, on the eve of God's manifesta-

<sup>120</sup> Jonas 3:4-10. <sup>121</sup> IV Kings 22:18-19.

<sup>122</sup> Christ was to teach His disciples who had been unable to drive out the demons from a man possessed: "But this kind is not cast out but by prayer and fasting" (Matt. 17:21).

<sup>123</sup> II Mach. 13:12.

tion, the people had been invited to purify themselves by penance in order to be able to hear Yahweh's words. "Go to the people, and sanctify them today, and tomorrow, and let them wash their garments. And let them be ready, against the third day."<sup>124</sup> A real asceticism, based on interior humility and supported by penitential practices suggested in the precepts, helped to keep men's hearts turned toward God. Times of special austerity were provided as an invitation to lead an interior life and to make their conversion more complete. "And this shall be to you an everlasting ordinance: The seventh month, and the tenth day of the month, you shall afflict your souls,<sup>125</sup> and shall do no work. . . . Upon this day shall be the expiation for you, and the cleansing from all your sins; you shall be cleansed before the Lord. For it is a sabbath of rest, and you shall afflict your souls by a perpetual religion."<sup>126</sup>

The best of the Jews lived a life of sacrifice through love of the divine commandments. They conformed to the severe and habitual discipline which comprised countless details of daily life. The spiritual reward of their service was often evident. When the four Hebrew youths at the court of Babylon persevered in their austere abstinence without suffering any injury to their health, "God gave [them] knowledge and understanding in every book, and wisdom; but to Daniel the understanding also of all visions and dreams."<sup>127</sup> Likewise, the sages of the Old Testament acquired their deep insight

<sup>124</sup> Exod. 19:10-11. Christ too gave an example of penance before beginning His public ministry. He fasted in the desert for forty days and forty nights. Cf. Matt. 4:2.

<sup>125</sup> The word "afflict" means here to mortify both physically and spiritually.

<sup>126</sup> Lev. 16:29-31. <sup>127</sup> Dan. 1:17.

into divine mysteries by reason of their holy lives rigidly devoted to penance and prayer.

But especially when God's great friends experience times of trouble, then the transformation of hearts becomes most evident and most wonderfully impressive. We may cite David's attitude when he fled from his son Absalom, usurper of the throne. He admirably combined deep humility with wonderful prudence, love of neighbor with oblivion of insult.

But David went up by the ascent of Mount Olivet, going up and weeping, walking barefoot, and with his head covered, and all the people that were with them, went up with their heads covered weeping. . . . And behold there came out . . . a man named Semei and . . . he cursed as he went on, and he threw stones at David, and at all the servants of king David: . . . And the king said to Abisai and to all his servants: Behold my son, who came forth from my bowels, seeketh my life; how much more now a son of Jemini? Let him alone that he may curse as the Lord hath bidden him. Perhaps the Lord may look upon my affliction, and the Lord may render me good for the cursing of this day. And David and his men with him went by the way. And Semei by the hill's side went over against him, cursing, and casting stones at him, and scattering earth.<sup>128</sup>

Besides humility and repentance, which show the sincerity of the soul's relationship to God, there arises also the desire to prove its love. To do so it must repair as far as possible the offense to God or the wrong done to neighbor. Again God, in His power and mercy, graciously provided men with a ritual sacrifice which rededicated what had been

<sup>128</sup> II Kings 15:30; 16:6, 11, 13.

snatched from Him and restored all things to their original order.

If any one shall sin through mistake, transgressing the ceremonies in those things that are sacrificed to the Lord, he shall offer for his offense a ram without blemish out of the flocks. . . . And he shall make good the damage itself which he hath done, and shall add the fifth part besides, delivering it to the priest, who shall pray for him, offering the ram, and it shall be forgiven him. . . . Whosoever shall sin and, despising the Lord, shall deny to his neighbor the thing delivered to his keeping, which was committed to his trust; or shall by force extort any thing, or commit oppression; or shall find a thing lost, and denying it, shall also swear falsely, or shall do any other of the many things wherein men are wont to sin; being convicted of the offense, he shall restore all that he would have gotten by fraud, in the principal, and the fifth part besides to the owner, whom he wronged. Moreover for his sin he shall offer a ram without blemish out of the flock, and shall give it to the priest, . . . and he shall pray for him before the Lord, and he shall have forgiveness for everything in doing of which he hath sinned. . . . This also is the law of the sacrifice for a trespass, it is most holy.<sup>129</sup>

By a wholly gratuitous favor, God grants this total and merciful restoration, along with the formal promise of pardon in answer to sincere prayer rising to Him. There is no taint so black that it cannot be totally obliterated and compensated by a greater love. The Psalmist cried out: "Thou

<sup>129</sup> Lev. 5:15-16; 6:2-7; 7:1. In the Gospel we see that Zaccheus, though he was a sinner, followed this rule. On that account, and also because of his humility, our Lord spoke words of salvation to him (Luke 19:8).

shalt sprinkle me with hyssop, and I shall be cleansed; Thou shalt wash me, and I shall be made whiter than snow. To my hearing Thou shalt give joy and gladness; and the bones that have been humbled shall rejoice. Turn away Thy face from my sins, and blot out all my iniquities. . . . Restore unto me the joy of Thy salvation, . . . and my tongue shall extol Thy justice.”<sup>130</sup>

Certain pages of the Bible overflow with the joy of this deep and total renewal. When the temple which had been desecrated was purified once more and sacrifice was offered to reconsecrate it to God, Ezechias assembled the priests and Levites.

And he said to them: Hear me, ye Levites, and be sanctified; purify the house of the Lord, the God of your fathers, and take away all filth out of the sanctuary. . . . And Ezechias commanded that they should offer holocausts upon the altar; and when the holocausts were offered, they began to sing praises to the Lord, and to sound with trumpets and divers instruments which David the king of Israel had prepared. And all the multitude adored, and the singers and the trumpeters were in their office till the holocaust was finished. And when the oblation was ended, the king and all that were with him bowed down and adored. . . . And Ezechias added, and said: You have filled your hands to the Lord, come and offer victims, and praises in the house of the Lord.<sup>131</sup>

The material injury caused by sin, however great it might be, could be repaired. But the moral damage of the soul committing it is in itself irreparable. Even if the soul made restitution to the limit of its assets, even if a thousand sacrifices were offered in atonement of the offense to God, the

<sup>130</sup> Ps. 50:9–11, 14, 16.    <sup>131</sup> II Par. 29:5, 27–31.

soul could not, on that account, be restored to grace. It could be fully pardoned only by being redeemed. But at what price? God Himself fixed the price, but a price so absurdly low that its symbolic meaning is clearly evident.

And the Lord spoke to Moses, saying: When thou shalt take the sum of the children of Israel according to their number, every one of them shall give a price for their souls to the Lord. . . . And this shall every one give that passeth at the naming, half a sicle according to the standard of the temple. . . . The rich man shall not add to half a sicle, and the poor man shall diminish nothing. . . . That it may be a memorial of them before the Lord, and He may be merciful to their souls.<sup>132</sup>

This coin is undoubtedly a symbol, for no ransom could be the equivalent of the infinite value of a soul. “No brother can redeem, nor shall man redeem; he shall not give to God his ransom. Nor the price of the redemption of his soul; and shall labor forever, and shall still live unto the end.”<sup>133</sup> The only adequate ransom would be the treasure of the redemptive blood of Jesus Christ,<sup>134</sup> to which we may add our own humble efforts to be generous in sacrifice, fervent in expressing love, merciful in dealing with our neighbor. And thus the abundance of divine mercy will be opened for us. “For alms delivereth from death, and the same is that which purgeth away sins, and maketh to find mercy and life everlasting.”<sup>135</sup>

<sup>132</sup> Exod. 30:11–16.    <sup>133</sup> Ps. 48:8–9.

<sup>134</sup> “For the Son of man . . . [has come] to give His life a redemption for many” (Mark 10:45).

<sup>135</sup> Tob. 12:9. To practice mercy draws down upon man God’s mercy and also gives proof of a restored soul alive with charity. God is wonderfully pleased with such service. “Present yourselves

Another special type of sacrifice found in the Old Testament consisted principally of ardent prayer. Though such prayer was not, of course, absent from the rites already considered, yet the place it holds in this case is noteworthy. It shows that Israel never considered sacrifice as a rite endowed with magic power, but as an action which was effective only so far as the one who offered it was humble and trusted God. One might say that the soul of sacrifice was the prayer which accompanied it. The one offering it acknowledged his profound unworthiness of the favor he asks. Yet he implores it fervently. Thus sacrifice is tantamount to the response to a tacit promise of divine benevolence. It is a kind of anticipated thanksgiving for a gift which is expected with the certainty of a boundless trust. So Jacob's ardent desire suggested the idea of the sacrifice which he offered to Yahweh:

And Jacob arising in the morning, took the stone which he had laid under his head, and set it up for a title, pouring oil upon the top of it. And he called the name of the city Bethel. . . . And he made a vow, saying: If God shall be with me, and shall keep me in the way by which I walk, and shall give me bread to eat, and raiment to put on, and I shall return prosperously to my father's house; the Lord shall be my God; and this stone, which I have set up for a title, shall be called the house of God; and of all things that Thou shalt give to me, I will offer tithes to Thee.<sup>136</sup>

Prayer and sacrifice call for each other and complete each other. The one is the expression of the other. Often we

to God, as those that are alive from the dead, and your members as instruments of justice unto God" (Rom. 6:13).

<sup>136</sup> Gen. 28:18-22.

see them closely associated, as at times of national disaster or when an important favor is requested. "And they said to Samuel: Cease not to cry to the Lord our God for us, that He may save us out of the hand of the Philistines. And Samuel took a sucking lamb, and offered it whole for a holocaust to the Lord; and Samuel cried to the Lord for Israel, and the Lord heard him."<sup>137</sup>

Sacrifice united to prayer pleased God even more when it expressed the sentiments of a multitude or when it was offered for the salvation of all the people. In the course of a terrible affliction which fell upon the people as a result of their sins, David "built there an altar to the Lord; and he offered holocausts and peace offerings, and he called upon the Lord, and He heard him by sending fire from heaven upon the altar of the holocaust. And the Lord commanded the angel; and he put up his sword again into his sheath."<sup>138</sup>

The ultimate reason for the reprieve granted through sacrifice is the absolute trust of the plea for help and mercy. When this trust is expressed in faith's chant of praise, it is so dear to God that He grants whatever is hoped for.<sup>139</sup> A striking instance is found when the Bible recounts how the people were about to perish in a military invasion at the time of Josaphat:

And Josaphat being seized with fear betook himself wholly to pray to the Lord, and he proclaimed a fast for all Juda. . . .

<sup>137</sup> I Kings 7:8-9.      <sup>138</sup> I Par. 21:26.

<sup>139</sup> "And this is the confidence which we have toward Him; that whatsoever we shall ask according to His will, He heareth us. And we know that He heareth us whatsoever we ask; we know that we have the petitions which we request of Him" (I John 5:14-15). "And all things whatsoever you shall ask in prayer, believing, you shall receive" (Matt. 21:22).

And all Juda stood before the Lord with their little ones, and their wives, and their children. And Jahaziel . . . was there, upon whom the spirit of the Lord came in the midst of the multitude. And he said: Attend ye, all Juda. . . . Thus saith the Lord to you: Fear ye not, and be not dismayed at this multitude; for the battle is not yours, but God's. Tomorrow you shall go down against them. . . . It shall not be you that shall fight, but only stand with confidence, and you shall see the help of the Lord over you. . . . And as they were marching, Josophat standing in the midst of them, said: Hear me, ye men of Juda, and all the inhabitants of Jerusalem, believe in the Lord your God, and you shall be secure; believe His prophets, and all things shall succeed well. And he gave counsel to the people, and appointed the singing men of the Lord, to praise Him by their companies, and to go before the army, and with one voice to say: Give glory to the Lord, for His mercy endureth forever. And when they began to sing praises, the Lord turned their ambushments upon themselves, that is to say, of the children of Ammon, . . . and they turned also against one another, and destroyed one another.<sup>140</sup>

Absolute trust, penance, and humble prayer produced the strength and victory of Judith and comprised the only adornment of Esther when she bowed down before God. "And when she had laid away her royal apparel, she put on garments suitable for weeping and mourning; instead of divers precious ointments, she covered her head with ashes and dung, and she humbled her body with fasts; and all the places in which before she was accustomed to rejoice, she filled with her torn hair. And she prayed to the Lord the God of Israel, saying: O my Lord, who alone art our king,

<sup>140</sup> II Par. 20:3, 13-23.

help me a desolate woman, and who have no other helper but Thee." <sup>141</sup>

With what remarkable freedom these souls express their trust and compunction in gestures adapted to the circumstances! Here the law no longer prescribed their actions and yet who could fail to recognize the element of sacrifice? This teaches us the sacrificial value implicit in attitudes of humility, consecration to God and absolute trust in His mercy. Since the soul of a just man comprises all these sentiments, he need only utter his prayer to God to have it granted. God Himself assured Abimelech that Abraham's prayer had extraordinary power: "He shall pray for thee, and thou shalt live." <sup>142</sup> Moses stretched out his arms over the people as a sign of intercession and was granted their salvation.<sup>143</sup> What touching signs of love and tokens of deep faith are found when the chant of praise precedes the plea for help! However long the delay, trust can never waver. Anna's prayer, full of anguish and yet penetrated with the harsh savor of incense offered in the evening sacrifice, is a wonderful example of how graciously God grants such requests.

As Anna had her heart full of grief, she prayed to the Lord, shedding many tears. And she made a vow, saying: O Lord of hosts, if Thou wilt look down on the affliction of Thy servant. . . . And it came to pass, as she multiplied prayers before the

<sup>141</sup> Esther 14:2-3. <sup>142</sup> Gen. 20:7.

<sup>143</sup> Cf. Luke 18:1-8: "And He spoke also a parable to them, that we ought always to pray, and not to faint. . . . And will not God revenge His elect who cry to Him day and night; and will He have patience in their regard? . . . But yet the Son of man, when He cometh, shall He find, think you, faith on earth?"

Lord, that Heli observed her mouth. And now Anna spoke in her heart, and only her lips moved, but her voice was not heard at all. Heli therefore thought her to be drunk. . . . Anna answering, said: Not so, my lord; for I am an exceedingly unhappy woman, and have drunk neither wine nor any strong drink, but I have poured out my soul before the Lord. . . . For out of the abundance of my sorrow and grief have I spoken till now. Then Heli said to her: Go in peace; and the God of Israel grant thee thy petition, which thou hast asked of Him. . . . So the woman went on her way, and ate, and her countenance was no more changed. . . . And it came to pass when the time was come about, Anna conceived and bore a son, and called his name Samuel, because she had asked him of the Lord.<sup>144</sup>

Doubtless, truly humble souls alone are able to comprehend the extent and the depth of God's mercy. Their sole attitude, therefore, becomes praise, blessing, and thanksgiving. "What shall I render to the Lord, for all the things that He hath rendered to me? I will take the chalice of salvation, and I will call upon the name of the Lord."<sup>145</sup> From the beginning to the end of time the faith of such souls makes them models for us. Not by chance do the great patriarchs make thanksgiving the principal element, almost the only motive, in the sacrifices they offered to God. Their zeal prompted them to build altars to Yahweh for sacrifices of praise. "And Noe built an altar unto the Lord; and taking of all cattle and fowls that were clean, offered holocausts upon the altar."<sup>146</sup> "And the Lord appeared to Abram . . .

<sup>144</sup> I Kings 1:10-20.

<sup>145</sup> Ps. 115:3-4. In the Gospel whenever Christ addresses His Father publicly, it is always with words of blessing and thanksgiving.

<sup>146</sup> Gen. 8:20.

and he built there an altar to the Lord. And passing on from thence to a mountain, that was on the east side of Bethel, he there pitched his tent, having Bethel on the west, and Hai on the east; he built there also an altar to the Lord, and called upon His name."<sup>147</sup>

Praise expresses their adoration and the favor they beg is God's blessing. To obtain it, Jacob did not hesitate to supplant his brother. The same craving to be blessed appeared at the time of his wrestling with the angel: "He remained alone; and behold a man wrestled with him till morning. . . . And he said to him: Let me go, for it is break of day. He answered: I will not let thee go except thou bless me. . . . And he blessed him in the same place."<sup>148</sup>

Such zeal and eagerness startle our lukewarm, insipid souls. If our hearts were sufficiently burning within us, we might seize the secret of that harsh jealousy. It is a fact that as soon as God's voice was heard these men stood before Him oblivious of themselves, adoration thrilling in their hearts, a flood of praise ready to gush forth. "I am here," said Abraham. Often in the psalms souls bypass their own wretchedness to offer God homage for the blessings heaped upon them, to offer Him also the praise of all creation. "It is good to give praise to the Lord; and to sing to Thy name, O Most High. To show forth Thy mercy in the morning, and Thy truth in the night."<sup>149</sup> "Praise ye the Lord from the heavens; praise ye Him in the high places. Praise ye Him, all His angels; praise ye Him, all His hosts."<sup>150</sup>

The soul forgets itself to become absorbed in the theme of thanksgiving, saying: "Bless the Lord, O my soul; and let all

<sup>147</sup> Gen. 12:7-8.

<sup>148</sup> Gen. 32:24-29.

<sup>149</sup> Ps. 91:2-3.

<sup>150</sup> Ps. 148:1-2.

that is within me bless His holy name.”<sup>151</sup> The just man praises God by thanking Him for His gifts. Often the gratitude took the form of sacrifices of thanksgiving, a frequent occurrence in Israel. These consisted of “unleavened bread, cakes tempered and mingled with oil, . . . loaves of leavened bread.”<sup>152</sup> All who were clean could eat of it.

An offering was made, likewise, of the best portion of all the wealth generously bestowed by God.

All tithes of the land, whether of corn, or of the fruits of trees, are the Lord’s, and are sanctified to Him.<sup>153</sup>

Every year thou shalt set aside the tithes of all thy fruits that the earth bringeth forth, and thou shalt eat before the Lord thy God in the place which He shall choose, that His name may be called upon therein, the tithe of thy corn, and thy wine, and thy oil, and the firstborn of thy herds and thy sheep; that thou mayest learn to fear the Lord thy God at all times.<sup>154</sup>

But the best thank-offering of a just man is the homage of a heart which gives itself and all it owns completely to God. King David told God: “I have joyfully offered all these things.”<sup>155</sup> Offerings and blessings should be made joyfully, as befits the spontaneous impulse of a soul paying a tribute of love:

There shall you feast before the Lord your God, you and your sons and your daughters, your menservants and maid-servants, and the Levite that dwelleth in your cities. For He hath no other part and possession among you.<sup>156</sup>

<sup>151</sup> Ps. 102:1. Cf. I Thess: “Always rejoice. Pray without ceasing. In all things give thanks; for this is the will of God in Christ Jesus concerning you all.”

<sup>152</sup> Lev. 7:12–13.      <sup>153</sup> Lev. 27:30.      <sup>154</sup> Deut. 14:22–23.

<sup>155</sup> I Par. 29:17.      <sup>156</sup> Deut. 12:12.

Give glory to God with a good heart; and diminish not the firstfruits of thy hands. In every gift show a cheerful countenance, and sanctify thy tithes with joy. Give to the Most High according to what He hath given to thee, and with a good eye do according to the ability of thy hands.<sup>157</sup>

Offer to God the sacrifice of praise; and pay thy vows to the Most High.<sup>158</sup>

The firstfruits were offered to Yahweh three times a year in the midst of great feasting—at the feasts of unleavened bread, the reaping and the harvest. This joy in giving was a wonderful sign of the purity of intention on the part of the giver, and of a love that was truly free with the freedom enjoyed by God’s true servants and friends. But the joy accompanying perfect gifts was, nevertheless, the fruit of real renunciation and the sign of a man’s victory over himself. For man finds liberty and the possibility of loving God above all things, only by fixing his heart on imperishable things, on Him who is the master and the giver of gifts.<sup>159</sup> Therefore the divine commandment required renunciation and detachment: detachment from wealth and material advantages to which man had a lawful right or which he could easily acquire. The law commanded these sacrifices not only for God’s sake, but also for the benefit of less favored brethren.

<sup>157</sup> Eccus. 35:10–12.      <sup>158</sup> Ps. 49:14.

<sup>159</sup> “Whatsoever you do, do it from the heart, as to the Lord, and not to men” (Col. 3:23). “Every one as he hath determined in his heart, not with sadness or of necessity; for God loveth a cheerful giver” (II Cor. 9:7). “Lay not up to yourselves treasures on earth: . . . But lay up to yourselves treasures in heaven. . . . For where thy treasure is, there is thy heart also” (Matt. 6:19–21).

Six years thou shalt sow thy field and six years thou shalt prune thy vineyard, and shalt gather the fruits thereof; but in the seventh year there shall be a sabbath to the land, of the resting of the Lord.<sup>160</sup>

If thy brother constrained by poverty, sell himself to thee, thou shalt not oppress him with the service of bondservants. . . . In the year of the jubilee he shall go out with his children. For the children of Israel are My servants, whom I brought forth out of the land of Egypt.<sup>161</sup>

The soul, however, is called to a deeper and more spiritual detachment for the glory of God. The sacrifice of what is dearest to man, his honor, could if necessary be asked of him. Thus, when David's wife, Michol, scorned him for dancing before the ark dressed only in his ephod, he showed his love and humility by answering: "Before the Lord, who chose me rather than thy father, and than all his house, and commanded me to be ruler over the people of the Lord in Israel, I will both play and make myself meaner than I have done; and I will be little in my own eyes; and with the handmaids of whom thou speakest, I shall appear more glorious."<sup>162</sup>

Under the influence of the divine commandment, the believer's soul itself became the living and true holocaust of which the ritual sacrifice was but an imperfect, though magnificent symbol. This spiritual worship is urged in certain texts which offer an apparent, but not real, contradiction of other commands. "For I spoke not to your fathers, and I commanded them not, . . . concerning the matter of burnt offerings and sacrifices. But this thing I commanded them,

<sup>160</sup> Lev. 25:3-4.

<sup>161</sup> Lev. 25:39, 54-55.

<sup>162</sup> II Kings 6:22-23.

saying: Harken to My voice, and I will be your God, and you shall be My people."<sup>163</sup>

In docile silence the generous soul heeds the quiet invitations and all life becomes a sacrifice of praise. Such a soul loves to repeat these words of Psalm 39, which Christ fulfilled in perfection: "Sacrifice and oblation Thou didst not desire; but Thou hast pierced ears for me. Burnt offering and sin offering Thou didst not require; then said I: Behold I come . . . that I should do Thy will, O my God."<sup>164</sup>

Christ was to declare that "greater love than this no man hath, that a man lay down his life for his friends."<sup>165</sup> His words were verified in His passion and death. But even in the Old Testament this ultimate sacrifice in which the soul gives itself completely was not unknown, for we find examples of absolute detachment. Upon a simple word from God, through pure love of His holy will, Abraham prepared to sacrifice his only son. This proof of supreme love became the figure of the redeeming sacrifice.

God tempted Abraham, and said to him: Abraham, Abraham. And he answered: Here I am. He said to him: Take thy only-begotten son Isaac, whom thou lovest, and go into the land of vision; and there thou shalt offer him for an holocaust upon one of the mountains which I will show thee. . . . And he took the wood for the holocaust, and laid it upon Isaac his son . . . and they two went on together.<sup>166</sup>

Throughout their history the children of God joyfully imperiled their lives for His sake and frequently found their death in battle. "They resolved to fight, and to set upon them manfully, that valor might decide the matter, be-

<sup>163</sup> Jer. 7:22-23.

<sup>164</sup> Ps. 39:7-9.

<sup>165</sup> John 15:13.

<sup>166</sup> Gen. 22:1-2, 6.



cause the holy city and the temple were in danger. For their concern was less for their wives, and children, and for their brethren, and kinsfolks; but their greatest and principal fear was for the holiness of the temple." <sup>167</sup>

The book of Machabees describes the voluntary sacrifice of seven sons whose mother experienced martyrdom in her heart before suffering it in her body. The last words of the old man Eleazar express his joyful acceptance of death: "But when he was now ready to die with the stripes, he groaned, and said: O Lord, who hast the holy knowledge, Thou knowest manifestly that whereas I might be delivered from death, I suffer grievous pains in body, but in soul am well content to suffer these things because I fear Thee." <sup>168</sup>

Divine love burned also in the heart of Esther, who risked death to save her people: "I with my handmaids will fast . . . and then I will go in to the king, against the law, not being called, and expose myself to death and to danger." <sup>169</sup>

The lives of Jeremias and of other prophets was a real martyrdom. The three youths in the furnace, who were witnesses of the truth, poured forth a hymn of praise: "Blessed art Thou, O Lord, the God of our fathers, and worthy to be praised and glorified, and exalted above all forever." <sup>170</sup>

All these souls seem to repeat constantly: "Thy kingdom come. Thy will be done on earth as it is in heaven." <sup>171</sup> For them sacrifice and love of God are so intimately linked that love impels them without hesitation to whatever deed best bears witness of Him. Christ was to tell His disciples: "You shall be brought before governors, and before kings . . . But when they shall deliver you up, take no thought how

<sup>167</sup> II Mach. 15:17-18. <sup>168</sup> II Mach. 6:30.

<sup>169</sup> Esther 4:16. <sup>170</sup> Dan. 3:52. <sup>171</sup> Matt. 6:1.0.

or what to speak." <sup>172</sup> But even in the Old Testament, simple souls ignored devious speech, sometimes expressing their faith in an exultant cry, more often finding an obscure death in battle or at the close of a long life which left them exhausted in the service of God's glory. They truly loved their God more than themselves, "above all things with all their strength and with all their soul," and they loved their neighbors with the same love. They prepared the way for the teaching of Jesus, whose passion and cross were to prove that the greatest love for God and the brethren is crucified love.

Penance, reparation, prayer, praise, thanksgiving: under all these aspects sacrifice was associated with the whole life of Israel. Always it was an expression of the love of God. But however important that may appear, there was a more far-reaching role. If sacrifice had such an important place in the Bible, if God wished His people to be so familiarized with it that it became an intimate part of all their collective and liturgical life, if He created the need for sacrifice from the very depths of their heart and personal life, the reason is that sacrifice was destined to attain a unique dignity. Here, as in so many other instances (but more clearly), the Old Testament had a mission to prepare men for a higher reality. All the sacrifices found there not only show progress toward less imperfect forms, but are an advance symbol of another sacrifice toward which they dimly grope. A day was to come when they would be assumed and resumed in the perfect, unique, final sacrifice which would suppress all others by completing them. It was but right to stress the variety and wealth of forms found in Israel's sacrifices, and to show

<sup>172</sup> Matt. 10:18-19.

what an important place they occupied in the life of the Hebrew people. But to find a focal point toward which all these vague preparations converged is impossible without the light of Christ, who offered the perfect sacrifice. Christ was perfect priest and perfect victim; in Christ was revealed the hidden meaning of all symbols; in Christ was fulfilled all prophecy.

We shall wait for our chapter on the Savior to trace the outline of His features in the Old Testament and to assemble the sacrificial figures and signs which found their pattern in Him. The sacrifice richest in meaning and connotation was the Passover, which Christ willed to perpetuate by offering it as priest and victim. In the new and eternal Testament, the ancient sacrifice of the paschal lamb, the Passover, was to become the victorious sacrifice of the Lamb of God, immolated on the cross and rising on the morning of the new Passover, Easter.<sup>173</sup>

### THE ROYAL LAW

#### *Love of neighbor*

Together with the great commandment of love of God, Israel received the second commandment: love of neighbor: "Thou shalt love thy neighbor as thyself."<sup>174</sup> Though apparently hidden beneath a flood of secondary prescriptions, the precept of love of neighbor, which Christ was to make *His* special commandment, occupied an important place even in the Old Testament. Little by little it became the

<sup>173</sup> In Latin and in many of the Romance languages the word for *Passover* has been retained, with but slight change, to indicate Easter [Translator's note].

<sup>174</sup> Lev. 19:18.

charter of the relations of men with their brethren. From its first appearance this law of charity possessed a special power due to its divine origin. Later it underwent gradual development. A long time was to elapse before it would become a part of everyday life. Indeed, life would never be perfectly permeated by charity, for souls could never cease discovering new values and new requirements in this love which God prescribed as the foundation of Israel's institutions. By charity the people were to become more deeply aware of their own destitution as well as their divine potentialities.

The dispositions of kindness and mercy found in the law side by side with requirements of loyalty and justice all blend to form an ideal which cannot derive from natural ethics alone, but requires a supernatural principle. "The Lord spoke to Moses, saying: Speak to all the congregation of the children of Israel, and thou shalt say to them: Be ye holy, because I the Lord your God am holy."<sup>175</sup>

So numerous and so intermingled were the obligations of the law that it acquired inner unity only when animated by the principle of charity. This also explains the absolute and wholly spiritual importance attached to the observance of each prescription. In the order of charity nothing is petty;<sup>176</sup> the smallest omission can compromise the whole structure. An attitude of justice in charity is the general orientation of the regulations found in the Pentateuch, especially in the Book of Leviticus.

<sup>175</sup> Lev. 19:1-2.

<sup>176</sup> "He that is faithful in that which is least, is faithful also in that which is greater. . . . And it is easier for heaven and earth to pass, than one tittle of the law to fall" (Luke 16:10, 17).

Let every one fear his father and his mother. . . . When thou reapest the corn of thy land, thou shalt not cut down all that is on the face of the earth to the very ground; nor shalt thou gather the ears that remain. Neither shalt thou gather the bunches and grapes that fall down in thy vineyard, but shalt leave them to the poor and the strangers to take. I am the Lord your God. You shall not steal. You shall not lie, neither shall any man deceive his neighbor. Thou shalt not swear falsely by My name, nor profane the name of thy God. I am the Lord. Thou shalt not calumniate thy neighbor, nor oppress him by violence. The wages of him that hath been hired by thee shall not abide with thee until the morning. Thou shalt not speak evil of the deaf, nor put a stumbling-block before the blind; but thou shalt fear the Lord thy God, because I am the Lord. . . . Judge thy neighbor according to justice. Thou shalt not be a detractor nor a whisperer among the people. Thou shalt not hate thy brother in thy heart, but reprove him openly, lest thou incur sin through him. Seek not revenge, nor be mindful of the injury of thy citizens. Thou shalt love thy neighbor as thyself. I am the Lord. . . . If a stranger dwell in your land, and abide among you, do not upbraid him; but let him be among you as one of the same country; and you shall love him as yourselves; for you were strangers in the land of Egypt. I am the Lord your God. Do not any unjust thing in judgment, in rule, in weight or in measure. Let the balance be just and the weights equal, the bushel just and the sextary equal. I am the Lord your God, that brought you out of the land of Egypt. Keep all My precepts and all My judgments, and do them. I am the Lord.<sup>177</sup>

In the above passages the repeated words, "I am the Lord," place us in the presence of the very Author of the law. God makes it clear that all these duties to neighbor,

<sup>177</sup> Lev. 19:3, 9-18, 33-37.

though unsystematically imposed, flow from one common source. Left to his own resources, man can no more reach this source than he can observe all the regulations. They are God's laws and regulations; human strength is not able to observe them with all the perfection required, that is, with charity. But the divine commandment asserts that it is possible to man if he is supported by God's word and God's strength.<sup>178</sup> Moreover, these laws all proceeding from the same Author link all men together in close unity; in God all are brothers.<sup>179</sup>

"Have we not all one father? Hath not one God created us?"<sup>180</sup> In asking this question, Malachias was hinting that the love of neighbor is not less supernatural in origin than the love of God, for fraternal charity reaches its perfection and fullness only if one man sees another as a child of God, the object of an equal love, promised the same reward, endowed with a share of the same divine bounty. Thus, the "royal law" is clearly supernatural in origin and end. It also requires supernatural help in its observance.

From humanity's first days, God had implanted His law in the hearts of those who lived in His presence. But to prepare the paths of charity, He had to teach men justice and impress upon them the necessity of pardon. When the proc-

<sup>178</sup> "With men this is impossible; but with God all things are possible" (Matt. 19:26). In the Sermon on the Mount, Christ enumerated the great precepts of the law of love and did not deny their severity: "Enter ye in at the narrow gate. . . . How narrow is the gate, and strait is the way that leadeth to life. . . . Not every one that saith to Me, Lord, Lord, shall enter into the kingdom of heaven, but he that doth the will of My Father" (Matt. 7:13, 21).

<sup>179</sup> "For one is your master; and all you are brethren" (Matt. 23:8).

<sup>180</sup> Mal. 2:10.

lamation of the law came on Sinai, the process was sufficiently advanced for the love of neighbor to animate many precepts which were tremendously exacting. Yet long before the time of Moses, certain souls followed the law of love in all its niceties. Abraham, for instance, was seized with a supernatural feeling of compassion on learning of the destruction about to fall upon the impious city of Sodom. The poignant debate between himself and God shows us that although the man of God never lacks humble respect, yet he and God are in agreement on the sublime plane of charity.

And the Lord said: The cry of Sodom and Gomorrha is multiplied, and their sin is become exceedingly grievous. I will go down and see whether they have done according to the cry that is come to Me, or whether it be not so, that I may know. And they turned themselves from thence, and went their way to Sodom; but Abraham as yet stood before the Lord. And drawing nigh he said: Wilt Thou destroy the just with the wicked? If there be fifty just men in the city, shall they perish withal? And wilt Thou not spare that place for the sake of the fifty just, if they be therein? Far be it from Thee to do this thing, and to slay the just with the wicked. . . . Thou who judgest all the earth, wilt not make this judgment. And the Lord said to him: If I find in Sodom fifty just within the city, I will spare the whole place for their sake. And Abraham answered, and said: Seeing I have once begun, I will speak to my Lord, whereas I am dust and ashes. What if there be five less than fifty just persons? Wilt Thou for five and forty destroy the whole city? And He said: I will not destroy it, if I find five and forty. And again he said: But if forty be found there, what wilt Thou do? He said: I will not destroy it for the sake of forty. Lord, saith he, be not angry, I beseech Thee, if I speak: What if thirty shall be found there? He answered: I will not do it, if I find thirty

there. Seeing, saith he, I have once begun, I will speak to my Lord. What if twenty be found there? He said: I will not destroy it for the sake of twenty. I beseech Thee, saith he, be not angry, Lord, if I speak yet once more: What if ten should be found there? And He said: I will not destroy it for the sake of ten.<sup>181</sup>

But alas, the ten were not found in the city and Sodom was destroyed.

Then too, what great charity was shown by Joseph in pardoning the treason of his brothers who had once deserted and sold him. When they had been tested by hunger and humiliation, they were able to open their hearts to charity. Then at last Joseph let his heart speak forth:

Joseph could no longer refrain himself before many that stood by; whereupon he commanded that all should go out, and no stranger be present at their knowing one another. . . . And he said to his brethren: I am Joseph, your brother, whom you sold into Egypt. Be not afraid, and let it not seem to you a hard case that you sold me into these countries; for God sent me before you into Egypt for your preservation. . . . And God sent me before, that you may be preserved upon the earth, and may have food to live. . . . And falling upon the neck of his brother Benjamin, he embraced him and wept. . . . And Joseph kissed all his brethren, and wept upon every one of them.<sup>182</sup>

In later times, charity was to be developed and refined in chosen souls; Tobias, for example, and also Ruth, who was to number David among her descendants. Consequently, we understand better that the stalk of Jesse in which the sap of love had long been circulating, would blossom forth at its top with the charity of Jesus Christ.

<sup>181</sup> Gen. 18:20-32.    <sup>182</sup> Gen. 45:1-7, 14-15.

*Two aspects of brotherly love*

Seek ye good, and not evil. . . . Hate evil, and love good.<sup>183</sup>

Grace is like a paradise in blessings, and mercy remaineth forever.<sup>184</sup>

We know that we have passed from death to life, because we love the brethren.<sup>185</sup>

Charity was destined to permeate institutions and societies by a gradual process and its ultimate source was not revealed to man at the outset. Nevertheless its supernatural qualities appeared at the dawn of biblical history. Because it came from God, it could not appear to man as a mere compromise between light and dark, between supernatural demands and human instincts; men might think they could avoid the struggle involved in existence and in the decisive choices charity required. They might seek to escape duty by furtive compromises which changed the bright flame of their lamps into smoky wicks. But charity could not accommodate itself to such devices. Supernatural charity could live in men's hearts only by fidelity to divine commandments and by generous struggle against ever-resurgent instincts of egoism, falsehood and revenge.

Hence charity includes a double series of requirements and thus takes on two aspects. The negative aspect was expressed in a series of precepts designed to protect our neighbor against the evil tendencies which constantly threaten to become active. The positive aspect is seen in the obligations of justice, love and mercy. These provide spiritual vitality for the soul and enable it to grow in charity and to respond to its ever-expanding requirements.<sup>186</sup> The

<sup>183</sup> Amos 5:14-15.    <sup>184</sup> Ecclus. 40:17.    <sup>185</sup> I John 3:14.

<sup>186</sup> "Unless a man be born again, he cannot see the kingdom of

Old Testament teaches and recalls these two aspects simultaneously.

The major prohibitions, being precise and solid, are quickly stamped on the mind. "Thou shalt not kill. Thou shalt not commit adultery. Thou shalt not steal. Thou shalt not bear false witness against thy neighbor. Thou shalt not covet thy neighbor's house; neither shalt thou desire his wife, nor his servant, nor his handmaid, nor his ox, nor his ass, nor any thing that is his."<sup>187</sup> Such prohibitions presuppose the daily temptations which harass us, where danger lurks under an attractive disguise. Even the shadow of evil hovering over the soul plunges it into darkness.<sup>188</sup>

The original commandments were supported by other prescriptions tending to give every man the right to live, to receive his just deserts, to preserve his honor. "Thou shalt not go aside in the poor man's judgment. . . . The innocent and just person thou shalt not put to death. . . . Neither shalt thou take bribes. . . . Thou shalt not molest a stranger."<sup>189</sup> "If a man seduce a virgin . . . he shall endow her, and have her to wife."<sup>190</sup>

At the same time, however, positive rules of kindness, of tactful charity, are given. These go beyond strict justice

God" (John 3:3). "For in Christ Jesus neither . . . availeth any thing . . . but a new creature" (Gal. 6:15). "Be not overcome by evil, but overcome evil by good" (Rom. 12:21).

<sup>187</sup> Exod. 20:13-17.

<sup>188</sup> "But I say to you, that whosoever shall look on a woman to lust after her, hath already committed adultery with her in his heart" (Matt. 5:28). "If thy eye be single, thy whole body will be light-some; but if it be evil, thy body also will be darksome. Take heed therefore, that the light which is in thee, be not darkness" (Luke 11:34-35).

<sup>189</sup> Exod. 23:6-8.

<sup>190</sup> Exod. 22:16.

and tend to open the heart to a deep understanding of one's neighbor and an intimate awareness of his needs which are different in each individual case.

If any man hurt a field or a vineyard, . . . he shall restore the best of whatsoever he hath in his own field or in his vineyard, according to the estimation of the damage. . . . If thou lend money to any of My people that is poor, that dwelleth with thee, thou shalt not be hard upon them as an extortioner, nor oppress them with usuries.<sup>191</sup>

When thou shalt demand of thy neighbor any thing that he oweth thee, thou shalt not go into his house to take away a pledge, but thou shalt stand without, and he shall bring out to thee what he hath. But if he be poor, the pledge shall not lodge with thee that night, but thou shalt restore it to him presently before the going down of the sun, that he may sleep in his own raiment and bless thee. . . . Thou shalt not refuse the hire of the needy, and the poor, whether he be thy brother, or a stranger that dwelleth with thee in the land, . . . But thou shalt pay him the price of his labor the same day . . . because he is poor, and with it he maintaineth his life.<sup>192</sup>

The same way of viewing charity under its two complementary aspects is found also in the words of the sages and the teaching of the prophets. While the sages have the special mission of imparting an appreciation of the spiritual beauty of the law of charity, the prophets shed full light on the precept of love of neighbor. Vividly depicting the events of daily life enacted before their eyes, they found therein ample motives for vehement exhortations to repair the shaky edifice of charity, as well as violent reproaches against widespread injustice and hypocrisy. They excoriated injustice, partic-

<sup>191</sup> Exod. 22:5, 25.

<sup>192</sup> Deut. 24:10-15.

ularly because it violated the most elementary form of brotherly love: respect for the person and possessions of others.<sup>193</sup>

Hear this, you that crush the poor, and make the needy of the land to fall, saying: When will the month be over,<sup>194</sup> and we shall sell our wares; and the sabbath, and we shall open the corn; that we may lessen the measure, and increase the sicle, and may convey in deceitful balances, that we may possess the needy for money, and the poor for a pair of shoes, and may sell the refuse of the corn?<sup>195</sup>

Woe to you . . . that justify the wicked for gifts and take away the justice of the just from him. . . . Woe to them that make wicked laws; when they write, write injustice. There is none that calleth upon justice, neither is there any one that judgeth truly; but they trust in a mere nothing and speak vanities. . . . And judgment is turned away backward, and justice hath stood far off; because truth hath fallen down in the street, and equity could not come in. And truth hath been forgotten; and he that departed from evil, lay open to be a prey.<sup>196</sup>

The injustice, violence and lack of charity which were widespread at the time of Isaias seemed even graver and more common in Jeremias' day. "Go about through the streets of Jerusalem, and see, and consider, and seek in the broad places thereof, if you can find a man that executeth

<sup>193</sup> Cf. Christ's condemnations: "Woe to you scribes and Pharisees . . . because you have left the weightier things of the law; judgment, and mercy, and faith. . . . Blind guides, who strain out a gnat, and swallow a camel" (Matt. 23:23-24).

<sup>194</sup> The day of the new moon, or the first day of the month, was a religious feast when it was forbidden to buy or sell (Num. 28:14; II Esd. 10:32).

<sup>195</sup> Amos 8:4-6.

<sup>196</sup> Isa. 5:23; 10:1; 59:4, 14.

judgment and seeketh faith; and I will be merciful unto it.<sup>197</sup> . . . As a net is full of birds, so their houses are full of deceit; therefore are they become great and enriched. They are grown gross and fat, and have most wickedly transgressed My words. . . . For from the least of them even to the greatest, all are given to covetousness; and from the prophet even to the priest, all are guilty of deceit.”<sup>198</sup>

Jeremias saw injustice, violence and fraud everywhere, even in the temple of God. “To steal, to murder, to commit adultery, to swear falsely, to offer to Baalim, and to go after strange gods, which you know not. And you have come, and stood before Me in this house, in which My name is called upon, and have said: We are delivered, because we have done all these abominations. Is this house, then, in which My name hath been called upon, in your eyes become a den of robbers?”<sup>199</sup>

When the prophets applied their indomitable energy to repressing crimes against fellow men, they were ever aware of leading Israel back to the precept of charity which had been bestowed in former times. They kept recalling this precept whenever the people departed from it:

And the word of the Lord came to Jeremias from the Lord, saying: . . . I made a covenant with your fathers in the day that I brought them out of the land of Egypt, out of the house of bondage, saying: At the end of seven years, let ye go every man his brother being a Hebrew, who hath been sold to thee. . . . And your fathers did not hearken to Me, nor did they incline

<sup>197</sup> Cf. in Rom. 3:9–18, St. Paul’s commentary on this text.

<sup>198</sup> Jer. 5:1, 28; 6:13.

<sup>199</sup> Jer. 7:9–10. Christ was to take up Jeremias’ words when he drove the merchants from the temple (Matt. 21:12).

their ear. And you turned today, and did that which was right in My eyes, in proclaiming liberty every one to his brother; and you are fallen back, and have brought back again every man his manservant, and every man his maidservant, whom you had let go free and set at liberty. . . . Behold I proclaim a liberty for you, saith the Lord, to the sword, to the pestilence and to the famine; and I will cause you to be removed from all the kingdoms of the earth . . . and I will make the cities of Juda a desolation without an inhabitant.<sup>200</sup>

Without hesitation the prophets unmask and attack the real sinners: the great and powerful men of the world; these are the chief butt of their reproaches.<sup>201</sup>

But I said: Perhaps these are poor and foolish, that know not the way of the Lord, the judgment of their God. I will go therefore to the great men, and will speak to them; for they have known the way of the Lord, the judgment of their God; and behold these have altogether broken the yoke more, and have burst the bonds.<sup>202</sup>

Hear this, ye princes of the house of Jacob, and ye judges of the house of Israel; you that abhor judgment and pervert all that is right. You that built up Sion with blood, and Jerusalem with iniquity. Her princes have judged for bribes, and her priests have taught for hire, and her prophets divined for money.<sup>203</sup>

The holy man is perished out of the earth, and there is none upright among men; they all lie in wait for blood, every one hunteth his brother to death. The evil of their hands they call good; the prince requireth, and the judge is forgiving; and the great man uttereth the desire of his soul. . . . He that is best

<sup>200</sup> Jer. 34:12–22.

<sup>201</sup> Similarly Christ’s reproaches were addressed almost exclusively to the leaders of Israel: the scribes, the Pharisees and the doctors of the law.

<sup>202</sup> Jer. 5:4–5.      <sup>203</sup> Mich. 3:9–12.

among them, is as a brier; and he that is righteous, as the thorn of the hedge.<sup>204</sup>

A marvellous text of Ezechiel violently attacks the wicked shepherds of Israel. The prophet's just indignation against the unworthy and covetous leaders alternates with tender pity for the weak and the poor who had been so shamefully treated. He is already imbued with the true spirit of the Gospels. What he condemns most in these bad shepherds is their desertion of their duties of justice and charity.

Thus saith the Lord God: Woe to the shepherds of Israel, that fed themselves; should not the flocks be fed by the shepherds? You ate the milk, and you clothed yourselves with the wool, and you killed that which was fat; but My flock you did not feed. The weak you have not strengthened, and that which was sick you have not healed, that which was broken you have not bound up, and that which was driven away you have not brought again, neither have you sought that which was lost; but you ruled over them with rigor, and with a high hand. And My sheep were scattered because there was no shepherd; and they became the prey of all the beasts of the field. . . . Therefore thus saith the Lord God to you: Behold I myself will judge between the fat cattle and the lean. Because you thrust with sides and shoulders, and struck all the weak cattle with your horns, till they were scattered abroad; I will save My flock, and it shall be no more a spoil, and I will judge between cattle and cattle.<sup>205</sup>

Often the prophets addressed well-deserved reproaches to the leaders who woefully neglected their duty. If the occasion demanded it, they even flung the truth in the face of the king himself. Thus, Nathan faced David, who was guilty

<sup>204</sup> Mich. 7:2-4.

<sup>205</sup> Ezech. 34:2-5, 20-22.

of the death of Urias, whose wife, Bethsabee, had been seduced by the king.

And the Lord sent Nathan to David; and when he was come to him, he said to him: There were two men in one city, the one rich and the other poor. The rich man had exceeding many sheep and oxen. But the poor man had nothing at all but one little ewe lamb, which he had brought and nourished up in his house together with his children, eating of his bread, and drinking of his cup, and sleeping in his bosom; and it was unto him as a daughter. And when a certain stranger was come unto the rich man, he spared to take of his own sheep and oxen, to make a feast for that stranger, who was come to him, but took the poor man's ewe, and dressed it for the man that was come to him. And David's anger being exceedingly kindled against that man, he said to Nathan: As the Lord liveth, the man that hath done this is a child of death. He shall restore the ewe fourfold, because he did this thing, and had no pity. And Nathan said to David: Thou art the man.<sup>206</sup>

The prophets were not content merely to condemn failures in justice and charity, along with evidence of covetousness and violence. They always sought the origin of the sin and revealed its underlying causes: hard hearts, closed by egotism, corrupted by deception and hypocrisy. As the Book of Proverbs warned: "With all watchfulness keep thy heart, because life issueth out from it."<sup>207</sup> The authors of the Old Testament had understood in early times a truth which Christ was to define with absolute clarity: "For from within out of the heart of men proceed evil thoughts, adulteries, fornications, murders."<sup>208</sup>

In the constant appeals and threats of the Bible, one idea

<sup>206</sup> II Kings 12:1-7.

<sup>207</sup> Prov. 4:23.

<sup>208</sup> Mark 7:21.



is clearly outlined and irrefutably proved: the soul that shuts out brotherly love shuts out God Himself, who, on that account, cannot gain entry. A soul once deprived of divine light is soon invaded by deceit, lying, hypocrisy, hard-heartedness, egotism: all the vices which Christ was later to condemn so energetically in the Pharisees. Everything holds together; everything is connected. Evil is expressed in action, but always it proceeds from the absence of love, lack of interior charity. The whole edifice, therefore, must be repaired from the foundation. The sages and the prophets indicated the constructive efforts needed in the domain of charity: "Wash yourselves, be clean, take away the evil of your devices from My eyes. . . . Learn to do well; seek judgment."<sup>209</sup>

The Wisdom writers have especially developed this teaching, relying on some of the most beautiful pages of the Old Law which had frequently been forgotten, but which they keep recalling. This exhortation was found in the Book of Deuteronomy:

If one of thy brethren . . . come to poverty, thou shalt not harden thy heart nor close thy hand, but shalt open it to the poor man; thou shalt lend him that which thou perceivest he hath need of. . . . But thou shalt give to him, neither shalt thou do anything craftily in relieving his necessities; that the Lord thy God may bless thee at all times, and in all things to which thou shalt put thy hand. There will not be wanting poor in the land of thy habitation; therefore I command thee to open thy hand to thy needy and poor brother, that liveth in the land.<sup>210</sup>

<sup>209</sup> Isa. 1:16-17. The same appeal echoes in the Epistles: "But according to thy hardness and impenitent heart, thou treasurest up to thyself wrath. . . . For not the hearers of the law are just before God, but the doers of the law shall be justified" (Rom. 2:5, 13).

<sup>210</sup> Deut. 15:7, 10-11.

The ideal of charity was expressed in many of the sacred books:

Deceit is in the heart of them that think evil things; but joy followeth them that take counsels of peace.<sup>211</sup>

Thou shalt not hate thy brother in thy heart, but reprove him openly, lest thou incur sin through him. Seek not revenge, nor be mindful of the injury of thy citizens.<sup>212</sup>

He that seeketh to revenge himself, shall find vengeance from the Lord, and He will surely keep his sins in remembrance. Forgive thy neighbor if he hath hurt thee; and then shall thy sins be forgiven to thee when thou prayest. Man to man reserveth anger, and doth he seek remedy of God? He hath no mercy on a man like himself, and doth he entreat for his own sins? He that is but flesh, nourisheth anger, and doth he ask forgiveness of God? Who shall obtain pardon for his sins? Remember thy last things, and let enmity cease. . . . Be not angry with thy neighbor, . . . overlook the ignorance of thy neighbor.<sup>213</sup>

The practice of charity procures divine pardon, which strips man of his harsh ways and softens the steel of his heart. "By mercy and truth iniquity is redeemed."<sup>214</sup> "Water quencheth a flaming fire, and alms resisteth sins."<sup>215</sup> "Charity covereth all sins."<sup>216</sup>

The angel Raphael taught the same lesson to young Tobias: "Prayer is good with fasting and alms more than to lay up treasures of gold. For alms delivereth from death, and the same is that which purgeth away sins, and maketh to find mercy and life everlasting."<sup>217</sup>

<sup>211</sup> Prov. 12:20.      <sup>212</sup> Lev. 19:17-18.      <sup>213</sup> Ecclus. 28:1-9.

<sup>214</sup> Prov. 16:6.      <sup>215</sup> Ecclus. 3:33.

<sup>216</sup> Prov. 10:12. "But before all things have a constant mutual charity among yourselves; for charity covereth a multitude of sins" (I Pet. 4:8).

<sup>217</sup> Tob. 12:8-9.

This charity is depicted with all the delicate nuances of love; it favors above all the poor, the weak and the suffering:

Do not withhold him from doing good, who is able; if thou art able, do good thyself also. Say not to thy friend: Go, and come again: and tomorrow I will give to thee, when thou canst give at present.<sup>218</sup>

Son, defraud not the poor of alms, and turn not away thy eyes from the poor. Despise not the hungry soul; and provoke not the poor in his want. Afflict not the heart of the needy, and defer not to give to him that is in distress. Reject not the petition of the afflicted; and turn not away thy face from the needy. In judging, be merciful to the fatherless as a father, and as a husband to their mother. And thou shalt be as the obedient son of the Most High, and He will have mercy on thee more than a mother. . . . Stretch out thy hand to the poor. . . . A gift hath grace in the sight of all the living, and restrain not grace from the dead. Be not wanting in comforting them that weep, and walk with them that mourn. Be not slow to visit the sick, for by these things thou shalt be confirmed in love. . . . He that showeth mercy, lendeth to his neighbor, and he that is stronger in hand, keepeth the commandments. . . . But yet toward the poor be thou more hearty, and delay not to show him mercy. Help the poor because of the commandment, and send him not away empty-handed because of his poverty.<sup>219</sup>

<sup>218</sup> Prov. 3:27-28.

<sup>219</sup> Ecclus. 4:1-4, 10-11; 7:36-39; 29:1, 11-12. On all these points the teaching of the apostles echoes that of the prophets: "But above all these things have charity, which is the bond of perfection" (Col. 3:14). "Religion clean and undefiled before God and the Father is this: to visit the fatherless and widows in their tribulation, and to keep one's self unspotted from this world" (Jas. 1:27). "Be ye all of one mind, having compassion one of another, being lovers of the brotherhood, merciful, modest, humble" (I Pet. 3:8). "In

Charity is mindful that the way of giving has a higher value than the gift itself. "Laugh no man to scorn in the bitterness of his soul."<sup>220</sup> "Shall not the dew assuage the heat? So also the good word is better than the gift. Lo, is not a word better than a gift? But both are with a justified man."<sup>221</sup>

The ultimate flowering of charity is shown in mercy for enemies. "If thy enemy be hungry, give him to eat; if he thirst, give him water to drink."<sup>222</sup> "If thou meet thy enemy's ox or ass going astray, bring it back to him. If thou see the ass of him that hateth thee lie underneath his burden, thou shalt not pass by, but shalt lift him up with him."<sup>223</sup>

One cannot fail to be touched by the spirit of brotherly love in all these texts dealing with charity toward the poor and the weak. Even when men are urged to give alms or to show mercy, these deeds are never considered as a function of some sort of moral or social superiority, nor as a display of condescension to the poor. The poor man is an equal and is referred to as a *brother* or a *neighbor*. A still greater dignity belongs to the weak, the poor, the humble, in short, all who suffer: they are God's envoys, His representatives, His friends. "He that hath mercy on the poor, lendeth to the Lord." "He that oppresseth the poor, upbraideth his Maker; but he that hath pity on the poor, honoreth Him."<sup>224</sup>

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this we have known the charity of God, because He hath laid down His life for us; and we ought to lay down our lives for the brethren" (I John 3:16).

<sup>220</sup> Ecclus. 7:12.      <sup>221</sup> Ecclus. 18:16-17.

<sup>222</sup> Prov. 25:21. St. Paul quoted these words in his Epistle to the Romans (13:20). These texts are truly a foreglimpse of the Gospel teaching. Cf. the Sermon on the Mount (Matt. chaps. 5-7).

<sup>223</sup> Exod. 23:4-5.      <sup>224</sup> Prov. 19:17; 14:31.

Tobias' instructions to his son showed the ideal manner of almsgiving:

According to thy ability be merciful. If thou have much, give abundantly; if thou have little, take care even so to bestow willingly a little. For thus thou storest up to thyself a good reward for the day of necessity. For alms deliver from all sin, and from death, and will not suffer the soul to go into darkness. . . . Eat thy bread with the hungry and the needy, and with thy garments cover the naked. . . . Fear not, my son; we lead indeed a poor life, but we shall have many good things if we fear God and depart from all sin, and do that which is good.<sup>225</sup>

This ideal does not quite attain the full light of the Gospel attitude of "as long as you did it to one of these My least brethren, you did it to Me,"<sup>226</sup> but is it not the first glimmer of its dawning?<sup>227</sup> Is there not the impression that if anyone should offer thanks for the benefit conferred, it is principally the one who has the privilege of practicing charity, for if charity flows through him, it permits him to find favor with God? "If thou wilt take away the chain out of the midst of thee, and cease to stretch out the finger, and to speak that which profiteth not. When thou shalt pour out thy soul to the hungry, and shalt satisfy the afflicted soul, then shall thy light rise up in darkness, and thy darkness shall be as the noonday. And the Lord will give thee rest continually,

<sup>225</sup> Tob. 4:8-11, 17, 23.      <sup>226</sup> Matt. 25:40.

<sup>227</sup> In the Old Testament this attitude of equal kindness toward all results from an oft-repeated principle of faith: God does not show partiality. He helps orphans and widows; He loves strangers (Deut. 10:17; II Par. 19:7; Wisd. 6:17; Eccles. 35:15). St. Peter himself took a long time to understand this lesson and St. Paul was to repeat it also (Acts 10:34; Rom. 2:11).

and will fill thy soul with brightness, and deliver thy bones and thou shalt be like a watered garden, and like a fountain of water whose waters shall not fail."<sup>228</sup>

Thus, even in the Old Testament, a soul performing good works was protected against the subtle tendencies to pride and self-satisfaction. If Israel had remained faithful to the spirit of the law, the pharisaic spirit would never have taken root in men's hearts. Too many texts depicted the poor man as the neighbor *par excellence*; it was said that he should be treated as *your own flesh*. Brotherly charity appeared as the foundation-stone of love of God. "Is this not rather the fast that I have chosen? Loose the bands of wickedness, undo the bundles that oppress, let them that are broken go free, and break asunder every burden. Deal thy bread to the hungry, and bring the needy and the harborless into thy house; when thou shalt see one naked, cover him, and despise not thy own flesh."<sup>229</sup>

The same attitude was required even toward sinners. It is evident in all the texts that the sinner is still a "neighbor" whose offense we should not measure nor judge lest we too be judged and condemned in turn.<sup>230</sup> With profound wisdom the just man of the Old Testament refrains from comparing himself to his fellow man. He stands before God and from such a vantage point he derives the strength needed to be charitable and just toward his fellows, in accordance with the demands of the law.

Only when the soul is imperfect does it believe in its right

<sup>228</sup> Isa. 58:9-11.      <sup>229</sup> Isa. 58:6-7.

<sup>230</sup> "Judge not, that you may not be judged. For with what judgment you judge, you shall be judged; and with what measure you mete, it shall be measured to you again" (Matt. 7:1-3). "Forgive us our trespasses, as we forgive those who trespass against us."

to choose among justice, equity and mercy. Far from setting himself up as a yardstick of charity, the just man simply tries to open his heart ever wider and wider to total charity, God alone being the standard of measurement. Then he can perceive the secret bonds uniting charity in all its aspects with God Himself. This insight fills his soul with overflowing joy. The just men of the Old Testament truly knew and lived this commandment of brotherly love, which was the direct fruit of their love and service of God. The souls of God's great servants flourished in the light of that charity. The Old Testament shows us souls who had been a prey to their passions, but were restored by love of neighbor. Once they became docile to the influence of the spirit, these souls gave free entry to charity which was accompanied by all the other virtues which it united and perfected.<sup>231</sup>

A rich and luminous phrase of Ecclesiasticus expresses the praise of charity. "The alms of a man is as a signet with him."<sup>232</sup> Indeed, we may say that like a river with swift current, charity flows through the Old Testament bringing life to its shores, life increasingly unified and unifying. A line from the Book of Proverbs shows the ideal that was proposed even in those early days: "To do mercy and judgment, pleaseth the Lord."<sup>233</sup> Even if the underlying reality was but rarely understood and weakly practiced, yet this thought seems to be a signpost indicating the path toward the bright radiance of the Gospel. Along that path Christ, "who went about doing good,"<sup>234</sup> would advance. When He came among us and said, "Love one another as I have

<sup>231</sup> "But above all these things have charity, which is the bond of perfection" (Col. 3:14).

<sup>232</sup> Ecclus. 17:18.      <sup>233</sup> Prov. 21:3.      <sup>234</sup> Acts 10:38.

loved you,"<sup>235</sup> He not only gave us the model of that same charity toward which the Old Testament aspired, but in His person He disclosed the divine fountainhead of charity. There He was to bathe us and by the power of His blood He would make all of us united in the charity of God.

<sup>235</sup> John 13:34.

## Chapter 5

# GOD AMONG MEN

And God said to him: I AM, and My covenant is with thee.<sup>1</sup>  
Hearken to My voice, and I will be your God.<sup>2</sup>  
O Lord! . . . Thou art my God.<sup>3</sup>

The commandment of love of God and neighbor traced for Israel the royal road leading to union. But how could Israel have known of this love of charity if it had not been revealed? St. John was to say later: "In this we have known the charity of God, because He hath laid down His life for us."<sup>4</sup> In the same way, though of course on a lower level, Israel knew God's love. Ceaseless manifestations of God's love for His people were faithfully narrated by the sacred authors and enabled Old Testament men to discover that God was *their* God, that they could turn trustfully to Him

<sup>1</sup> Gen. 17:4.    <sup>2</sup> Jer. 7:23.    <sup>3</sup> Ps. 30:15.

<sup>4</sup> I John 3:16.

who was allied with them, that they could call Him "our God." Love was revealed to Old Testament men because God Himself entered the path leading to union and constantly showed His mercy. It is remarkable that the Bible, while insisting so carefully on God's transcendence and showing His omnipotence and sanctity, takes equal pains to remind us that the same God "who dwelleth on high" also "looketh down on the low things in heaven and in earth."<sup>5</sup> "The Lord hath looked down from heaven upon the children of men."<sup>6</sup>

Thus He whose transcendence cannot be signified in human language is at the same time very concerned with men, watching them, stooping to touch their lives and their souls, coming so near them, in short, that we must add to His title of Lord that of "our God." "Who is as the Lord our God?"<sup>7</sup> It may be objected that the title "our God" seems to reserve God for the benefit of Israel, making Him a national God, lowering His dignity by confronting Him with other gods. Doubtless Israel, on saying "our God," meant first of all *God of the covenant* and *God of our fathers*. On the other hand, we know that beyond the covenant made with Abraham, there existed a more universal covenant. "I will establish My covenant between Me and thee, and between thy seed after thee in their generations, by a perpetual covenant. . . . And in thy seed shall all the nations of the earth be blessed."<sup>8</sup>

The scope and duration of this older covenant had been revealed to Noe. "This is the sign of the covenant which I give between Me and you, and to every living soul that is

<sup>5</sup> Ps. 112:5, 6.    <sup>6</sup> Ps. 13:2.    <sup>7</sup> Ps. 112:5.

<sup>8</sup> Gen. 17:7; 22:18.

with you, for perpetual generations. I will set My bow in the clouds, and it shall be the sign of a covenant between Me and between the earth. . . . This shall be the sign of the covenant which I have established between Me and all flesh upon the earth.”<sup>9</sup>

This covenant has continued to our own time and was sealed in the blood of Christ for the salvation of the whole world. Each soul is called upon to accept the proposal made; whereupon it can repeat with all the Old Testament: “O Lord, . . . Thou art my God.”<sup>10</sup>

To understand the deep reasons for this covenant and this resultant intimacy between God and man, we must go back to creation: “And the Lord God formed man of the slime of the earth; and breathed into his face the breath of life.”<sup>11</sup> How far removed is this wonderful tale from the idea of a distant and inaccessible First Cause! On the contrary, full light is shed on the intimate, personal relationship between the Creator and His creature. There is no need to fear that such a God would ever abandon the work fashioned by His fatherly hands, or that He could fail to understand this being, made to his image and likeness. “He that planted the ear, shall He not hear? Or He that formed the eye, doth He not consider?”<sup>12</sup>

Nor should we fear that He will ever desert us. He has, indeed, given His own pledge with a love more tender than a mother’s. “Can a woman forget her infant, so as not to have pity on the son of her womb? And if she should forget, yet will not I forget thee.”<sup>13</sup> The Psalms also emphasize the wonderfully close bond uniting the Creator to His handi-

<sup>9</sup> Gen. 9:12–13, 17.    <sup>10</sup> Ps. 15:1, 2.    <sup>11</sup> Gen. 2:7.

<sup>12</sup> Ps. 93:9–10.    <sup>13</sup> Isa. 49:15.

work: “Know ye that the Lord He is God; He made us, and not we ourselves.”<sup>14</sup> “Come let us adore and fall down; and weep before the Lord that made us.”<sup>15</sup> These words are from the psalm used as the invitatory in the Divine Office. The Bible gives us a deep consciousness of the rights of possession based on the relation of Creator and creature, of God’s watchful care for His children, and of His providential help in all their needs. The Old Testament shows how admirably God looks after humanity and also how He takes the initiative in teaching men the way to call on Him. He Himself said: “I will be your God.”<sup>16</sup>

### *God of the patriarchs*

The Lord God of your fathers, the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob, hath sent me to you.<sup>17</sup>

They are most dear for the sake of the fathers.<sup>18</sup>

God was to be ours. Promises reiterated throughout the ages were fulfilled in this prodigious reality which was prepared by His intimate association with the first man and His constant renewal of friendship among the people of Israel. In the souls of Adam and of the later patriarchs in the faith, this intimacy shed a soft light which softened their harsh character by the hidden delicacy of love. In this friendship God appeared tender, attentive, thoughtful and respectful, while man made bold to be familiar and yet humble in his response. The liberty and the manifold nuances of love which increased as intimacy grew deeper, ultimately became impossible to express in words. Such love was what God had originally intended for man. Adam met Yahweh not only

<sup>14</sup> Ps. 99:3.    <sup>15</sup> Ps. 94:6.    <sup>16</sup> Exod. 6:7.

<sup>17</sup> Exod. 3:15.    <sup>18</sup> Rom. 11:28.

in the pathways of Eden but also in the paths of his own soul. The divine voice was familiar to his ear, but even more familiar to his heart. "I heard Thy voice in paradise," he said. But alas, there came a day when sin forced him to add: "And I hid myself."<sup>19</sup>

Though man was expelled from Eden as a result of his sin, he was not deserted by God; their relationship was not broken off. God continued to speak to Adam's descendants and to protect them. Even the worst criminals felt the pain of their estrangement from God and they implored His help and protection.

And Cain said to the Lord: My iniquity is greater than that I may deserve pardon. Behold Thou dost cast me out this day, from the face of the earth, and I shall be hidden from Thy face, and I shall be a vagabond and a fugitive on the earth; every one, therefore, that findeth me, shall kill me. And the Lord said to him: No, it shall not be so; but whosoever shall kill Cain, shall be punished sevenfold. And the Lord set a mark upon Cain.<sup>20</sup>

The divine intimacy with man continued, with God frequently taking the initiative in scenes of magnificent simplicity. He gave Noe the plan for the ark and advice for building it. When it was finished and the animals "two by two," with Noe's family and the patriarch himself, had gone in, then Yahweh, with a gesture of tender care, closed the door of the ark upon them.<sup>21</sup> Throughout Noe's life God spoke to him and protected him. "But Noe found grace before the Lord. . . . He walked with God."<sup>22</sup>

Abraham likewise experienced this tender care of God. From the day that he heard the call to faith and a nomadic

<sup>19</sup> Gen. 3:10.

<sup>20</sup> Gen. 4:13-15.

<sup>21</sup> Cf. Gen. 7:16.

<sup>22</sup> Gen. 6:8-9.

life, God accompanied, sustained and guided him. The covenant, which was to be infinite in its consequences, was concluded in terms of a simplicity both divine and human, like a man who makes a contract with another man. "My covenant is with thee."<sup>23</sup> At nightfall, on one of the brilliant nights characteristic of the Orient, God took Abraham aside and, leading him outside, pointed to the sky "and said to him: Look up to heaven and number the stars, if thou canst. . . . So shall thy seed be."<sup>24</sup>

Isaac, the patriarch's son, was told by Abimelech: "We saw that the Lord is with thee, and therefore . . . with peace [we] have sent thee away increased with the blessing of the Lord."<sup>25</sup> God likewise watched over Jacob on whom He lavished encouragement and advice. When Jacob hesitated to leave for Egypt, Yahweh called to him and told him in a vision at night: "I will be thy keeper whithersoever thou goest, and will bring thee back into this land; neither will I leave thee, till I shall have accomplished all that I have said."<sup>26</sup>

God's intimacy with Moses was even greater, for He spoke to him as to a friend. "For I speak to him mouth to mouth; and plainly, and not by riddles and figures doth he see the Lord."<sup>27</sup>

In conversations dealing with very humble subjects, God frequently showed men new aspects of the spiritual bond uniting them to Him. Man responded, emboldened by God's

<sup>23</sup> Gen. 17:4.      <sup>24</sup> Gen. 15:5.      <sup>25</sup> Gen. 26:28-29.

<sup>26</sup> Gen. 28:15. Our Lord used the same words to comfort His disciples at the time of His ascension (Matt. 28:20). He told His faithful servant Paul: "Do not fear, . . . because I am with thee" (Acts 18:9).

<sup>27</sup> Gen. 12:8.

familiarity with him. Young Samuel, with the calm simplicity of a pure and recollected heart, murmured: "Speak, Lord, for Thy servant heareth."<sup>28</sup> Abraham, in addressing the three mysterious strangers who appeared before his tent, spoke without the slightest embarrassment, though filled with the deepest respect: "Lord, if I have found favor in thy sight, pass not away from thy servant; but I will fetch a little water, and wash ye your feet, and rest ye under the tree. And I will set a morsel of bread, and strengthen ye your heart, afterward you shall pass on; for therefore are you come aside to your servant. And they said: Do as thou hast spoken."<sup>29</sup> The same patriarch persisted, respectfully but poignantly, in seeking pardon for Sodom. Jacob wrestled all night against a mysterious opponent who spoke to him in the morning: "And he said to him: Let me go, for it is break of day. He answered: I will not let thee go except thou bless me. And he said: What is thy name? He answered: Jacob. But he said. Thy name shall not be called Jacob, but Israel; for if thou hast been strong against God, how much more shalt thou prevail against men? Jacob asked him: Tell me by what name art thou called? He answered: Why dost thou

<sup>28</sup> I Kings 3:10.

<sup>29</sup> Gen. 18:3-8. Another scene was even more beautiful in its divine simplicity. The God-man with His own hands prepared a meal for men: "When the morning was come, Jesus stood on the shore, yet the disciples knew not that it was Jesus. . . . He saith to them: Cast the net on the right side of the ship, and you shall find. They cast therefore; and now they were not able to draw it, for the multitude of fishes. . . . As soon then as they came to land, they saw hot coals lying, and a fish laid thereon, and bread. . . . Jesus saith to them: Come, and dine. And none of them who were at meat, durst ask Him: Who art Thou? knowing that it was the Lord" (John 21:4-12).

ask my name? And he blessed him in the same place."<sup>30</sup> Moses habitually conversed face to face with God with such familiarity that he even ventured to request of Him: "Show me Thy glory."<sup>31</sup> Finally Job, in a paroxysm of suffering cried out imploringly, uttering the humble and intimate reproach of one who is accustomed to divine tenderness:

Thy hands have made me, and fashioned me wholly round about, and dost Thou thus cast me down headlong on a sudden? Remember, I beseech Thee, that Thou hast made me as the clay, and Thou wilt bring me into dust again. Hast Thou not milked me as milk, and curdled me like cheese? Thou hast clothed me with skin and flesh; Thou hast put me together with bones and sinews; Thou hast granted me life and mercy, and Thy visitation hath preserved my spirit.<sup>32</sup>

Job was deeply moved by the remembrance of former days when he enjoyed divine friendship. "As I was in the days of my youth, when God was secretly in my tabernacle."<sup>33</sup>

These numerous witnesses of the friendship between God and faithful souls prove the value of the treasure which our forefathers have bequeathed to us.

### *God of Israel*

But thou Israel, art My servant, Jacob whom I have chosen, the seed of Abraham My friend.<sup>34</sup>

God hath not cast away His people, which He foreknew. . . . For the gifts and the calling of God are without repentance.<sup>35</sup>

The deposit of revelation was so precious and was the pledge of such wonderful love that wherever it was received it could not fail to bear fruit. Knowledge engenders love

<sup>30</sup> Gen. 32:27-30.    <sup>31</sup> Exod. 33:18.    <sup>32</sup> Job 10:8-12.

<sup>33</sup> Job 29:4.    <sup>34</sup> Isa. 41:8.    <sup>35</sup> Rom. 11:2, 25.



and favors the intimacy to which God tirelessly calls man. Thus, it was not enough for God to form intimate friendships with certain individuals only, but He revealed to a whole nation His constant presence, His tender care, and His desire for an intimate union of love. He told Moses: "I will take you to Myself for My people, I will be your God."<sup>36</sup>

Throughout the centuries God continued to show His predilection for the nation of which He clearly became the heart and the leader. "I have separated you from other people, that you should be Mine. . . . I am the Lord who sanctify you, and who brought you out of the land of Egypt, that I might be your God; I am the Lord."<sup>37</sup> Nor was it because this nation offered fertile soil for the cultivation of the gifts bestowed; this uncouth, stubborn people of harsh and violent ways required a long, slow process to temper the religious soul of the community. But for the sake of their ancestors who were holy, the nation received God's kindness and His ardent invitations to friendship. "Thou didst hear His words . . . because He loved thy fathers, and chose their seed after them."<sup>38</sup> God revealed Himself through His people. "Who declareth His word to Jacob; His justices and His judgments to Israel."<sup>39</sup> God truly revealed Himself.

Here on earth children may enjoy a familiar relationship with their father, but they are not on that account admitted to intimate association with him. At times the best of the father's soul eludes them. But God, from the outset, posited the foundation of all true intimacy: knowledge engendering

<sup>36</sup> Exod. 6:7.

<sup>37</sup> Lev. 20:26; 22:32-33.

<sup>38</sup> Deut. 4:36-37.

<sup>39</sup> Ps. 147:8.

love. "We are happy, O Israel: because the things that are pleasing to God are made known to us."<sup>40</sup>

This deposit of revelation is an inestimable treasure, but it forces everyone who receives it to make a clear-cut decision: either acceptance (the seed of a friendship which is infinite because it is divine) or refusal. Israel's response was doubtless imperfect, yet the nation had allowed entry for the word of God; thenceforth God had the right to consider the nation as His child whom He loved. The little Jewish community was the first where He dwelt and acted, where He let Himself be known and loved. In the same nation, too, He was later to become incarnate, suffer and die for all men.

"He came unto His own, and His own received Him not."<sup>41</sup> What tragic testimony these words give of the covenant which God had established; which continued unremittingly in spite of all repudiation and infidelity.

From the very beginning, when Israel was but a tiny tribe, God was pleased to show it the power of His works as well as the blessing of His presence. This presence of God in the midst of the chosen people is the primary fact of the Old Testament, slowly shaping the soul of Israel, permeating it with the divine, building up the temporal city which one day, as the promises assure us, will attain the glory of the heavenly Jerusalem. We can cite but a few of the countless instances which prove forcefully God's dwelling among

<sup>40</sup> Bar. 4:4. Christ was to emphasize that this relationship of friendship and intimacy would imply knowledge: "I will not now call you servants; for the servant knoweth not what his lord doth. But I have called you friends; because all things whatsoever I have heard of My Father, I have made known to you" (John 15:15).

<sup>41</sup> John 1:11.

men and the intimate relationship established between the whole nation and the God who wished to be *their* God.

Joseph, at the moment of death, had told his sons that God would visit them.<sup>42</sup> And indeed God's activity would become evident to the multitude which would depart for the desert and whose existence for forty years would depend daily upon their invisible but ever-present leader, God Himself. He it was who gave them light at night and guidance by day, nourished them, quenched their thirst, cured them, gave the signal to stop and then to depart again. He accompanied them the whole way.<sup>43</sup> These men became so accustomed to being under divine control and protection that after they had been unfaithful to God, they were seized with anguish on hearing Him say to Moses: "Go, get thee from this place, thou and thy people which thou hast brought out of the land of Egypt, into the land concerning which I swore to Abraham, Isaac and Jacob, saying: To thy seed I will give it. And I will send an angel before thee. . . . For I will not go up with thee."<sup>44</sup> The answer they gave Him through their leader was: "If Thou Thyself dost not go before, bring us not out of this place. For how shall we be able to know, I and Thy people, that we have found grace in Thy sight, unless Thou walk with us, that we may be glorified by all people that dwell upon the earth?"<sup>45</sup>

The divine presence so sustained the soul of the people in time of trial that it even seemed to become Israel's lawful right. In the days of affliction Moses based his appeal on it: "The Egyptians . . . and the inhabitants of this land . . . have heard that Thou, O Lord, art among this people, and

<sup>42</sup> Cf. Gen. 50:24.    <sup>43</sup> Exod., chaps. 13, 17, 33, 40, *passim*.

<sup>44</sup> Exod. 33:1-3.    <sup>45</sup> Exod. 33:15-16.

art seen face to face, and Thy cloud protecteth them, and Thou goest before them in a pillar of a cloud by day and in a pillar of fire by night."<sup>46</sup> And yet at other times the hard and narrow hearts of the people required amazing miracles before they would believe in the divine presence.

And they saw . . . the mighty hand that the Lord had used . . . and they believed the Lord, and Moses His servant. Behold I will stand before thee, upon the rock Horeb; and thou shalt strike the rock, and water shall come out of it. Moses did so . . . and he called the name of that place Temptation, because of the chiding of the children of Israel, and for that they tempted the Lord saying: Is the Lord amongst us or not?<sup>47</sup>

Thanks to so many marvels, Israel's faith in her exceptional destiny became unshakeable. "I will make a covenant in the sight of all. I will do signs such as were never seen upon the earth, nor in any nations; that this people, in the midst of whom thou art, may see the terrible work of the Lord which I will do."<sup>48</sup>

Those heroic early days when Yahweh manifested Himself as the special God of His people furnished the sacred, undeniable testimony to which judges, kings and prophets constantly referred whenever they encouraged the people to be true to the covenant. At the time of Esdras the Levites exhorted the people with striking reminders of that divine presence and multiform activity:

Arise, bless the Lord your God from eternity to eternity. . . . Thou Thyself, O Lord alone, Thou hast made heaven, and the heaven of heavens and all the host thereof; the earth and all

<sup>46</sup> Num. 14:14.    <sup>47</sup> Exod. 14:31; 17:6-7.

<sup>48</sup> Exod. 34:10.

things that are in it; the seas and all that are therein; and Thou givest life to all these things, and the host of heaven adoreth Thee. Thou, O Lord God, art He who chosest Abram and broughtest him forth out of the fire of the Chaldeans, and gavest him the name of Abraham. And Thou didst find his heart faithful before Thee; and Thou madest a covenant with him. . . . And Thou hast fulfilled Thy words, because thou art just. And Thou sawest the affliction of our fathers in Egypt; and Thou didst hear their cry by the Red Sea. And Thou showedst signs and wonders upon Pharaoh. . . . And Thou didst divide the sea before them, . . . And in a pillar of a cloud Thou wast their leader by day, and in a pillar of fire by night, that they might see the way by which they went. Thou camest down also to Mount Sinai. . . . And Thou gavest them bread from heaven in their hunger, and broughtest forth water for them out of the rock in their thirst.<sup>49</sup>

The Psalmist also sang of the divine marvels accomplished in ancient times, the pledges of a predilection which could never be retracted:

Give glory to the Lord, and call upon His name; declare His deeds among the Gentiles. . . . Remember His marvellous works which He hath done; His wonders, and the judgments of His mouth. . . . He is the Lord our God. . . . He hath remembered His covenant forever. . . . When they were but a small number . . . He suffered no man to hurt them; and He

<sup>49</sup> II Esd. 9:5-15. This divine presence never fails, even if Israel is unfaithful. If the people return to God, they will be reinstated in the divine friendship which they formerly enjoyed. "After all the things aforesaid shall find thee, in the latter time thou shalt return to the Lord thy God, and shalt hear His voice. Because the Lord thy God is a merciful God; He will not leave thee, nor altogether destroy thee, nor forget the covenant, by which He swore to thy fathers" (Deut. 4:30-31).

reproved kings for their sakes: Touch ye not My anointed; and do no evil to My prophets. And He called a famine upon the land; and He broke in pieces all the support of bread. He sent a man before them, Joseph, who was sold for a slave, . . . until the king sent, and He released him. . . . He made him master of His house, and ruler of all His possessions. . . . He sent Moses His servant; Aaron the man whom He had chosen. He gave them power to show His signs, and His wonders in the land of Cham. . . . And He brought them out. . . . He spread a cloud for their protection, and fire to give them light in the night. They asked, and the quail came; and He filled them with the bread of heaven. He opened the rock, and waters flowed; rivers ran down in the dry land. Because He remembered His holy word, which He had spoken to his servant Abraham. And He brought forth His people with joy, and His chosen with gladness. And He gave them the lands of the Gentiles; and they possessed the labors of the people; that they might observe His justifications and seek after His law.<sup>50</sup>

In recalling these events, first place is given to marvels, it being evident that they, as well as the divine word, constituted the foundation of faith in God's presence among men, the first proof of a friendship which God constantly strove to deepen. The same law was verified in the course of the centuries. Throughout the ages it was equally evident that God's presence was marked by tender care and providential interventions. By the touch of His hand on the people's daily life, God taught them to form their desire and will on the pattern of the divine will, and to live with Him in order to live by Him.

At the entrance to the Promised Land God told Josue, whom He gave to Israel as leader: "As I have been with

<sup>50</sup> Ps. 104.

Moses, so will I be with thee; I will not leave thee, nor forsake thee.”<sup>51</sup> But humanity would not easily let its dough be kneaded; the fulfillment of God’s promises was constantly in abeyance. Hence the long silences interspersed with tremendous and tragic defeats. Yet the continuity of divine help granted to this stubborn, forgetful nation was never broken; a continuity increasingly evident in the perspective of passing time. It was proclaimed magnificently in the Book of Ecclesiasticus. There the praises of the patriarchs, from Adam to the highpriest Simeon, formed a series of exultant testimonies to God’s help bestowed on His beloved people. “And now pray ye to the God of all, who hath great things in all the earth, who hath increased our days from our mother’s womb, and hath done with us according to His mercy.”<sup>52</sup>

The men of God formed an unbroken line, acting like leaven in the heavy mass of the people: Phinees, with whom God made a covenant of peace; Josue; Caleb; the uncorrupted judges whose memory was a benediction; Samuel, beloved of the Lord; Nathan; the great king David whose throne became the cradle of messianic hope; Solomon, from whom God did not withdraw mercy in spite of the faults of his later years; Elias, who appeased divine wrath, reconciling and restoring the people.<sup>53</sup> Nevertheless God’s tender care did not attain its goal. After Eliseus, who inherited the spirit of his master, “there was left but a small people, and a prince in the house of David. Some of these did that which pleased God, but others committed many sins.”<sup>54</sup>

Then opened a new era: that of the great prophets whom God placed, not at the head of the nation like the kings or

<sup>51</sup> Jos. 1:5.    <sup>52</sup> Eccles. 50:24.    <sup>53</sup> Cf. Eccles., chaps. 45–48.

<sup>54</sup> Eccles. 48:17–18.

judges, but in the midst of the people to tell them again of His appeal for love and to lead them back, even at the price of painful trials. “I will be their God, and they shall be My people.”<sup>55</sup> This the prophets reiterated tirelessly in the name of God.

From the day that their fathers came out of the land of Egypt, even to this day, I have sent to you all My servants the prophets from day to day . . . and they have not hearkened to Me.<sup>56</sup>

For protesting I conjured your fathers in the day that I brought them out of the land of Egypt even to this day; rising early I conjured them, and said: Hearken ye to My voice. And they obeyed not, nor inclined their ear; but walked every one in the perverseness of his own wicked heart; and I brought upon them all the words of this covenant, which I commanded them to do, but they did them not.<sup>57</sup>

By the voice of His prophets God ever recalled the covenant made with His people, calling them “Israel My servant, Jacob whom I have chosen, the seed of Abraham My friend.”<sup>58</sup> Such words truly sufficed to show the real intimacy between God and His people. Whenever Israel evaded this friendship, it brought upon itself severe punishment. “You only have I known of all the families of the earth; therefore will I visit upon you all your iniquities.”<sup>59</sup>

If Israel’s refusal made it impossible for God to be with them in tender fidelity, He yet found a way to be still with them, namely, through punishment. This clearly shows how jealous is His love, as we see in the poignant image of the prophet Osee: “And I will be to them as a lioness, as a leopard in the way of the Assyrians. I will meet them as a

<sup>55</sup> Ezech. 37:27.    <sup>56</sup> Jer. 7:23–24.    <sup>57</sup> Jer. 11:7–8.

<sup>58</sup> Isa. 41:8.    <sup>59</sup> Amos 3:2.

bear that is robbed of her whelps, and I will rend the inner parts of their liver; and I will devour them there as a lion, the beast of the field shall tear them. Destruction is thy own, O Israel; thy help is only in Me.”<sup>60</sup>

These terrifying lines show wounded, tortured love hunting its prey. The tears and lamentations of the prophets are a still more vivid expression of this love:<sup>61</sup>

Depart from me, I will weep bitterly; labor not to comfort me, for the devastation of the daughter of my people.<sup>62</sup>

Thou didst forbear with them for many years, and didst testify against them by Thy spirit by the hand of Thy prophets; and they heard not, and Thou didst deliver them into the hand of the people of the lands. Yet in Thy very many mercies Thou didst not utterly consume them nor forsake them; because Thou art a merciful and gracious God.<sup>63</sup>

Israel, the beloved vine, planted by God in olden days on a fertile hill,<sup>64</sup> never ceased to be His heritage. Though she was pillaged and laid waste, He continued to visit her. Perhaps in the depths of anguish and bitter defeat she would finally understand His love for her, so that a bond of truly faithful union would be formed. God never tires of proposing it to her:

<sup>60</sup> Osee 13:7-9.

<sup>61</sup> Christ Himself wept over Jerusalem and, in loving but violent words which evoke those of the Old Testament, reminded the city of how cherished and yet how disloyal it had been: “Jerusalem, Jerusalem, thou that killest the prophets, and stonest them that are sent unto thee, how often would I have gathered together thy children, as the hen doth gather her chickens under her wings, and thou wouldst not” (Matt. 23:37).

<sup>62</sup> Isa. 22:4. <sup>63</sup> II Esd. 9:30-31. <sup>64</sup> Cf. Isa. 5:1.

And thou My servant Jacob, fear not and be not thou dismayed, O Israel; for behold I will save thee from afar off. . . . Fear not, saith the Lord, because I am with thee.<sup>65</sup>

And you shall know that I am in the midst of Israel . . . and My people shall not be confounded forever.<sup>66</sup>

Even during the exile He did not abandon her. In fact, during the captivity He spoke to the hearts of His servants and some of them then attained knowledge of the living and personal God who was *their* God, and they realized what divine food was offered to their souls. “Therefore thus saith the Lord God: Because I have removed them far off among the Gentiles, and because I have scattered them among the countries, I will be to them a little sanctuary in the countries whither they are come.”<sup>67</sup> In the desert long before, manna had been brought to them and they had not been able to appreciate it. After the exile, centuries later, when the temple was empty, Israel turned expectantly toward the Promised One, and poring over the sacred books, the people finally encountered the word of God and felt it living within them. This word became their support. In the *diaspora*, as in their battles for liberty, it was truly the interior and living “comfort”<sup>68</sup> of Israel.

Then the heart of the people turned humbly and longingly toward their God. Magnificent psalms beg for the renewal of His favor and the grace of His friendship:

O God, Thou hast cast us off and hast destroyed us; Thou hast been angry, and hast had mercy on us. . . . Thou hast shown Thy people hard things, Thou hast made us drink the

<sup>65</sup> Jer. 46:27-28. <sup>66</sup> Joel 2:27. <sup>67</sup> Ezech. 11:16.

<sup>68</sup> Cf. II Mach. 12:9.

wine of sorrow. Thou hast given a warning to them that fear Thee, that they may flee from before the bow, that Thy beloved may be delivered.<sup>69</sup>

Lord remember David, and all his meekness.<sup>70</sup>

Thou shalt arise and have mercy on Sion; for it is time to have mercy on it, for the time is come. For the stones thereof have pleased Thy servants; and they shall have pity on the earth thereof.<sup>71</sup>

We see now that the expression "God of Israel" is neither exaggerated nor superficial. Does it even express adequately how imbued with God this nation was? God entered into its sins as well as its contrition. With all the power of His grace and fidelity He became Israel's God. Even exteriorly it is apparent that God was the soul of the entire national and private life of the people. From the time of Jacob He was the judge of all disputes. "The God of Abraham, and the God of Nachor, the God of their father, judge between us."<sup>72</sup> Their oaths were in His name.<sup>73</sup> He presided over all their gatherings to rejoice, to eat and to drink, like children in their father's home.<sup>74</sup> He guided them in all their actions as He had promised through Moses: "Thence will I give orders, and will speak to thee . . . all things which I will command the children of Israel by thee."<sup>75</sup> He was present in their wars to grant them victory, in their troubles to rouse their courage. The nation seemed to have expressed its very soul in the cry of the prophet Isaias, paying homage to the God who had become *their* God: "For the Lord is our judge, the Lord is our lawgiver, the Lord is our king; He will save us."<sup>76</sup>

<sup>69</sup> Ps. 59:3, 5-6.

<sup>70</sup> Ps. 131:1.

<sup>71</sup> Ps. 101:14-15.

<sup>72</sup> Gen. 31:53.

<sup>73</sup> II Esd. 10:30.

<sup>74</sup> Exod. 18:12.

<sup>75</sup> Gen. 25:22.

<sup>76</sup> Isa. 33:22.

This active presence of God in the whole of life is undoubtedly one of the principal doctrines of the Old Testament. To meditate upon this is as vital and urgent today as in the past.

But God's presence with Israel was not merely like the visit of a familiar guest. The heart of Israel was nourished by the divine commandments and the messianic promises. Israel was the community chosen to be the cradle of Him who would truly be *our God* by giving Himself totally to everyone. In a mysterious way the divine word penetrated to the very depths of the nation's soul; then it sprouted with new life from its soil, to give forth its fruit, in due time, to the whole world. "I have put My words in Thy mouth, and have protected Thee in the shadow of My hand, that Thou mightest plant the heavens and found the earth; and mightest say to Sion: Thou art My people."<sup>77</sup>

If, in family life, the expectation of a child to be born binds the members of a household more closely together, how much more did the anticipation of a Savior bring the people nearer to its God. The divine secret, after being long guarded as a communal treasure, a pledge of mutual fidelity, finally became a vehement, impulsive longing, pulsating in unison through the heart of Israel and the heart of God. "Behold, your God . . . will come and will save you."<sup>78</sup> "Thou art my helper and my protector; O my God, be not slack."<sup>79</sup>

When, at last, the day came that the Savior was born of a humble virgin of the house of David, the poor shepherds came to adore Him in Bethlehem; then truly could it be said that Yahweh, the great and mighty God, became completely God of Israel, while at the same time He became also God of the Gentiles. "For a Child is born to us, and a Son is

<sup>77</sup> Isa. 51:16.

<sup>78</sup> Isa. 35:4.

<sup>79</sup> Ps. 39:18.

given to us.”<sup>80</sup> Beside His crib Israel’s history on the wane met the rising light of the Gentiles through their most thrilling and precious privilege: intimacy with God. The same moment that this inheritance was bequeathed to us, brought us also its fulfillment, Jesus Christ.<sup>81</sup>

### GOD’S FAVORITES: THE POOR, HUMBLE AND JUST

He shall scorn the scorers, and to the meek He will give grace.<sup>82</sup>

Because every one that exalteth himself, shall be humbled; and he that humbleth himself, shall be exalted.<sup>83</sup>

To a few chosen men, the patriarchs, God first showed the joy and the depths of divine friendship. He bound them to Himself. Then the whole nation learned, by means of signs and wonders, by constant evidence of love and providential care, that it was the chosen race. The people received sure proof that they were Yahweh’s people, as Yahweh was their God. Yet for God and man to meet and be united, something more was required than the divine initiative. The ground had to be prepared. Something in man had to become open and responsive to the divine allurements in order

<sup>80</sup> Isa. 9:6.

<sup>81</sup> St. Paul warns us that the blindness of the Jews concerning the Gospel is a mystery permitted by God. Their error was that “by following after the law of justice, . . . they sought it not by faith, but as it were of works” (Rom. 9:32). But if these branches were broken off, it was in order that we might be grafted in (Rom. 11:19). “For God hath concluded all in unbelief, that He may have mercy on all” (Rom. 11:32). The meaning of St. Paul’s teaching is that Israel is still cherished by God and will be saved when the mass of the Gentiles has been converted.

<sup>82</sup> Prov. 3:34.

<sup>83</sup> Luke 14:11.

to assimilate and reciprocate them. Divine friendship was a plant that could bloom only on a ploughed and fertile soil. “Let the earth be opened, and bud forth a Savior.”<sup>84</sup>

The most favorable conditions for the divine purpose are found among those whom the Bible calls the just. But God’s benevolence is likewise exercised in a special way toward the poor and the humble, that is, all whose situation arouses pity. If poverty is favored in God’s eyes, it is do doubt because He finds in it the beginnings of the very foundation of justice, namely, humility. The poor, the humble and the just realize their privileged position and constantly utter this cry of trust in God: “I have put my trust in Thee, O Lord; I said: Thou art my God.”<sup>85</sup> They show a primitive, vague resemblance to Him who would one day set foot on a similar path to give Himself to us. “Learn of Me, because I am meek, and humble of heart.”<sup>86</sup> He opens the depths of His love, provided we consent to follow Him on the path of humility.

I confess to Thee, O Father, Lord of heaven and earth, because Thou hast hid these things from the wise and prudent, and hast revealed them to little ones.<sup>87</sup>

Blessed is the rich man that is found without blemish, and that hath not gone after gold, nor put his trust in money nor in treasures.<sup>88</sup>

Blessed are ye poor, for yours is the kingdom of God.<sup>89</sup>

The whole Bible shows God’s touching preference for the poor and the humble whom He watches, hears and answers with special care. “This poor man cried, and the Lord heard

<sup>84</sup> Isa. 45:8.      <sup>85</sup> Ps. 30:15.      <sup>86</sup> Matt. 11:29.

<sup>87</sup> Matt. 11:25.      <sup>88</sup> Ecclus. 31:8.      <sup>89</sup> Luke 6:20.

him, and saved him out of all his troubles.”<sup>90</sup> “He hath had regard to the prayer of the humble; and He hath not despised their petition.”<sup>91</sup>

God’s solicitude and jealous love include all who are in need:

[The Lord] . . . who executeth judgment for them that suffer wrong; who giveth food to the hungry. The Lord looseth them that are fettered; the Lord enlighteneth the blind. The Lord lifteth up them that are cast down; the Lord loveth the just. The Lord keepeth the strangers, he will support the fatherless and the widow; and the ways of sinners He will destroy.<sup>92</sup>

The needy and the poor seek for waters, and there are none; their tongue hath been dry with thirst. I the Lord will hear them, I the God of Israel will not forsake them.<sup>93</sup>

Those who are disinherited or suffer in body and soul receive the news of release in the name of Yahweh: “Strengthen ye the feeble hands, and confirm the weak knees. Say to the fainthearted: Take courage, and fear not; behold, your God Himself will come and will save you.”<sup>94</sup> For them “waters are broken in the desert and streams in the wilderness. . . . And a path and a way shall be there, and it shall be called the holy way; the unclean shall not pass over it, . . . so that fools shall not err therein.”<sup>95</sup>

Ecclesiasticus reminds the rich man not to reject the poor “for the prayer of him that curseth thee in the bitterness of his soul, shall be heard, for He that made him will hear him.”<sup>96</sup> Thus, like the cry of His favorite child is the appeal of the unfortunate in the ear of God. What is the motive of

<sup>90</sup> Ps. 33:7.      <sup>91</sup> Ps. 101:18.      <sup>92</sup> Ps. 145:7–9.  
<sup>93</sup> Isa. 41:17.      <sup>94</sup> Isa. 35:3–4.      <sup>95</sup> Isa. 35:6–8.  
<sup>96</sup> Eccles. 4:6.

such special benevolence? Why has the poor man’s prayer such prestige in God’s sight? Is wealth evil or condemned by God? No. The Bible neither condemns nor extols wealth or poverty in themselves; both are gifts of God. “Riches are good to him that hath no sin in his conscience; and poverty is very wicked in the mouth of the ungodly.”<sup>97</sup>

Yet all too often “the poor will speak with supplications, and the rich will speak roughly. . . . The rich ruleth over the poor.”<sup>98</sup> Therefore the triumph of God’s justice was involved. Right order being violated, He restores the balance by supporting the poor man. “Do no violence to the poor, because he is poor; and do not oppress the needy in the gate. Because the Lord will judge his cause, and will afflict them that have afflicted his soul.”<sup>99</sup> God may reserve the time and the manner of His intervention, but He never fails to protect the poor. He is particularly eager that those who call on Him should receive proof of His compassion as Creator and as Father. “Wilt thou take the prey for the lioness, and satisfy the appetite of her whelps. . . . Who provideth food for the raven, when her young ones cry to God, wandering about, because they have no meat?”<sup>100</sup> “For the sparrow hath found herself a house, and the turtle a nest for herself where she may lay her young ones.”<sup>101</sup>

If He cares thus for animals and birds, how much more

<sup>97</sup> Eccles. 13:30. Christ was to visit rich men like Simon (Luke 7:36) or Zaccheus (Luke 19:1–10), but He loved to gather the poor about Him. He said: “Amen, I say to you, that a rich man shall hardly enter into the kingdom of heaven” (Matt. 19:23). That statement was illustrated by the parable of Lazarus and the rich man (Luke 16:19–31).

<sup>98</sup> Prov. 18:23; 22:7.      <sup>99</sup> Prov. 22:22–23.

<sup>100</sup> Job 38:39–40.      <sup>101</sup> Ps. 83:4.



readily does He respond to the children of men when they cry to Him. Whether they are great or small, they are all children in His eyes and in His fatherly hand. When they are hungry and thirsty with no one to relieve them, God stoops to help them. The poor man claims the sacred right to life, the right which belongs to every creature.

The name given to the wonderful help, humanly unpredictable, which so often rescues the poor from their distress, is providence. It means far more than the mere assurance of earthly food and material help. The poor are not deceived in this; they know that providence is the treasure of God's mercy opening for them, giving a glimpse of His paternal heart. For God it is an opportunity to pour the streams of His tender love into a human heart. The love, even more than the material help, melts the poor man's heart and opens it to supernatural love. The impulses and effects of divine mercy are better known to the poor than to those who have never experienced misery; thus they gradually acquire the incommunicable knowledge of God which even the wise envy them. "What doth he know, that hath not been tried?"<sup>102</sup> The afflicted soul comforted by God truly receives divine knowledge and divine experience. A privileged intimacy is then established between the poor man and His God—between Him whose totally gratuitous generosity has found a means of expression and the humble, grateful heart offering the thanks which God's other children neglect to utter. "The eyes of God are upon them that love Him."<sup>103</sup> The friendship between God and the poor is more than a secret; it is a mystery. But humanity finds in it enlightenment which the poor are commissioned to communicate.

<sup>102</sup> Ecclus. 34:9.      <sup>103</sup> Ecclus. 34:15.

Without poverty men would have greater difficulty in practicing charity in its material form of almsgiving. The hard lot of so many destitute men living in dependence, helplessness and virtual slavery provides not only an opportunity but a duty for the rich to help them. "I command thee to open thy hand to thy needy and poor brother, that liveth in the land."<sup>104</sup> The same text asserts, moreover, that whatever relief may be given, poverty will not disappear. "There will not be wanting poor in the land of thy habitation."<sup>105</sup>

Thus poverty invites others to practice almsgiving. But this is by no means its only advantage. It constitutes a positive blessing for the poor man as well as for those who observe his life. Poverty deprives a man of necessities, puts him in painful and inauspicious circumstances, hollows him out, arouses a thirst which the rich man ignores. It leads him to expect help and salvation from God alone, to send heavenward the cries of distress so frequent in the Bible. "But I am needy and poor; O God, help me."<sup>106</sup> Thus the poor man is linked ever more closely to God; he develops greater

<sup>104</sup> Deut. 15:11. The Lord's loving care for the poor who love Him humbly and generously appears in one of the most tender scenes of the Gospel: "And looking on, He saw the rich men cast their gifts into the treasury. And He saw also a certain poor widow casting in two brass mites. And He said: Verily I say to you, that this poor widow hath cast in more than they all; for all these have of their abundance cast into the offerings of God; but she of her want, hath cast in all the living that she had" (Luke 21:1-4).

<sup>105</sup> Deut. 15:11. Christ was to express the same thought: "The poor you have always with you" (Matt. 26:11). By then, however, the supernatural foundations of the precept of charity had been revealed in the light of His teaching.

<sup>106</sup> Ps. 69:6.

trust and renunciation. It is true that many poor men do not reach this height, but in the divine plan, poverty gives them the means to do so, means which, if used properly, place them on the path leading to the greatest and richest realm: the kingdom of God Himself.<sup>107</sup>

This is one explanation of the privileged position of the poor in the Old Testament. Yet their “eminent dignity” depends upon ever deeper causes: God’s gracious kindness toward the *anawim*—the weak and the small, all who are condemned to poverty and suffering, who endure oppression—derives from the fact that He sees in them the first outlines of the features of Christ, who was to come to earth in the guise of a poor man. Christ, indeed, was not only a poor man like any other, but He was *the* poor man *par excellence*. More than any others, the poor were to experience His gentleness and humility. “The bruised reed He shall not break, and smoking flax He shall not quench. . . . But He shall judge the poor with justice, and shall reprove with equity for the meek of the earth.”<sup>108</sup>

Christ was to stoop lovingly toward all poor and wretched men: “The spirit of the Lord is upon Me, because the Lord hath anointed Me; He hath sent Me to preach to the meek, to heal the contrite of heart and to preach a release to the captives, and deliverance to them that are shut up. To proclaim the acceptable year of the Lord, and the day of vengeance of our God; to comfort all that mourn; to appoint

<sup>107</sup> We cannot forget that the first to hear Christ’s call and to follow Him were the poor: humble fishermen and artisans. “Hearken, my dearest brethren: hath not God chosen the poor in this world, rich in faith, and heirs of the kingdom which God hath promised to them that love Him?” (Jas. 2:5.)

<sup>108</sup> Isa. 42:3; 11:4.

to the mourners of Sion, and to give them a crown for ashes, the oil of joy for mourning, a garment of praise for the spirit of grief.”<sup>109</sup>

He would share their distress. He was to be born, to love and to die as a poor man. The highest function of the poor in the Old Testament was to prefigure Christ and to prepare men to receive His message on poverty;<sup>110</sup> that is why they are so dear to God’s heart.

Even before the sweet light of the beatitudes rose over the mountain, the song of the poor rang out, proclaiming how God gave Himself to them and would be theirs even more completely if they would stay unswervingly faithful to Him. Thus, Tobias reproached his friends who mocked his persevering fidelity in the midst of extreme destitution. He extolled the one necessity of which he already had a foretaste in his heart:

Speak not so; for we are the children of saints, and look for that life which God will give to those that never change their faith from Him.<sup>111</sup>

Whosoever is a little one, let him come to Me.<sup>112</sup>

Whosoever therefore shall humble himself as this little child, he is the greater in the kingdom of heaven.<sup>113</sup>

Ordinarily we are not asked to choose poverty voluntarily as a state of life, to live as poor men. Yet God offers to us and requires of us the interior attitudes of the poor.<sup>114</sup> The

<sup>109</sup> Isa. 61:1–3.

<sup>110</sup> “Blessed are the poor in spirit; for theirs is the kingdom of heaven” (Matt. 5:3).

<sup>111</sup> Tob. 2:18. <sup>112</sup> Prov. 9:4. <sup>113</sup> Matt. 18:4.

<sup>114</sup> Thus, the rich Pharisee, Simon, incurred the Lord’s rebuke because of his hard heart, while the rich publican, Zaccheus, being

only truly poor man is the humble man. God is pleased with the humble, the poor in spirit; He shows them His mercy. Humility converts the heart and turns it toward God. If pride is essentially a separation from God, humility is a preparation for union with Him.

The beginning of the pride of man, is to fall off from God; because his heart is departed from Him that made him. . . . Pride was not made for men.<sup>115</sup>

Where pride is, there also shall be reproach; but where humility is, there also is wisdom. . . . The fear of the Lord is the lesson of wisdom; and humility goeth before glory. . . . Every proud man is an abomination to the Lord.<sup>116</sup>

Every soul seeking God finds lessons of true humility in the sacred authors as well as in the whole history of Israel. "Humble thy spirit very much; for the vengeance on the flesh of the ungodly is fire and worms. . . . The greater thou art, the more humble thyself in all things, and thou shalt find grace before God; for great is the power of God alone, and He is honored by the humble."<sup>117</sup>

Justice demands humility in God's presence; souls need humiliation to abate their pride. "And the loftiness of men shall be bowed down, and the haughtiness of men shall be humbled, and the Lord alone shall be exalted in that day."<sup>118</sup> A soul should bless the day when, looking up to God, its supreme good, it becomes conscious of its own nothingness and wretchedness. Merely to admit this misery evokes God's loving help. Like the prodigal son's words to his father, "I

generous and humble, was told: "This day is salvation come to this house" (Luke 19:9).

<sup>115</sup> Ecclus. 10:14-15, 22.

<sup>116</sup> Prov. 11:2; 15:33; 16:5.

<sup>117</sup> Ecclus. 7:19; 3:20-21.

<sup>118</sup> Isa. 2:17.

have sinned against heaven, and before thee," so Baruch's humble prayer sufficed to turn God to him: "We have sinned before the Lord our God, and have not believed Him, nor put our trust in Him; and we were not obedient to Him, and we have not hearkened to the voice of the Lord our God. . . . And we have not entreated the face of the Lord our God, that we might return every one of us from our most wicked ways."<sup>119</sup>

But the mere admission of misery is not enough to reinstate us in divine friendship and happiness: "They shall be afflicted for the sins of their fathers, and their own, . . . until their uncircumcised mind be ashamed; then shall they pray for their sins. And I will remember My covenant."<sup>120</sup> These lines remind us that God cannot be separated from His justice. Those who seek God in their hearts are assured of His mercy, but at the price of humble expiation does the lost path reappear. Suffering brings the meek soul an increased enjoyment of God's presence.<sup>121</sup> The impious king Antiochus confessed his sin when his pride had been broken by the weight of adversity, but in vain did he seek to escape punishment by tardy good deeds and favors.

The Lord God of Israel, that seeth all things, struck him with an incurable and an invisible plague. . . . And by this means, being brought from his great pride, he began to come to the knowledge of himself, being admonished by the scourge of God. . . . He spoke thus: It is just to be subject to God, and that a mortal man should not equal himself to God. . . . But his

<sup>119</sup> Bar. 1:17-18; 2:8.

<sup>120</sup> Lev. 26:39-42.

<sup>121</sup> So teaches St. James: "Draw nigh to God, and He will draw nigh to you. Cleanse your hands, ye sinners; and purify your hearts, ye double minded. . . . Be humbled in the sight of the Lord, and He will exalt you" (Jas. 4:8, 10).

pains not ceasing (for the just judgment of God was come upon him).<sup>122</sup>

The humble soul, however, does not seek to avoid the just penalty, but trustfully hastens to God and asks to be cleansed of sin. "And David said to God: I have sinned exceedingly in doing this; I beseech Thee take away the iniquity of Thy servant, for I have done foolishly."<sup>123</sup> The humble soul, though abashed, remains aware of the presence of God, who does not cease to be *his* God. The humble invite punishment and surrender to God's merciful hand. "And David said to God: I am on every side in a great strait; but it is better for me to fall into the hands of the Lord, for His mercies are many, than into the hands of men."<sup>124</sup>

God is not content merely to raise up the humble-hearted man, but He supports him effectively, protects him from external danger and preserves him from evil. "O Lord, deliver my soul. The Lord is merciful and just, and our God showeth mercy. The Lord is the keeper of little ones; I was humbled, and He delivered me."<sup>125</sup> "Thou hast broken my bonds."<sup>126</sup>

God's heart is irresistibly attracted to true humility which unites modesty and confidence, forming a perfect vessel for the infusion of grace.<sup>127</sup> "The prayer of him that humbleth himself, shall pierce the clouds; and till it come nigh he will not be comforted; and he will not depart till the Most High behold."<sup>128</sup> "My hand made all these things, . . . saith the Lord. But to whom shall I have respect but to him that is

<sup>122</sup> II Mach. 9:11, 18. <sup>123</sup> I Par. 21:8. <sup>124</sup> I Par. 21:13.

<sup>125</sup> Ps. 114:5-6. <sup>126</sup> Ps. 115:7.

<sup>127</sup> It would seem that the prayer of the good thief was answered because of his fear of God and his humility as well as his keen faith (Luke 23:33, 42).

<sup>128</sup> Eccles. 35:21.

poor and little, and of a contrite spirit, and that trembleth at My words?"<sup>129</sup>

God answered Daniel's suppliant prayer by saying: "Fear not, Daniel, for from the first day that thou didst set thy heart to understand, to afflict thyself in the sight of thy God, thy words have been heard; and I am come for thy words."<sup>130</sup>

The humble are granted access to God's heart and are charged with carrying out His wishes. The Psalmist sang of the benefits of humiliation: "He will guide the mild in judgment; He will teach the meek His ways. . . . Before I was humbled I offended. . . . In Thy truth Thou hast humbled me. O let Thy mercy be for my comfort. . . . It is good for me that Thou hast humbled me."<sup>131</sup>

For the humble servant of Yahweh, to fear God is to love His commandments, just as to humble oneself means also to serve God and to love Him. "They that fear the Lord will not be incredulous to His word. . . . They that fear the Lord will seek after the things that are well pleasing to Him; and they that love Him shall be filled with His law. They that fear the Lord will prepare their hearts, and in His sight will sanctify their souls."<sup>132</sup>

The humble and the little folk have a greater right than others to speak of *our God*. Not only does God dwell in their hearts, but He cherishes them tenderly and fills them with "the joy no man can take from them." "And the meek shall increase their joy in the Lord, and the poor men shall rejoice in the Holy One of Israel."<sup>133</sup>

"But the souls of the just are in the hand of God, and the

<sup>129</sup> Isa. 66:2. <sup>130</sup> Dan. 10:12.

<sup>131</sup> Ps. 24:9; 118:67, 75-76, 71. <sup>132</sup> Eccles. 2:18-20.

<sup>133</sup> Isa. 29:19.

torment of death shall not touch them. . . . God hath tried them, and found them worthy of Himself.”<sup>134</sup> “Not he who commendeth himself, is approved, but he whom God commendeth.”<sup>135</sup>

Interior poverty and humility establish the soul in a state of truth and dependence which is needed before it can submit to the control of grace and taste the sweetness of God’s gift. Also, as humility awakens a man to a greater realization of his true status as God’s servant, his zeal in God’s service glows more brightly. Hence we may well understand how dear to God are such souls: the light of His grace finds them totally transparent; His gifts to them bear fruit according to His will; He receives the testimony of their trusting and faithful love. To them would apply the words of the father in Christ’s parable: “Son, thou art always with me, and all I have is thine.”<sup>136</sup> These favorite friends of God are called, in the Old Testament, the just. They dwell in truth and humility; they prove that the more faithful a soul is, the more God gives Himself to it.

The Bible frequently portrays the just. The author of the Book of Proverbs strives to show the advantages of this privileged state and the benefits that the just man confers on those around him: “The mouth of the just is a vein of life. . . . The lips of the just teach many. . . . The expectation of the just is joy. . . . The desire of the just is all good. . . . The fruit of the just man is a tree of life. . . . The name of the Lord is a strong tower; the just runneth to it, and shall be exalted. . . . The just that walketh in His simplicity, shall leave behind him blessed children.”<sup>137</sup>

<sup>134</sup> Wisd. 3:1, 5.    <sup>135</sup> II Cor. 10:18.    <sup>136</sup> Luke 15:31.

<sup>137</sup> Prov. 10:11, 21, 28; 11:23, 30; 18:10; 20:7.

But the inspired authors despair of defining the soul of the just man, though indicating that the soul enjoys God’s presence, undergoes constant renewal and acquires an experience of God which we shall describe later. The constant appeals heard from the lips of the just man prove that for him, God is everything. “O God, my God, to Thee do I watch at break of day. For Thee my soul hath thirsted; for Thee my flesh, O how many ways!”<sup>138</sup> “Thou art the God of my heart, and the God that is my portion forever. . . . It is good for me to adhere to my God, to put my hope in the Lord God.”<sup>139</sup>

In time of need he cries out trustfully to God, sure of being heard. “O my God, make haste to my help.”<sup>140</sup> But the chief characteristic of the just man is that he is enamored of God and yearns for the triumph of His cause; he has a keen awareness of God’s majesty which is offended by evil; he espouses God’s cause and expresses his whole soul in vehement prayer: “Why, O Lord, hast Thou retired afar off? Why dost Thou slight us in our wants, in the time of trouble? Whilst the wicked man is proud, the poor is set on fire; they are caught in the counsels which they devise. . . . Arise, O Lord God, let Thy hand be exalted; forget not the poor . . . that man may no more presume to magnify himself upon earth.”<sup>141</sup>

God, therefore, heeds this soul burning with zeal. He gives His help and then hears the prayer of thanksgiving: “I will be glad and rejoice in Thee; I will sing to Thy name, O Thou Most High. When my enemy shall be turned back, they shall be weakened and perish before Thy face. For Thou hast maintained my judgment and my cause; Thou

<sup>138</sup> Ps. 62:1–2.    <sup>139</sup> Ps. 72:26–27.    <sup>140</sup> Ps. 70:12.

<sup>141</sup> Ps. 9:22–42.

hast sat on the throne, who judgest justice. Thou hast rebuked the Gentiles, and the wicked one hath perished; Thou hast blotted out their name forever and ever.”<sup>142</sup>

The entire life of the just man runs on within the sight of God who guides every action. He even testifies before God to his own integrity in a manner so bold that it would seem surprising were it not the proof of the intimacy of his friendship. “Judge me, O Lord, for I have walked in my innocence, and I have put my trust in the Lord, and shall not be weakened. . . . For Thy mercy is before my eyes. . . . I will wash my hands among the innocent; and will compass Thy altar, O Lord.”<sup>143</sup>

Even in the most frightful trials the just man still looks on God as *his* God: witness the cry in the messianic psalm which was uttered by the pre-eminently Just Man. “O God, my God, look upon Me; why hast Thou forsaken Me?”<sup>144</sup> The most intolerable suffering cannot prevail over the strength and fidelity of the just man’s love. Such unflinching trust will not be disappointed. “This may be my comfort, that afflicting me with sorrow, He spare not, nor I contradict the words of the Holy One.”<sup>145</sup> “Many are the afflictions of the just; but out of them all will the Lord deliver them. The Lord keepeth all their bones, not one of them shall be broken.”<sup>146</sup>

While we cannot discover the secrets of the just man’s friendship with God, at least we know the path it has followed and the sustenance it has received on the way. The angel Raphael, on leaving Tobias whom he had guided, told him a great secret: “I seemed indeed to eat and to drink

<sup>142</sup> Ps. 9:2-6.

<sup>143</sup> Ps. 25:1, 3, 6.

<sup>144</sup> Ps. 21:1.

<sup>145</sup> Job 6:10.

<sup>146</sup> Ps. 33:20-21.

with you, but I use an invisible meat and drink, which cannot be seen by men.”<sup>147</sup>

The just man also is fed on invisible and spiritual food which strengthens his soul and invigorates his whole life: the law of God, his obedience to the divine commandments and the divine will. Christ Himself was to taste no other food: “In the head of the book it is written of Me that I should do Thy will; O my God, I have desired it, and Thy law in the midst of My heart.”<sup>148</sup> God’s law is the food of the good; it is also “a path and . . . a holy way, . . . a straight way, so that fools shall not err therein.”<sup>149</sup> The path which the Lord “will teach the meek”<sup>150</sup> is the way by which divine charity reaches the poor. Jesus declared that “not every one that saith to Me, Lord, Lord, shall enter into the kingdom of heaven; but he that doth the will of My Father.”<sup>151</sup> The law of charity enables the upright and just man to respond to God’s love with his own humble, fervent love. That is the secret of the contacts between God and man, all expressed in the cry which the poor, the humble and the holy raise to heaven as an appeal, a hope and a jubilant certainty: “O Lord, I said: Thou art my God.”<sup>152</sup>

### GOD DWELLS AMONG MEN

If you walk in My precepts, . . . I will set My tabernacle in the midst of you.<sup>153</sup>

The love of God and neighbor is not only “all the law and the prophets,” but it is also a road which, if followed steadfastly, leads to God. In addition to promulgating a

<sup>147</sup> Tob. 12:19.

<sup>148</sup> Ps. 39:8-9.

<sup>149</sup> Isa. 35:8.

<sup>150</sup> Ps. 24:9.

<sup>151</sup> Matt. 7:21.

<sup>152</sup> Ps. 30:15.

<sup>153</sup> Lev. 26:3, 11.

law, God acted with wholly gratuitous love in turning to mankind with repeated gestures of mercy. With the nation He chose and which chose Him, He established a covenant that nothing could annul. He did even more. He united Himself to men whenever He found in their hearts the dispositions of humility, justice and charity, which the Bible ever describes as the necessary conditions of such friendship. For God did not intend to be only our God. He wished to belong to us, to be truly *ours*, that we might be *His*. Later He would not hesitate to become *Emmanuel*, which means *God with us*. In this way would union be achieved. Though the Old Testament promise, "I will set My tabernacle in the midst of you," was applied to the divine presence in the ark and in the temple as well as to God's protection of Israel, yet the promise foretold a much more intimate union: that of God and the soul.

To attain this, the soul first of all had to remain true to the double commandment of love of God and neighbor, even at the cost of repeated effort and painful sacrifices. In addition it was necessary to understand that this fidelity should not and could not have any other reward but God Himself. To reach this point required a long process of spiritual education.

In this, as in many other respects, the Old Testament played the role of pedagogue. God patiently strove to spiritualize the notion of retribution. At first, and for as long as necessary, He did not hesitate to grant material advantages to those who were faithful to Him. Is it not true, moreover, that this education which we observe in the Bible has to be renewed and continued by God even now in each soul? How

admirable it is to see in the Old Testament how God led men gradually to discover true values, to desire Him alone and to expect no recompense but union with Him in love.<sup>154</sup>

To persuade Old Testament men to follow the path of obedience, God gave them tangible evidence of the material advantages involved: "If then you obey my commandments, which I command you this day, that you love the Lord your God and serve Him with all your heart and with all your soul, He will give to your land the early rain and the latter rain, that you may gather in your corn, and your wine, and your oil."<sup>155</sup> Men, however, should beware of attributing to their own personal worth or to their own work the benefits they receive; they should refer the credit to God.

Not because you surpass all nations in number, is the Lord joined unto you, and hath chosen you, for you are the fewest of any people; but because the Lord hath loved you, and hath kept His oath, which He swore to your fathers. . . . Take heed, and beware lest at any time thou forget the Lord thy God, and neglect His commandments and judgments and ceremonies, which I command thee this day; lest after thou hast eaten and art filled, hast built goodly houses, and dwelt in them, and shalt have herds of oxen and flocks of sheep, and plenty of gold and of silver, and of all things, thy heart be lifted up, and thou remember not the Lord thy God, who brought thee out of the land of Egypt, . . . lest thou shouldst say in thy heart: My own might, and the strength of my own hand have achieved all

<sup>154</sup> We cannot help recalling here that when the Lord asked St. Thomas Aquinas, at the end of his life, what he wanted as a recompense for all his work, he answered: "Nothing but Thyself, Lord."

<sup>155</sup> Deut. 11:13-14.

these things for me. But remember the Lord thy God, that He hath given thee strength.<sup>156</sup>

On those who hear His voice God bestows innumerable blessings:

And all these blessings shall come upon thee and overtake thee; yet so if thou hear His precepts. Blessed shalt thou be in the city, and blessed in the field. Blessed shall be the fruit of thy womb, and the fruit of thy ground, and the fruit of thy cattle, the droves of thy herds, and the folds of thy sheep. Blessed shall be thy barns and blessed thy stores. Blessed shalt thou be in coming in and going out. . . . The Lord will make thee abound with all goods, . . . with the fruit of thy land, which the Lord swore to thy fathers that He would give thee. The Lord will open His excellent treasure, the heaven, that it may give rain in due season. . . . And thou shalt lend to many nations, and shalt not borrow of any one. And the Lord shall make thee the head and not the tail; and thou shalt be always above, and not beneath; yet so if thou wilt hear the commandments of the Lord thy God which I command thee this day, and keep and do them.<sup>157</sup>

The abundance of these benefits developed among men of the Old Testament limitless trust in God's power and goodness. This then formed a solid foundation on which God

<sup>156</sup> Deut. 7:7-8; 8:11-18. "What hast thou that thou hast not received?" (I Cor. 4:7.) "For it is God who worketh in you, both to will and to accomplish" (Phil. 2:13). "I have planted, Apollo watered, but God gave the increase. Therefore, neither he that planteth is anything, nor he that watereth; but God that giveth the increase" (I Cor. 3:6-7). "But when the goodness and kindness of God our Savior appeared; not by the works of justice, which we have done, but according to His mercy, He saved us" (Tit. 3:4-5).

<sup>157</sup> Deut. 28:2-13.

proceeded to erect a spiritual edifice. Some of the psalms hint that God rewards fidelity in a way not entirely material:

Blessed are all they that fear the Lord; that walk in His ways. For thou shalt eat the labors of thy hands; blessed art thou, and it shall be well with thee. Thy wife as a fruitful vine, on the sides of thy house. Thy children as olive plants, round about thy table. Behold, thus shall the man be blessed that feareth the Lord. May the Lord bless thee out of Sion; and mayst thou see the good things of Jerusalem all the days of thy life. And mayst thou see thy children's children, peace upon Israel.<sup>158</sup>

The spiritual nature of the reward is even more clearly indicated in Psalm 111:

Blessed is the man that feareth the Lord; he shall delight exceedingly in His commandments. His seed shall be mighty upon earth; the generation of the righteous shall be blessed. Glory and wealth shall be in his house; and his justice remaineth forever and ever. To the righteous a light is risen up in darkness; he is merciful, and compassionate and just. . . . His justice remaineth forever and ever; his horn shall be exalted in glory.<sup>159</sup>

Psalm 118 extols and glorifies only spiritual benefits. The reward *par excellence* is friendship with God, which the just man receives for obeying the commandments. Hence he loves them, observes them with all his heart, finds his delight in them, is quickened by them.

This friendship, which is God's reward to the servants who faithfully obey His law, produces in their souls manifold fruits which the Old Testament often mentions. In the first place, the soul that is "with God," that is, the soul which

<sup>158</sup> Ps. 127.

<sup>159</sup> Ps. 111:1-4, 9.



enjoys His friendship, experiences peace. "Thus shall you bless the children of Israel, and you shall say to them: The Lord bless thee and keep thee. The Lord show His face to thee and have mercy on thee. The Lord turn His countenance to thee and give thee peace."<sup>160</sup>

Christ also was to make peace one of the signs of His presence in men's hearts: "Peace I leave with you, My peace I give unto you; not as the world giveth, do I give unto you."<sup>161</sup>

He who dwells with God not only experiences peace, but already possesses eternal life: "Seek ye Me, and you shall live. Seek ye the Lord, and live. . . . Seek ye good, and not evil, that you may live; and the Lord the God of hosts will be with you."<sup>162</sup>

He who dwells with God and receives His grace becomes capable of choosing the good and clinging to it; this brings him true happiness. "I have set before you life and death. . . . Choose therefore life, that both thou and thy seed may live."<sup>163</sup> "Observe and hear all the things that I command thee, that it may be well with thee and thy children after thee forever."<sup>164</sup>

God so desires this happiness for us that He keeps repeating His directions in order that we may not deprive ourselves of it through our own fault. "Hearken to My voice and I will be your God, and you shall be My people; and walk ye in all the way that I have commanded you, that it may be well with you."<sup>165</sup> He begs us to remain faithful to His commandments, which are for us at once the way to reach God, to dwell with Him and to taste happiness. "Who shall give

<sup>160</sup> Num. 6:23-26.

<sup>161</sup> John 14:27.

<sup>162</sup> Amos 5:4, 14.

<sup>163</sup> Deut. 30:19.

<sup>164</sup> Deut. 12:28.

<sup>165</sup> Jer. 7:23.

them to have such a mind, to fear Me, and to keep all My commandments at all times, that it may be well with them and with their children forever?"<sup>166</sup>

What the Old Testament author had merely glimpsed was later to be fully understood by St. John, who was to tell us that obedience to the commandments puts us in vital contact with God by the union of love, and thereby brings us happiness. "I know that His commandment is life everlasting."<sup>167</sup> "For this is the charity of God, that we keep His commandments; and His commandments are not heavy. For whatsoever is born of God, overcometh the world; and this is the victory which overcometh the world, our faith."<sup>168</sup> St. James spoke in the same way: "But he that hath looked into the perfect law of liberty, and hath continued therein, not becoming a forgetful hearer, but a doer of the work; this man shall be blessed in his deed."<sup>169</sup>

Nor should men imagine that this obedience is hard, arduous, almost impossible. "The commandment, that I command thee this day is not above thee, nor far off from thee. . . . But the word is very nigh unto thee, in thy mouth and in thy heart, that thou mayst do it."<sup>170</sup> To gather the fruits of a life with God in the union of charity, all that is required is to accept His guidance and to remain faithful to Him. "I am the Lord thy God that teach thee profitable things, that govern thee in the way that thou walkest. O that thou hadst hearkened to My commandments; thy peace had been as a river and thy justice as the waves of the sea."<sup>171</sup>

The more a man tastes of the fruits of obedience, which

<sup>166</sup> Deut. 5:29.

<sup>167</sup> John 12:50.

<sup>168</sup> I John 5:3-4.

<sup>169</sup> Jas. 1:25.

<sup>170</sup> Deut. 30:11, 14.

<sup>171</sup> Isa. 48:17-18.

are peace, life and spiritual joy, the better he understands what treasure is contained in God's law. He discovers that the blessing above all blessings, the blessing which God wishes to pour upon souls in torrential abundance, is the same blessing which the Church continues to propose to all her children. *Dominus vobiscum*, the priest keeps repeating; "The Lord be with you." Jacob was eager for this blessing when he tried to detain the angel of Yahweh: "I will not let thee go except thou bless me."<sup>172</sup> Bearing the mark of this blessing like a divine seal, the soul becomes pleasing to God, as was Jacob to his father Isaac. "Come near me, and give me a kiss, my son. . . . Behold the smell of my son is as the smell of a plentiful field, which the Lord hath blessed."<sup>173</sup>

God's blessing rests on the soul of the faithful man and the Lord is with him. Free of all selfish desire, filled only with pure longing for God, already he experiences deep inward happiness. But realizing that God alone is the source—the inexhaustible source—of his happiness, he turns ever more frequently toward Him, remains in His presence, calls Him, sees Him approach, walks to meet Him. "Then shalt thou call, and the Lord shall hear; thou shalt cry, and He shall say: Here I am."<sup>174</sup> By this phrase, "Here I am," God gives Himself completely to man; man answers in the same words. The union of charity is nothing other than this encounter of the soul and God, chanted long ago in the Old Testament. But only souls united to God by obedience and love experience the divine visitation and the true gift of God. Only those whose lives translate into action the words, "Here I am," can know the overwhelming joy of hearing within

<sup>172</sup> Gen. 32:26.<sup>173</sup> Gen. 27:26–27.<sup>174</sup> Isa. 58:9.

themselves the same words whispered by the voice of God: "Here I am." Souls who wish to dwell with Him, if they are faithful and generous, may be sure that He will satisfy them.

Thou hast given him his heart's desire, and hast not withholden from him the will of his lips. For Thou hast prevented him with blessings of sweetness; Thou hast set on his head a crown of precious stones. He asked life of Thee, and Thou hast given him length of days forever and ever. His glory is great in Thy salvation; glory and great beauty shalt Thou lay upon him. For Thou shalt give him to be a blessing forever and ever; Thou shalt make him joyful in gladness with Thy countenance.<sup>175</sup>

Though trials may be hard on the road of love, the just man acquires a taste of God's word and God's will, which for him are food, light and charity. "Blessed are they who hear the word of God, and keep it."<sup>176</sup> For them the divine promise is already fulfilled: "For lo, the kingdom of God is within you."<sup>177</sup>

Let not the book of this law depart from thy mouth; but thou shalt meditate on it day and night, that thou mayst observe and do all things that are written in it; then shalt thou direct thy way, and understand it. Behold I command thee, take courage, and be strong. Fear not and be not dismayed, because the Lord thy God is with thee in all things whatsoever thou shalt go to.<sup>178</sup>

The divine presence granted to the just man who obeys the commandments—"the Lord thy God is with thee in all things"—is by no means fortuitous or temporary. God Himself declares that it is to be stable and permanent, that

<sup>175</sup> Ps. 20:2–7.<sup>176</sup> Luke 11:28.<sup>177</sup> Luke 17:21.<sup>178</sup> Jos. 1:8–9.

eventually it will be transformed into true union and mutual indwelling. Yahweh's presence in Israel entails far more than material help or even miraculous aid. It is true that He walked with His people, guided them, led them, accompanied them throughout their wanderings in the desert. But He did even more spiritually. The sacred authors often boasted of God's dwelling with His people in the ark and in the temple. Israel was proud of being the chosen people and of claiming God's abode in Jerusalem.

For the Lord hath chosen Sion; He hath chosen it for His dwelling. This is my rest forever and ever; here will I dwell, for I have chosen it.<sup>179</sup>

For I have chosen, and have sanctified this place, that My name may be there forever, and My eyes and My heart may remain there perpetually.<sup>180</sup>

But the dwelling which God sought above all was in men's souls, as these lines from Exodus demonstrate: "And I will dwell in the midst of the children of Israel, and will be their God; and they shall know that I am the Lord their God, who have brought them out of the land of Egypt, that I might abide among them, I the Lord their God."<sup>181</sup> Other texts affirm even more clearly this nearness of God, as well as His spiritual presence and intimate union with those who thirsted for Him and sought Him. "Seek ye the Lord while He may be found; call upon Him, while He is near."<sup>182</sup> "The Lord is with you, because you have been with Him. If you seek Him, you shall find; but if you forsake Him, He will forsake you."<sup>183</sup> God Himself never ceased to seek men even

<sup>179</sup> Ps. 131:13-14.

<sup>180</sup> II Par. 7:16.

<sup>181</sup> Exod. 29:45-46.

<sup>182</sup> Isa. 55:6.

<sup>183</sup> II Par. 15:2.

more eagerly than they sought Him. "Behold I come, and I will dwell in the midst of thee, saith the Lord."<sup>184</sup> "I am God, . . . the Holy One in the midst of thee."<sup>185</sup> "I dwell in the midst of the children of Israel forever."<sup>186</sup>

The day would come when, to find them and to achieve a closer union with them, He would become like them by taking on their nature. "And their leader shall be of themselves; and their prince shall come forth from the midst of them."<sup>187</sup> "Therefore My people shall know My name in that day; for I Myself that spoke, behold I am here."<sup>188</sup>

God's desire was to be with us, to be *Emmanuel*, to show us the fullness of His love. Already in Old Testament days He began to carry out His desire. The biblical authors were deeply conscious of this and they have outlined the features of divine love so that in it men could learn to recognize God as a Father, a Savior and a Lover. We shall now consider this essential message of the Old Testament.

<sup>184</sup> Zach. 2:10.

<sup>185</sup> Osee. 11:9.

<sup>186</sup> Ezech. 43:7.

<sup>187</sup> Jer. 30:21.

<sup>188</sup> Isa. 52:6.